TRADE UNION STRATEGY AND THE LABOUR PROCESS: TUCSA TRADE UNIONS IN THE TRANSPORT AND BUILDING INDUSTRIES, 1955-1977

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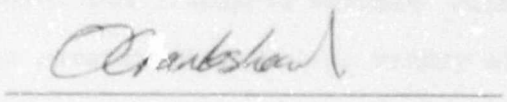
This dissertation is entirely my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any other University.



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BIBLIOGRAPHY

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACFW	Association of Cape Furniture Workers
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
ATWU	African Transport Workers' Union
AUBTW	Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of South Africa
BEU	Bakery Employees' Union
CCSATU	Coordinating Council of South African Trade Unions
CMA	Cape Musicians' Association
CM&ABWU	Coloured, Malay & Asiatic Building Workers' Union
CPSA	Church of the Province of South Africa Archives Collection
CS&ATAU	Concession Stores & Allied Trades Assistants' Union
CTWUSA	Coloured Transport Workers' Union of South Africa
DIMES	Durban Integrated Municipal Employees' Society
DMTEU	Durban Municipal Transport Employees' Union
DRIU	Durban Rubber Industrial Union
EIWU	Engineering Industrial Workers' Union (Natal)
EL&CTEU	European Liquour & Catering Trades Employees' Union
ELDCEA	East London Divisional Council Employees' Association
ELL&CTEU	East London Liquour & Catering Trades Employees' Union
ELMTWU	East London Municipal Transport Workers' Union
EPH&CEEU	Eastern Province Hotel & Club European Employees' Union
FCC	Federal Consultative Council of the SAR&H Staff Associations
FUU	Funeral Undertakers' Union (Cape)
FWIU(N)	Furniture Workers' Industrial Union (Natal)
GD&CEU	Grave-Diggers and Cemetery Employees' Union
GWIU(N)	Garment Workers' Industrial Union (Natal)
GWUWP	Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province
GWUSA	Garment Workers' Union of South Africa
HB&CTEA	Hotel, Bar & Catering Trades Employees' Association
IMS	Iron Moulders' Society of South Africa
JMTWU	Johannesburg Municipal Transport Workers' Union
JMWU	Johannesburg Municipal Workers' Union
JPL	Johannesburg Public Library Newspaper Clippings Collection
LC&DWUSA	Laundry, Cleaning & Dyeing Workers' Union of South Africa
MBA	Master Builder Association
MICWU	Motor Industry Combined Workers' Union
MIEUSA	Motor Industry Employees' Union of South Africa
MTWU	Motor Transport Workers' Union of South Africa
NAF&AWSA	National Association of Furniture & Allied Workers of South Africa
NBIEU	Natal Baking Industry Employees' Union
NBTU	Natal Bespoke Tailors' Union
NPTEU	Natal Passenger Transport Employees' Union
NL&CTEU	Natal Liquour & Catering Trades Employees' Union
NSIEU	Natal Sugar Industry Employees' Union
NUOBM&P	National Union of Operative Biscuit Makers & Packers
NUC&AW	National Union of Commercial & Allied Workers
NUC&TW	National Union of Cigarette & Tobacco Workers
NUDW	National Union of Distributive Workers
NUF&AWSA	National Union of Furniture & Allied Workers of South Africa
NULW	National Union of Leather Workers
OBC&CU	Operative Bakers', Confectioners' and Conductors' Union
OPTU	Operative Plasterers' Trade Union of South Africa
PEA	Photographic Employees' Association
RTWUSA	Republic Transport Workers' Union of South Africa
SAADME	South African Association of Dental Mechanician Employees
SABS	South African Boilermakers', Iron & Steel Workers', Shipbuilders' & Welders' Society
SACOL	South African Confederation of Labour
SAC&RWU	South African Canvas & Ropeworkers' Union

SACTW	South African Council of Transport Workers
SAEWA	South African Electrical Workers' Association
SAFTU	South African Federation of Trade Unions
SAHEIU	South African Hairdresser Employees' Industrial Union
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations Newspaper Clippings Collection
SAPWU	South African Pyrotechnical Workers' Union
SAR&H	South African Railways and Harbours
SASBO	South African Society of Bank Officials
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SATU	South African Typographical Union
SATUC	South African Trade Union Council (renamed TUCSA)
TWU(CA)	Transport Workers' Union (Coloured & Asian)
SAWU	South African Woodworkers' Union
SWU	Sweet Workers' Union
T&CWU	Tea & Coffee Workers' Union
TL&ATIU	Transvaal Leather & Allied Trades Industrial Union
T&LFU	Trawler & Line Fishermans' Union
T&OWU	Tramway & Omnibus Workers' Union (Cape)
TOSA	Tramway Officials' Staff Association (Cape Town)
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWD&FU	Tailoring Workers', Dressmakers' & Furriers' Union
TWUSA	Transport Workers' Union of South Africa
UL&AW	Union of Lampshade & Allied Workers
WBEA	Witwatersrand Baking Employees' Association
WBWU	White Building Workers' Union
WTRR&CTEU	Witwatersrand Tea Room, Restuarant & Catering Trade Employees' Union

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Aim of Thesis

This dissertation examines the relationship between the labour process and the racially exclusive trade union strategies adopted by some unions within the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) during the sixties. My argument is that the relations of production embodied in a particular labour process determine the broad limits within which certain types of trade union strategies can be successfully employed. Within these limits, broad as they may be, political and ideological relationships determine the outcome of trade union struggles. I address this question through a study of some TUCSA unions which rejected the Council's policy of organising African unions in the late sixties.

During the 1960s when the South African State pursued a policy of excluding African trade unions from the industrial conciliation system, TUCSA was the only federation of registered unions that engaged in the organisation of African unions and called for their legal recognition. This policy was not, however, a perennial one. The period between 1955 and 1974 was marked with deep internal divisions over which type of trade union strategy would best protect TUCSA's members against the threat of cheap African labour. Should registered trade unions prevent undercutting by supporting the Government policy of job reservation and the exclusion of African unions from the industrial conciliation machinery; or should they support the strategy of rate for the job and organise African workers in-

stead? This was the question which TUCSA unions asked, and which they answered in different ways.

From its inception, TUCSA was plagued by this division which deepened throughout the sixties to precipitate a crisis in 1968 which nearly destroyed the Council. When TUCSA was formed in 1954, African unions were excluded from membership in order to secure the participation of the right-wing unions. Although this decision was reversed in 1962, it was only four years later that tensions in TUCSA emerged when some affiliates began calling for the expulsion of African unions. In the context of growing State opposition to TUCSA's policy, this led to a major debate within TUCSA which culminated in the mass disaffiliation of 12 unions (representing about 20% of TUCSA's membership).[1] As a result, and in the interests of preventing a right-wing break-away, African unions were once more expelled in 1969.

What caused the upsurge of right-wing trade unionism in TUCSA during the 1960s? No doubt, a full explanation of the support of some TUCSA unions for racially-exclusive trade unionism during the sixties would include a wide range of factors. The scope of this study, however, is much more limited. My aim is to address the relationship between changes in the labour process and the exclusive strategy adopted by some TUCSA unions towards African workers during the late sixties. Although the focus of this study is restricted to the structural relationships of the labour process, I also begin to examine other social factors which are pertinant to a full explanation of trade union strategy. These include the supply of labour, State legislation and opposition to non-racial trade unionism, and the nationalist/racist ideology of white trade union members.

By posing the question of TUCSA's relationship to African unions in terms of the changing skill structure of the labour process, this study differs from earlier analyses of TUCSA by placing greater attention to the determining role of the relations of production. Earlier analyses of TUCSA have focussed on the relationship of white workers to the State.

2. Explanations of TUCSA's Relationship with African Unions

There are two different explanations of the organisational strategies adopted by registered trade unions in South Africa during the sixties and seventies: the "fractionalist school" and the "labour process approach".

Earlier explanations of TUCSA's relationship with African unions sought to demonstrate the fundamental unity of TUCSA's rate for the job strategy and the job reservation policy of the State and registered right-wing unions. Ensor and Davies argue that the basis for this unity lies in the fact that both these strategies were methods whereby white wage-earners entrenched their minority privileges. In his seminal article on the white working class in 1973, Davies argues that

> "Equal pay for equal work, under present conditions where Africans are systematically denied access to educational facilities, is in practice merely a disguised call to maintain the essentials of the status quo, whilst perhaps dropping a few of the unskilled and organisationally weak white workers."[2]

In a later study of TUCSA, Ensor makes the same point:

> "...it is clear that the differences between the State refusing to recognise and TUCSA supporting the recognition of, African trade unions were differences in methods with the common aim of reproducing the racially exclusive political structures which guaranteed the economic position of white workers."[3]

This argument therefore underplays the conflict between these two types of trade union strategy, and instead emphasises the common political interests of all white workers.

2.1 Fractionalist Explanation:

Davies' and Ensor's argument, that the interests of TUCSA and pro-State unions were basically similar, was developed into a more general theory of the racial division of the working class in South Africa. Because it relies on Poulantzas' concept of "fractions" of capital, this form of explanation has become known as the "fractionalist school" of South African historiography.[4] This account explains the racially exclusive practices of the white working class through reference to their various alliances with hegemonic fractions of capital. Shifts in these alliances are identified with two major political events in South African history: the electoral victories of the Pact Government in 1924 and the *Herenigde Nasionale Party/Volksparty* in 1948. The changing political alliances which resulted in these electoral victories are explained in terms of the economic interests of the classes or class fractions which represented these political parties.

In the case of the first example, the electoral victory of the Pact Government in 1924 represented an alliance of the white working class with the national bourgeoisie. The material basis for this alliance lies in the congruence of the interests of both the white working class and the national agricultural bourgeoisie over the distribution of the surplus produced by the mining industry. The higher wages paid to the white working class miners by international capital reduced the repatriated surplus and increased the saving and spending powers of the white working class. This served the interests of the national agricultural bourgeoisie by making possible the

expansion of the internal market and by providing additional sources of savings and taxation.[5] This common interest was therefore responsible for the entrenchment of white worker privileges under the Pact Government through, *inter alia*, a higher wage.[6] This was the mechanism whereby surplus was appropriated from the international bourgeoisie. This appropriation was possible because the white wage exceeded the "average allowable wage with no surplus [value] content".[7] Since white workers did not contribute more labour, they must have received a higher wage at the expense of their fellow African workers.[8]

The second example, the electoral victory of the *Herenigde Nasionale Party/Volksparty* in 1948, is explained as an alliance of the white working class with the agricultural bourgeoisie and Afrikaner traditional petty bourgeoisie. The economic basis of this alliance lies in the common interests shared by these class fractions with respect to the allocation of African labour.[9] Both the agricultural bourgeoisie and white wage earners shared an interest in maintaining the migrant labour system: the former because it ensured an adequate supply of cheap African farm labour, and the latter because it maintained their monopoly of skilled jobs and kept African wages low. These common interests were welded into a class alliance by the traditional petty bourgeoisie who relied on agricultural accumulation and the savings of white wage-earners for their sources of capital as they strived to transform themselves into a fully-fledged capitalist class. So, in both these historical examples, the white workers were split off from the African working class because of their common interest with various fractions of capital in the redistribution of surplus value.

Ironically, although these contributions of the fractionalist school are directly critical of the earlier Marxist attempts to ex-

plain the racial division of the working class through reference to the political power of white workers,[10] they in fact reproduce this error in their own analysis. The early Marxist contributions by Asheron, Johnstone and Simons and Simons, were not able to explain the racial division of the South African working class in a manner that specified the extent and limits of the determination of political and economic relationships. As a result, their analyses either privilege the determinacy of political relationships, or their determining role is not distinguished from that of class relationships.[11] For example, after arguing that economic interests were the material basis of the alliance between white wage-earners and the agricultural bourgeoisie, Davies then argues that the cause of this alliance is in fact a political one:

> "Of course, the explanation for this state of affairs [the racial division of the working class] is political...What can be said then, without fear of contradiction, is that since the white wage is high by virtue of political privilege, if this privilege were to disappear the white wage would be reduced."[12] (and hence the basis for a racial division of the working class would collapse - O.C.)

This is also true for Ensor's argument, when she argues that the extent of the conflict between mixed unions and the State over the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act "...was limited by the framework of a class alliance".[13] She therefore argues that this political relationship was the reason for TUCSA's eagerness in 1955 to form an alliance with pro-Government trade unions, the terms of which meant the exclusion of African unions.[14]

This problem was first noted by Wolpe, who pointed out that these explanations rely on concepts of class and class fractions which are not informed by any analysis of the production process.[15] Innes and Plaut made this same criticism of later fractionalist contributions to analysis of the South African State.[16] Clarke made a similar point when he argued that the fractionalist account is only able to iden-

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tify classes and fractions of classes when they exist as political parties or pressure groups.[17] So, capitalist relationships of production are only pertinent to this explanation insofar as they are the pre-condition for a wage economy and of struggles over the distribution of the wage.[18]

This criticism of the fractionalist explanation does not imply that the racial division of the working class can be explained without reference to political relationships. Rather it is a problem of theoretical consistency. Explaining class divisions through reference to political relationships is inconsistent with a Marxist theory of class. The result is in fact a tautology. If class relations are to explain political relationships, then it is clearly illegitimate to explain the reproduction of class relationships through reference to these political relationships. A consistent Marxist account of the racial division of the working class in South Africa should be able to demonstrate how the relations of production condition other social relationships. It should do this in a manner which does not exclude the determining role of political and ideological relationships. Such an analysis should also be able to demonstrate how changes in the labour process, resulting from capital accumulation and class struggle, alter the conditions of and possibilities for different styles of trade union organisation. Recent studies on the labour process and trade union organisation have provided a starting point for the latter sort of analysis.[19]

2.2 The Labour Process Approach:

In contrast to the fractionalist explanation, the labour process approach begins its analysis with the relations of production and demonstrates how the organisation of production sets limits to the possible strategies which can be employed by trade unions to protect the interests of their members. This explanation identifies different trade union traditions which corresponded to different forms of organisation of the labour process, and which had different interests in racially exclusive trade union strategies. Craft unions, which emerged in the early period of manufacturing when a simple division of labour between unskilled workers and artisans prevailed, pursued an exclusive form of organisation. Relying on the strategic importance of their members' skill for bargaining power, these unions defended their craft through the mechanisms of the closed shop and the apprenticeship system.[20] Having no need to rely on "colour bars" to protect their members, these unions retained an ambiguous position on the issue of racial exclusion.[21] Any racially exclusive practices followed by these unions were more informed by a trade union principle which excluded all unskilled labour, than racist ideology.[22]

The rise of large-scale industry and the introduction of machinery, brought with it a new labour process which required a different division of labour. Despite resistance by the craft unions, the skilled crafts of the artisan were eventually fragmented, to give rise to a division of labour which included semi-skilled operatives. These changes undermined the bargaining power of skilled workers and provided a basis for industrial as opposed to craft unionism. Faced with their declining bargaining power, the craft unions resorted to using the closed shop and their power through access to the Industrial Council system (which excluded Africans), to enforce a form

of job reservation.[23] In contrast, industrial unions, representing the interests of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, were unable to rely on skill for bargaining strength. Instead they employed the strategy of organising as many workers as possible. This open union strategy therefore prevented undercutting by organising unskilled workers instead of excluding them.[24] Where racial subordination coincided with low levels of skill, these unions did have an interest in breaching racial barriers, and herein lay the basis for the pre-World War II tradition of non-racial trade unionism. However, where unskilled and semi-skilled workers had access to political power, and where the costs of running against the policies of a racially exclusive state became too high, an alternative strategy was to rely on the state to prevent undercutting.[25]

3. Conceptual Approach

What this labour process theory suggests, therefore, is that the particular organisation of the labour process sets broad limits to the types of trade union strategies which unions can employ to advance the interests of their members. Specifically, craft unions whose members are fully-skilled artisans, will prevent undercutting through a form of trade unionism which excludes unskilled labour, rather than African labour *per se*. However, when discriminatory legislation coincides with the division between skilled and unskilled workers, these unions would be amenable to state protection which prevents undercutting from unskilled African labour.

With the fragmentation of their trades, however, these craft unions gradually lose the ability to defend their privilege through their control over the supply of skilled labour. As their position is weakened they are faced with the choice of either 'opening-up'

and becoming industrial unions, or of remaining 'closed' craft unions. In the case of the former, the union chooses to represent the growing majority of workers, while in the latter, its membership is restricted to an ever-decreasing proportion of the total workforce. Thus, the rise of machinofacture (and its accompanying labour process) presents the possibility of this choice, but does not determine which choice will be made.

To the extent that industrial trade unionism represents the demise of skill hierarchy in the workplace, it provides the material basis for inter-racial solidarity. However, industrial unionism may be non-racial or racially exclusive. The character of the labour process determines the historical possibility of this choice, but not the choice that is made. The factors which do determine trade union strategy include a variety of non-class relationships such as the supply of labour, the form of the state, the organisational structure of trade unions, the relationship between trade union leaders and the rank-and-file, and trade union ideology. This form of explanation is able to specify how the relations of production set the parameters of trade union strategies, without excluding the determining role of other social relationships.

Because it is able to demonstrate how relations of production condition trade union strategies without excluding the role of political relationships, the labour process approach constitutes an advance on previous contributions for examining TUCSA's relationship with African unions.

4. Argument / Thesis

Having outlined the theoretical tools which I applied in this research, the following analysis of the relationship between the labour process and trade union organisation in TUCSA can be advanced.

The spectacular industrial growth of the South African economy during the 1960s was accompanied by a shortage of white skilled and semi-skilled labour. This shortage of labour became an obstacle to the continued profitability of capitalist production. As a result, capitalists began to restructure the labour process in order to reduce their dependence on white labour. White trade unions were therefore subject to contradictory pressures. On the one hand the skill shortage strengthened the bargaining position of the unions because it placed a premium on their labour. On the other hand, however, this shortage encouraged capitalists to restructure the labour process and the racial division of labour in order to reduce their dependence on skilled white labour. During this period, capitalists were in fact successful in restructuring the labour process and racial division of labour, with the result that they not only reduced the labour shortage, but also decreased their wage bill by employing cheaper semi-skilled and African labour.

In the period prior to this restructuring of the labour process, the only feasible form of organisation which could be pursued by craft unions was one which excluded all unskilled labour. Since Africans constituted the vast majority of unskilled workers, this exclusive form of organisation was perfectly compatible with racially exclusive forms of trade union organisation, except in the Western Cape where most artisans were coloured. This all changed however, when employers began to fragment the skilled trades and undercut white artisans with African operatives. This development

now made it feasible for skilled white workers to protect their interests through organising, rather than excluding African labour. In other words, the range of feasible organisational options was widened to include not only "closed", but also "open" styles of unionism. The fragmentation of the skilled trades and the introduction of African operatives was the very condition for the debates and splits within TUCSA over the organisation of African unions.

These developments had different consequences for semi-skilled trade unions. Unable to prevent undercutting by cheaper African and coloured labour through the control of the supply of skilled labour, these unions were quick to rely on the State to prevent the employment of cheap labour. The skill shortage therefore served to place these unions under an even greater threat of undercutting by cheap labour. However, as with skilled white workers whose trades were being fragmented, these semi-skilled unions were in a position such that it was still in their interests to practice either an "open" or "closed" style of unionism. As a result of employers' attempts to employ coloured and African labour at lower rates of pay, some of these unions relied on the State to reserve their occupations for whites only, while others engaged in the organisation of Africans in separate, parallel trade unions.

In response to these changes in the labour process and racial division of labour, registered trade unions were therefore able to confront a new range of organisational questions and to resolve them differently. The combined role of right-wing trade unionism, the racial legislation of the State and the racist ideology of white (and also coloured) workers played the decisive role in determining whether trade unions adopted open or closed forms of organisation. These political and ideological relationships therefore determined

the style of trade union organisation; but did so on the terms set by changes in the labour process.

5. Structure of The.

Chapter two is devoted to identifying the unions which supported the organisation of African unions and those which called for their exclusion from TUCSA. Once these divisions were identified, the unions were classified according to the race and occupation of their members and the industry in which they were employed. Would these divisions within TUCSA correlate with the racial and occupational composition of their membership or not? Would unions with the same policy be clustered in specific industries or would they be scattered throughout all sectors of the economy? It was anticipated that the answers to these questions would indicate further avenues of research.

The fact that 50% of the unions which opposed the organisation of African workers were to be found in the transport and building industries was the basis for turning to a detailed examination of these unions and the industries in which they organised. Chapters three and four are therefore devoted to studying trade unions responses to changes in the labour process in the transport and building industries. The themes which I investigate in these two chapters revolve around the supply of labour, the character of the dominant labour process in the respective industries and the implications which this has for the manner in which employers are able to cheapen the cost of labour, and for the forms of trade union resistance to these attempts. It is within the context of these relationships that I begin to examine, although only superficially, the influence of political relationships on trade union strategies.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

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[2] Davies, R.(1973), "The White Working Class in South Africa", *New Left Review* 82, p.55

[3] Ensor, L.(1976), "The Trade Union Council of South Africa and its Relationship with African Trade Unions", Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p.15

Ensor, L.(1978), "TUCSA's Relationship with African Trade Unions - an Attempt at Control, 1954-1962", *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, E. Webster (ed.), Ravan Press, Johannesburg, p.217

[4] Poulantzas, N.(1975), *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, Verso Editions, London.

[5] My focus here is on the earlier contributions cast in this theoretical model. Later contributions shifted their focus from the white working class to the form of the State. See

Davies, R., Kaplan, D., Morris, M. and O'Meara, D.(1976), "Class Struggle and the Periodisation of the State in South Africa", *Review of African Political Economy* 7, pp.4-30

Davies, R.(1979), *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960: An historical materialist analysis of class formation and class relations*, The Harvester Press, Sussex.

[6] Kaplan, D.(1977), "Capitalist Development in South Africa: Class conflict and the State", *Perspectives on South Africa: A collection of working papers*, Adler, T.(ed.), Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, pp.115-116

[7] Davies, R.(1973), *op cit*, pp.45-46
Kaplan, D.(1977), *ibid*, pp.116-117

[8] The average wage each worker would receive if there was no exploitation.

[9] Davies, R.(1973), *op cit*, p.51

[10] Ensor, L.(1976), *op cit*, pp.9-11

[11] Kaplan, D.(1977), *op cit*, p.117

[12] An example from Asheron's contribution in 1969 demonstrates this confusion:
"*In its unintended consequences the ideology of race has outrun its 'ideologues' and become an additional independent variable, as significant as the economic base, in the future development of South Africa.*" [13] (original emphasis) Asheron, A.(1969), "Race and Politics in South Africa", *New Left Review* 53, p.64