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by: E C Webster

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A PROFILE OF UNREGISTERED UNION MEMBERS IN DURBAN

F. C. Webster

Authors's Note

Three introductory points are necessary:

Firstly, this survey has the limited objective of building a statistical portrait of a sample of unregistered trade union members to examine the extent to which the necessary conditions for trade unionism exists. Elsewhere in this edition the union's strategy and history are analyzed.

Secondly, I feel I owe readers an explanation as to why the survey was delayed for so long. I was about to process the questionnaires when both I and my research assistant were arrested and detained respectively for alleged political offences. This led to an unavoidable delay of 18 months before we were both available to resume our analysis of the questionnaires.

Finally, a note on the methodology is necessary. Although the bulk of the survey data was drawn from a conventional questionnaire (See Appendix I), some information on the unions was derived from my "participant observation" in the unions over the period 1973 to 1975 when I served on the Working Committee of the Institute for Industrial Education (I.I.E.), the educational wing of T.U.A.C.C.

The role and potential of trade unions among African workers has moved over the last five years from a peripheral to a central issue in industrial relations in S.A. Government attitudes have changed from a determination to exclude African trade unions by promoting an alternat. in-plant committee structure, to the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation with a clear indication on the part of the Chairman that trade unionism is a right for all workers. (1)

Some employer associations have changed from outright hostility to support in principle for the right of African workers to negotiate on the same basis as non-Africans. (2) Although the antagonism or indifference of the registered trade union movement continues, the decision of TUCSA in 1973 to allow African trade unions to affiliate, signals a growing awareness among the more far-sighted registered trade union leadership that the future of the trade union movement lies with Coloured and African workers. (3) The growing internationalization of industrial relations in S.A. through the publication of employers "codes of conduct" as a response to the increasing pressure on foreign investors to withdraw, is further evidence of this change. (4)

This move of the "African trade union" issue to the centre of the debate is not meant to deny the fact that state repression against effective trade union organizers through bannings continues, or that these embryonic unions are still experiencing very real problems from the Government bodies, employers and the registered trade union movement. It is clear from this survey (5) that many of the problems that have always plagued attempts to establish permanent trade union organization among African workers continues today. However, what it does highlight is the growing awareness on the part of these groups that some form of accommodation and recognition of the permanence of these institutions has now become a necessity.

These interviews, conducted by Judson Kuzwayo in late 1975, are an attempt to give a clear statistical and attitudinal portrait of three of these unions. (See Appendix 1 for method of selection.)

Profile of Unions Surveyed

Table 1 is a detailed profile of the three unions surveyed: the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). (6)

Table 1: Profile of Unions Surveyed in 1976

| | CWIU | MAWU | NUIW |
|--|--|---|--|
| 1. Year founded | 1974 | 1973 | 1973 |
| 2. Secretary | Mr O Badsha (1975) Ms N Dlamini (1976) | Mr A Mthethwa (1976) (banned) Ms J R Nala (1977) | Ms J R Nala (1976) Mr O Zuma (1977) |
| 3. Chairperson of BEC | Mr Mbuto (1976) Mr Mapamila (1977) | Ms B Tshabalala | Mr Manyathi (1976) Mr Mkize (1977) |
| 4. Locals/Branches | Jacobs, Pinetown and Dalbridge | Johannesburg and PMB, Dalbridge | Jacobs & Pinetown and Dalbridge |
| 5. Industry covered | chemicals, soaps & candles, oils refinery, pharmaceut- icals, including plastics, perfume, paints | metal (engineering, motor manufacturing) | textiles: blankets, cotton, wool, synthetic fibres |
| 6. Paid officials | 4 (including 1 part-time) (since 1977, 2 paid officials) | 6 (including 1 part-time) (since 1977 1 or 2 paid officials) | 4 |
| Shop-Stewards | 48 | 86 | 80 |
| 8. <u>Membership:</u> | | | |
| Signed-up | 2 900 | 5 000 | 6 000 |
| Paid-up | 900 | 1 000 | 2 000 |
| % paid-up | 31% | 20% | 33% |
| 9. <u>Estimated potential membership in the industry</u> | | | |
| % Signed-up membership | 8% | 2½% | 40% |
| 10. Attendance at Annual General Meeting | Not available | 500 | 500 |
| 11. <u>Ratio of signed-up members</u> | | | |
| to paid officials | 880:1 | 940:1 | 1500:1 |
| to shop stewards | 60:1 | 58:1 | 75:1 |
| 12. <u>Ratio of paid-up members</u> | | | |
| to paid officials | 270:1 | 190:1 | 500:1 |
| to shop stewards | 19:1 | 12:1 | 25:1 |
| 13. Entrance fee | 50 cents | 50 cents | 50 cents |
| 14. Annual subscription | R10,40 | R10,40 | R10,40 |

They were all formed in the wake of the mass strikes in Durban in 1973 (although the CWIU was only officially formed in 1974, it started accepting members from late 1973). They are all affiliated to the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC) and have been influenced by that body's emphasis on the need for strong shop floor representation. This can be seen in Table 1 where the ratio of paid-up members to shop-stewards is:

| | |
|------|------|
| CWIU | 19:1 |
| MAWU | 21:1 |
| NUTW | 25:1 |

They all have links with the international trade union movement and the MAWU has been represented on the International Metal Federations' Consultative committee from its inception in S.A.

Statistical Profile of Union Membership

All three of the Unions could be classified as industrial unions as they cater for all workers in a single industry irrespective of their race, craft, occupation or grade of skill. In reality, of course, because Africans are the only racial group unable to register as "employees" under the Industrial Conciliation Act, the membership consists overwhelmingly of Africans. Furthermore, as Table 2 indicates the vast bulk of union membership (between 80 and 90%) are either unskilled or lower semi-skilled. (See Appendix 2 for a definition of skills)

Table 2: Union membership by skill level

| | Unskilled | Lower semi-skilled | Higher semi-skilled | Lower skilled | Total |
|-------|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 57 | 29 | 7 | 7 | 100 |
| MAWU | 47 | 41 | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| NUTW | 14 | 73 | 10 | 3 | 100 |
| Total | 35 | 51 | 8 | 6 | 100 |

Table 4 shows union membership cross tabulated by age.

Table 3: Union membership by age

| Age | 20 - 29 | 30 - 39 | 40 - 49 | +50 | Total |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|-----|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 14 | 28 | 29 | 29 | 100 |
| MAWU | 17 | 18 | 47 | 18 | 100 |
| NUTW | 31 | 41 | 21 | 7 | 100 |
| Total | 22 | 34 | 30 | 14 | 100 |

Most members are between 30 and 49 years of age although the NUTW does have a significantly higher proportion of members between the age of 20 and 39 (72%) than does the CWIU (42%) and MAWU (35%).

Most members (77%) have a primary school education. However Table 4 suggests that the NUTW has significantly less members with no education and a higher proportion with Form I, II and III than the other two unions. This is most probably the result of the higher proportion of younger workers in the NUTW (See Table 3)

Table 4: Union membership by education

| | no education | sub A or B | std 1-3 | std 4-5 | std 6-7 (Form I) | Form I & II | Total |
|-------|--------------|------------|---------|---------|------------------|-------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 22 | 7 | 21 | 36 | 14 | 0 | 100 |
| MAWU | 35 | 0 | 35 | 6 | 24 | 0 | 100 |
| NUTW | 7 | 0 | 28 | 17 | 38 | 10 | 100 |
| Total | 17 | 1 | 30 | 18 | 29 | 5 | 100 |

Table 5: Union membership by length of service in the present job

| Union | Up to 2 years | 2 - 4 | 5 - 9 | 10 - 15 | 15+ | Total |
|-------|---------------|-------|-------|---------|-----|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 21 | 43 | 22 | 14 | 0 | 100 |
| MAWU | 37 | 38 | 19 | 0 | 6 | 100 |
| NUTW | 25 | 22 | 46 | 0 | 7 | 100 |
| Total | 28 | 29 | 33 | 5 | 5 | 100 |

72% of the union membership had been working in the same job for over two years although only a small percentage stayed on for over 10 years (5%). The survey suggests, therefore, that union members are relatively stable in their jobs.

Table 6: Union membership by weekly wage (including overtime)

| | R10-R15 | R15-R20 | R20-R30 | R30+ | Total |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 0 | 6 | 53 | 41 | 100 |
| MAWU | 0 | 28 | 54 | 18 | 100 |
| NUTW | 20 | 17 | 46 | 17 | 100 |
| Total | 7 | 16 | 54 | 23 | 100 |

Most union members earned between R20 - R30 per week. As much as 23% of all union members earned less than R20 and in the NUTW, 20% earned less than R15 per week. These figures are similar to those of the Natal Employers Association (NEA) annual wage survey for the year ending 1 May 1975 where they found that the average wage for adult male labourers was R24 per week.

Most of the union members (54%) were born in the rural areas (reserve or 'white' farming areas), 12% in peri-urban areas, and 34% were born in Durban. As many as 65% had been working in Durban for more than 15 years, 11% for between 10 and 15 years and only 24% for less than 10 years. It is quite likely then that nearly two-thirds of the sample qualify for permanent urban residence either under Sec. 10(a) or 10(b) of the Urban Areas Act. (7)

Recruitment

We were interested in the degree of continuity of membership between the present unions and their forerunners in the past. We asked respondents whether they had ever been members of trade unions before. One said he had been a member of the ICU, a general union prominent in Natal in the 1920's which continued on a loose basis until the 1930's. 11% of the sample had belonged to SACTU - the trade union wing of the congress movement active in the late 1950's and early 1960's. It ceased to be active ^{publicly publicly} in S.A. in 1964 after a wave of bannings and state harassment. It was interesting to note that many respondents were aware of this and said that they had been reluctant to join the present unions because of SACTU's experience of banning, exile and banishment. They contrasted SACTU's concentration on politics on a national level, with the present unions concern with the day-to-day issues in the factory and their stress on the need to resolve complaints through shop-stewards and not at the trade union offices.

Our impression was that a network of informal leadership existed in the factories who had past experience of the repression of formal organisation and discussed the wisdom of re-establishing trade unions. In some cases they had been members of SACTU or more recently, they had participated in the wave of strikes in 1973. As the authors of The Durban Strikes 1973 argue "The spread of spontaneous action of this kind (such as the mass action of 1973) will almost certainly depend upon and be influenced by pre-existing, informal communication networks, such as friendship groups, "home-boy" groups, groups of people who habitually commute together and so on". (8) In addition most of those interviewed belonged to informal groups who pool their income such as Stokfel or Maholisana. (9)

Respondents were asked how they had heard about the present union. 43% mentioned workmates at their place of employment, 25% mentioned hearing about the union in the township and 32% were approached directly by a union organiser at their factory gate.

Table 7: Union membership by method of recruitment

| | Township | Work-mates | Approached by union organisers | Total |
|-------|----------|------------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 43 | 36 | 21 | 100 |
| MAWU | 29 | 47 | 24 | 100 |
| NUTW | 17 | 45 | 38 | 100 |
| Total | 25 | 43 | 32 | 100 |

They were then asked an open-ended question on why they decided to join the union once they got to hear of it. (Table 8) They often gave more than one reason, and we decided to categorise the answers under three headings; - benefits offered by the union; improvement of wages; and defence of the workers dignity and rights. This last reason was often expressed in terms of the need for workers to get together to defend their rights. 59% gave as their reason for joining the union the last category. This is a typical reply:

"I had known of the advantages of the union. The employers know of the advantages of the union too and fear them. They know how they (management) rob people of the monies due to them. That is why they do not want anybody who is a member of a trade union. I felt the union would aid me in times of dispute with the management. But more than this there is a need for the workers themselves to be a strong block that will force management to recognise our rights. The union must be so strong that if anything happend to one of its members they must fight to the last degree".

34% singled out union benefits (funeral and medical) as a reason for joining the union. 7% mentioned wages specifically.

Table 8: Why did you decide to join the Union?

| | Benefits | Improved wages | Defend workers rights | Total |
|-------|----------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 33 | 10 | 57 | 100 |
| MAWU | 20 | 9 | 71 | 100 |
| NUTW | 40 | 8 | 52 | 100 |
| Total | 34 | 7 | 59 | 100 |

Initially unions recruited members on a mass basis. By 1975 this strategy had changed. The MAWU stated this change in their report to TUACC in August 1975 in these terms:

"Previously organisation had been based on a mass drive for membership without a thorough assessment of the direction of the Union or the consequences of such a drive. The heightened militancy of Durban workers, following the strikes made the mass organisational drive appear successful but the subsequent lessening of militancy on the workers' part and the need to train suitably qualified personnel to deal with the problems of the Union have necessitated a reassessment of strategy. Broadly speaking, this reassessment has resulted in two major changes in strategy:

- (a) Decentralisation
- (b) Concentration of resources upon a few carefully selected factories.

Decentralisation:

This has taken two directions:

- (i) The union officials now concentrate primarily upon training of workers in shop-steward committees, making it in turn the responsibility of these shop-steward committees to recruit and organise members, and to collect subscriptions. Regular meetings of shop-stewards from particular factories are held and training is integrated with the ongoing organisational process at these factories.
- (ii) The office in Jacobs was established in order to encourage more participation in Union affairs by members whose place of work is in that area.

Concentration of resources: (a number of factories are then mentioned)."

Problems facing African workers

The most common problem mentioned was victimisation and arbitrary action against African workers (38%). Africans are excluded from protection against victimisation for trade union activity, either because the statute concerned excludes Africans by its definition

of employee (the Industrial Conciliation Act) or by defining 'trade union' to mean a registered trade union, which Africans cannot form (e g Wage Act and Shops and Offices Act). Similarly, the provisions under the Industrial Conciliation Act whereby compulsory arbitration can be made to apply to a dispute arising from victimisation, do not apply to Africans. Nor does the procedure whereby the Minister of Labour can order the reinstatement of victimised employees apply to Africans if the reason for victimisation was trade union activity.

Table 9: Problems facing African workers

| | Victimi- sation & arbitrary action | Low wages | Lack of recognition of represent- atives | dangerous work con- ditions | Bad relations with supervisors | ignorance of rights | Total |
|-------|---|--------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 36 | 36 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 100 |
| MAWU | 38 | 38 | 12 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 100 |
| NUTW | 40 | 32 | 13 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 100 |
| Total | 38 | 35 | 12 | 8 | 3 | 14 | 100 |

Respondents said it was often difficult to prove victimisation for trade union activity, as it was often done in the form of "redundancy". If the factory has to go on to short time, they said, it is the union activists who are laid off first. (10) Another important form of victimisation mentioned by respondents is that applied to contract workers. A contract worker who is dismissed has to return immediately to the rural areas. With the present rate of unemployment this will mean that he is not likely to have his contract renewed and will have to remain in the rural areas. One respondent said management used the contract system to "weed-out" trade unionists by simply not re-employing them when their contracts expire.

In addition respondents mentioned, under the broad heading of "victimisation and arbitrary action", a range of actions on management's part that they felt showed either management's lack of conception of them as human beings or management's arbitrariness. Here reference was frequently made to the fact that management gave preference in promotion to Indians. Many spoke of this tendency as if it were a deliberate attempt to divide the working class. (11) Clearly Indian-African hostility is a potential problem for unions

concerned with attempting to establish non-racial solidarity, but this problem should not be exaggerated. The unregistered textile union (NUTW) had complete cooperation from the local branch of the registered largely Indian and Coloured union, (TWIU), until the Head Office in Cape Town ruptured relations in 1976 after the bannings of some TUACC officials. The main reason for the cooperation of the local branch of TWIU was that only about 15% of the workers in the textile industry are eligible to belong to the registered union i.e. are Indian. On its own this union would be very weak, so it needs to cooperate with the much larger unregistered union. It seems, therefore, not unreasonable to postulate that if there were freedom of association, and Africans and Indians could join common unions, they would do so if only because of the economic benefits of collective bargaining. There is evidence of precisely this kind of solidarity emerging in the Smith and Nephew factory, where, when the ^{TWIU} ~~NUTW~~ Head Office withdrew cooperation from the unregistered ^{NUTW} ~~TWIU~~, the majority of Indian workers in that factory chose to join the unregistered union. In this situation their class interest lay clearly in inter-racial working class solidarity.

The next most common problem mentioned (35%) was low wages. This problem was often accompanied by complaints about the growing number of unemployed Africans and the numbers being laid-off.

The lack of recognition of trade union representatives by management was the third most common problem mentioned by respondents. The ineffectiveness of liaison committees and the 'planting' of informers to try and divide workers was also frequently mentioned. All three of the unions were, at the time of the survey, conducting negotiations in some of the factories where they were organised with management over recognition. Some of these negotiations had already broken down by the time the survey was completed. In all cases management evaded recognition by promoting works or liaison committees as alternatives to trade unions. (12)

Dangerous work conditions was raised in strong emotional terms by some members particularly those working with chemicals.

Members' Perceptions of the Unions

When asked whether the union was helping to overcome their problems nearly half (49%) answered clearly in the affirmative. Only 3% said no. 45% felt that the union's performance could not be judged because

it was not recognised and its members were vulnerable to victimisation if they tried to solve workers' problems. Here is an example of this type of response to the question.

"This is very difficult because most of the things need an open challenge, yet we can't do it because we can then be exposing ourselves to victimisation by police and management."

Table 10: "What does the union need to make it effective?"

| | Recognition through unity | More invol- vement in factories | increase members | link with kwazulu | more militant | other | Total |
|-------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 33 | 39 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 100 |
| MAWU | 27 | 35 | 15 | 0 | 4 | 19 | 100 |
| NUIW | 50 | 28 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 100 |
| Total | 39 | 33 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 100 |

When asked how the union could become more effective, 39% mentioned the need for greater unity and discipline to win recognition. 33% mentioned the need for the union to have more contact with its members in the factories by taking up specific issues.

Maintaining contact between organisers and members is made particularly difficult by the long distances organisers have to travel, in part the result of the Group Areas Act. Transport costs are the second largest item next to wages for most unions. Organisers have to work four regular evenings a week attending shop steward meetings. The unions have thus spent a great deal of time and money developing factory structures in an attempt to consolidate support in the factory and establish the shop-steward as the key link between the union office and the shop-floor.

An interesting feature of members' response to this section of the questionnaire is that only 2% of the membership felt the union needed to become more militant. Many of them stressed the extent to which the unions had taught them to exercise their collective power in a disciplined and cautious way.

Factors inhibiting membership growth

The percentage of the potential work-force in each industry which is organised by the unions is low except for the NUTW (40%). We asked respondents, therefore, why more workers did not join the unions.

Fear of intimidation from employers and from the state was the reason 44% of the respondents gave when asked why more workers did not join the union.

"They fear employers who always give an impression that the unions are dangerous and adventurous bodies and threaten to dismiss anyone who joins the Union".

"They have fear of the police. The police consider the Union as the same thing with the Congress (ANC) because it fights against oppression.

"When the organisers make explanations they put it clearly that the Union is not registered. As a result many people keep away and interpret 'not registered' as meaning 'illegal'."

"Africans consider it illegal to join the union or something that ultimately leads one to trouble or confrontation with the police."

"Many believe there can be informers within the Union membership which at a later stage can lead to some ill information oozing out to the police or management leading to arrests."

One member interviewed described how he hides his union card at work because he is afraid of informers. There seemed, he said, to be general agreement that you can only talk about unions to those whom you can trust. (13)

These fears of members have a clear base in objective experience. Not long after the survey was completed the Secretary of MAWU was banned for 5 years under the Internal Security Act and the Secretary of NUTW was detained under the Terrorism Act for nine months and then released without any charges being laid. In January 1974 four Durban trade unionists were banned. In November 1976, 26 men and women involved with African worker organisation were banned. In the textile industry alone 27 trade unionists have been banned since 1950.

Table 11: "Why do you think more workers don't join the Union?"

| | Fear of intimidation by employer/state | Pessimistic | Corruption | Other | Total |
|-------|--|-------------|------------|-------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 48 | 28 | 14 | 10 | 100 |
| MAWU | 42 | 29 | 13 | 16 | 100 |
| NUTW | 45 | 35 | 8 | 12 | 100 |
| Total | 44 | 33 | 11 | 12 | 100 |

The second largest category of responses (33%) was amongst those who felt that there was basic pessimism about any chances of survival of unions. These two responses sum up this category:

"We Africans do not have good knowledge of the Unions. Unions all the time have been considered by us as something we are not allowed to participate in or found. Many people do not consider the African unions to be having any future as it is."

"As they understand it, it is something for the whites. Some people do not believe that there are any means by a black man that can make a white man either change his attitude or yield to some force by a black man. Hence you find some people saying 'What can Buthelezi do for me? He is black and can't get anywhere'".

A considerable smaller proportion (^(11%)~~(14%)~~) attributed lack of support of the union to corruption among union officials.

"Many people have had their monies collected by people who later disappear. This has led to distrust of them who form unions."

Membership Maintenance

Two thirds of the sample were members whose subscription fees had lapsed, i.e. they were 28 weeks in arrears. These figures are similar to the proportion of paid-up members in Table 1: 31% in the CWIU, 20% in MAWU and 33% in NUTW. They were asked why they stopped paying their subscriptions.

Table 12: Why did you stop paying your subscription fees to the Union?

| | Financial difficulties Too busy. Changed jobs. Recently unemployed. | Union inefficiency | Disillusioned with unions progress | Not applicable | Total |
|-------|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 69 | 10 | 6 | 15 | 100 |
| MAWU | 47 | 18 | 6 | 29 | 100 |
| NUIW | 29 | 7 | 6 | 58 | 100 |
| Total | 40 | 12 | 6 | 42 | 100 |

The most frequent reason given for ceasing to pay subs were personal factors unrelated to the union. These included such factors as financial difficulties, changing job, too busy with family affairs, etc.

(The answer to this particular question must be treated with caution - although the interviewer made it clear that he was not from the unions, it is possible that some would have given reasons that would not offend the union). 12% stopped paying because they believed that the union had been inefficient. 6% were disillusioned in general with the unions progress. This response typifies this category:

"This union is useless and fails to respect its promises. I hate such things. We are in a bad position. We need help from people, not to be cheated."

The collection of subscriptions is clearly a problem for the unions. The Industrial Conciliation Act allows employers to make check-off (or stop-order) deductions on behalf of the registered trade unions against the wages of employers (Sec. 51(3)). This facility is denied Africans, which in terms of the Bantu Labour Act, is made illegal (No. 67 of 1964; Sec. 16 (11)). ^(The implications of the recent abolition of Sec 16) Unregistered unions are forced to collect dues by one of the four following methods: not ye
clear

- (a) organisers can visit the work place if they have access to it, or else, stand at the factory gates.
- (b) they can try and develop a sufficiently cohesive shop-steward committee to collect the dues at the work-place.
- (c) they can get subscriptions indirectly in conjunction with a life insurance scheme.
- (d) Workers pay membership fees at the union offices.

Amongst the TUACC unions only (b) and (d) are used.

The Unions and Politics

The debate about the relationship between trade unions and political parties is a long-standing one in the labour movement. Amongst African workers in S.A. it has taken a particularly controversial form because of the tendency of working class organisations to link up with the movement for national liberation. For example, in 1954 SACTU was formed with the specific intention of engaging in "political unionism" and linked up with the Congress movement in its national political campaigns.

The TUACC affiliated unions have eschewed any involvement with the nationalist movement and have been concerned to establish an independent trade union organisation. However, nationalist politics remain crucial areas of interest for African workers and we were concerned to establish what perception of present and past leadership union members had.

Table 13: "Can you think of a leader present or past who can or could improve the position of African workers?"

| Unions | Luthuli | G Buthelezi | Mandela | M Mabhedede | Others | Total |
|--------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|--------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 58 | 8 | 0 | 17 | 17 | 100 |
| MAWU | 42 | 25 | 17 | 8 | 8 | 100 |
| NUTW | 40 | 24 | 8 | 4 | 24 | 100 |
| Totals | 44 | 19 | 10 | 8 | 19 | 100 |

Table 13 indicates that Chief Albert Luthuli, President General of the ANC until his death in 1967, remains the most popular nationalist political figure. Not surprising, since Durban is a predominantly zulu-speaking area, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief Minister of Kwazulu, was rated second, followed by Nelson Mandela, the jailed leader of the ANC. Moses Mabhedede, a SACTU leader in the 1950's and early 1960's, was still seen by some as a leader of African workers.

The attitude of union members to Chief Buthelezi is of particular interest because of Buthelezi's overtures to the trade unions in 1975 to join the newly established Inkatha movement. (14). The trade unions were concerned to maintain the independent position mentioned earlier and decided not to join but encouraged individual members to join if

they so wished. Clearly Table 14 shows the widespread support Buthelezi has amongst African workers.

Table 14: Do African workers think of Gatsha Buthelezi as their leader?

| Union | Yes | Used to | No | Don't know | Total |
|-------|-----|---------|----|------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| CWIU | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| MAWU | 94 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 100 |
| NUTW | 80 | 10 | 3 | 7 | 100 |
| Total | 87 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 100 |

However, if age is taken as a variable a clear tendency for the younger members to be critical of Buthelezi is noticeable. (Table 15) Those who are critical say that he is not a "workers' leader" or they say that he has made promises but nothing has come about.

Table 15: Do African workers think of Buthelezi as their leader?

| Age | Yes | Used to | No | Don't know | Total |
|---------|-----|---------|----|------------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| 20 - 29 | 72 | 14 | 7 | 7 | 100 |
| 30 - 39 | 85 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 100 |
| 40 - 49 | 95 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 100 |
| +50 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Total | 87 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 100 |

Conclusion

There is a view popular in certain employer, government and registered trade union circles that Africans do not understand and are not yet "ready" for trade unionism. Arrie Paulus, General-Secretary of the Mine Workers Union, wrote recently that:

"It is my sincere belief that the mass of Black workers in the Republic today are even less ready to understand the concept of a responsible trade union than the white workers were, say, half a century ago". (15)

Similarly, W.J. de Villiers, a top official in General Mining has

written that "he (the African) may easily interpret his collective bargaining power merely as a way in which to put demands which must be satisfied, and not as a medium for negotiating the basic agreement. He argues this curious position on the alleged cultural differences in child-rearing practices between Africans and Whites! (16) In both cases this view of Africans rests on the assumption that Africans are still hide-bound by 'tribal' customs, belonging to a largely untouched 'tribal' culture. While clearly in the early stage of capitalist development in S.A., when most Africans had an alternative source of income in the pre-capitalist "Reserve" economies, their responses and consciousness may well have been affected by this incomplete proletarianisation. The fact that they were forced to vacillate between both a capitalist and a non-capitalist mode of production will have affected their perception of their work situation. However, with the collapse of their "Reserve" economies, certainly by the end of the Second World War, the vast bulk of Africans became fully dependent on wage labour and increasingly see their future within the capitalist mode of production. (17) To try, therefore, to explain conflicts which arise in the work-place on the cultural level is to create the erroneous and unfortunate impression that Africans have only recently been engaged in continuous wage-labour.

However, these remarks must not be meant to imply that there are no distinctive features in the conditions of the African working class in S.A. There are, firstly, special conditions created by "economic backwardness" i.e. the persistence of 'pre-capitalist' relations of production even if somewhat destroyed. (18) Furthermore, the restrictions created by influx control on 'contract' workers settling in the town leads many of them to retain links with the rural areas. However, as Schlemmer has shown in his survey of Durban workers in 1971-1972, in spite of the fact that as many as 73% had some sort of familial rural links, two out of three saw themselves as seriously deprived of opportunities and fair wages and had "an orientation which would approximate to what one would expect of a class-for-itself". Furthermore, when the question of action was posed specifically in relation to labour power, 48% revealed some awareness of the potential strength of African workers. Schlemmer concludes by arguing that in spite of the fact that they have rural links, they are completely in 'tune' with urban values. (19) The main effect of

influx control is not on worker consciousness but rather in the way in which it inhibits collective bargaining through perpetuating the contract system. As Hindson argues,

"the (contract system) makes trade union organisation difficult by dividing the labour force into those with an established right in the urban areas and those without. For contract labour in particular, the ever present threat of losing a job and being forced to leave the urban area must greatly weaken the desire for trade union membership". (20)

Thus the institutionalisation of migrant labour and the lack of worker organisation are the distinctive features of the African workers situation in the S.A. economy today.

The evidence presented in this survey seems to suggest that the necessary conditions for effective trade unions now largely exists among the members of these three unregistered trade unions. These conditions involve, essentially, the existence of a body of life-long wage earners, dependent on wages and aware of the benefits of collective bargaining. We have shown that members in this sample are relatively stable in their jobs and join unions to try collectively to improve their wages and work conditions. These are the necessary conditions; the sufficient conditions for effective trade unions involve the readiness of both management and the state to allow the emergence of collective organisation in the work-place and a willingness to recognise and negotiate with its leadership on a permanent basis. We suggested earlier that some changes in this direction are discernible; in Durban, as yet, only one company, Smith and Nephew, have been prepared to enter into a negotiated agreement with a trade union, the NUTW.

However, a central dilemma for these members remains. When asked whether the union was helping members to overcome their problems,

nearly half (45%) of the respondents said the union could not be judged because it was not recognized. There is no evidence that they rejected the union per se; they seemed to accept the necessity for a strategy based on the day-to-day issues in the factory rather than national political issues. Yet, unless these unions are able to deliver economic benefits to their members, they ^{members} may increasingly cease to see the trade union as the central institution able to solve their problems in the work-place, and turn to more 'political' forms of involvement. However, what forms such political involvement could take and what the relationship between work-place organization and the working class party should be, is an issue which must be left to another occasion.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The Minister of Labour, when introducing the Bantu Labour Relations Amendment Act of 1973, said: "I think that the establishment of these works committees will really deprive those ... Bantu trade unions ... of their life's blood and any necessity for existence." (House of Assembly Debates, 1973, col. 8779). This is in sharp contrast to Professor N. Wiehahn' (admittedly his personal opinions) inaugural address to UNISA where he speaks of the rights of all workers to trade unions, "The Regulation of Labour Relations in a changing S.A." Institute of Labour Relations, 1977, UNISA.
- (2) See discussion of the changed policy of Natal Employers Association, L Schlemmer and M. Boulanger, Employers, in Lawrence Schlemmer & Eddie Webster in Change, Reform and Economic Growth in S.A. Also ASSOCOM's evidence to the Cilliers Commission where inter alia it is recommended that "Africans be given freedom of movement and allowed to negotiate with employers on the same basis as whites", Rand Daily Mail, 18/2/78.
- (3) See Ray Altmann: "There is no doubt that the future of the trade union movement in S.A. lies in the hands of the Coloured and Black workers", "Leadership Problems of Registered Trade Unions in S.A." SALB Vol. 3 No.2.
- (4) The first code of conduct was formulated in 1973 by the British Government. SALB Vol. 1 No. 2.
- (5) Acknowledgement is made to SAIRR for financial assistance and to Judson Kuzwayo for conducting the interviews.
- (6) Most of these statistics are derived from Appendix A.1 and A.2 in John Lewsen Black Trade Unions in South Africa. Unpublished MBA dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 1970.
- (7) Section 10 of the Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1923 as amended governs the right of an African to be in Durban (as in all other prescribed areas) and lays down the conditions under which he may remain. Those who are born in Durban qualify under Sec.10(a), while those who have worked continuously for one employer at one address for 10 years or have resided lawfully in Durban for 15 years, also qualify as permanent residents.

They are referred to as Section 10(1)b. The remainder are forced into a system of annual contract work under 1968 regulations which stipulate that every African may obtain work only through the Tribal Labour Bureau in his area and that a service contract must be terminated within one year. These men and women are migrants. However, in Durban the 'tribal' areas (such as Umlazi) are within commuting distance from the work-place. Consequently these workers, even though they don't qualify for permanence in Durban, will not be as vulnerable to endorsement as, say, workers in Cape Town where homes could be 600 kms from their work-place. In other words, if an Umlazi worker loses his job in Durban he is still able to retain his home in Umlazi.

Sheena Duncan has argued something similar. "I believe that there are certain areas where black trade unions are likely to be most effective at the present time. There are those urban areas where workers live in 'homeland' townships but commute daily to work in 'white' S.A. e.g. Mdantsane outside East London, Kwa Mashu and Umlazi outside Durban, Ga Rankuwu and Malopani outside Pretoria, together with the innumerable smaller places in the Transvaal and Natal where homeland townships are in fact dormitory suburbs for nearby towns.

In these areas it seems to me to be more possible for *worker* accommodation and family stability need not be dependent on their employment ...". S A L B Nol. 3 No. 9.

action to take plan

- (8) The Durban Strikes 1973, IIE, 1974, p. 92.
- (9) For similar information on "informal groups" among African workers in Durban see E. Webster, "A Research Note on Consciousness and the Problem of Organisation" in Schlemmer and Webster, Change, Reform and Economic Growth in S.A., p.229.
- (10) Although the courts presume that the charge brought against the employer for victimisation stands until the employer proves otherwise, this statutory provision is weakened immensely by the fact that the presumption of victimisation falls away if the employer proves that there are grounds other than those statutorily prohibited which justify dismissal. Examples of such grounds are moral misconduct and wilful negligence which includes incompetence, violence, dishonesty and disobedience to a lawful and reasonable order.
- (11) For a discussion of similar alleged preferential treatment towards Indians by management see E Webster, The 1949 Durban 'Riots' in P L Bonner, Working Papers in Southern African Studies, Institute of African Studies, 1977.
- (12) For two short case studies of management's attempts to evade recognition by promoting works and liaison committees see E Webster, Management's Counter-Offensive SALB Vol. 2 No.3, p. 33-34.
- (13) For further information on 'Company spies' see the cross-examination by the Defence of the Wentex employee in the State vs Mbali, SALB Vol. 2 No. 9-10, p.54-57.
- (14) These overtures were made at the graduation ceremony of the first IIE (Institute for Industrial Education) Diploma students in mid 1975. Chief Buthelezi was Chancellor of the IIE at the time.

- (15) A Paulus, Trade Unionism in South Africa in Grey Coetzee, Industrial Relations in S.A. Juta 1976, p. 217.
- (16) W J de Villiers, The Effective Utilization of Human Resources in the Republic of S.A. Federale Mynbou-General Mining Group, Johannesburg, 1974.
- (17) D O'Meara, The 1946 Mine Workers Strike in the Political Economy of S.A., in Working Papers in Southern African Studies African Studies Institute, 1977.
For a summary of the collapse of 'peasant' agriculture in the Reserves, see O'Meara, p. 189. Precisely when the Reserves 'collapsed' is a difficult question. Firstly collapse is too final a work to describe what Meillasoux has called a contradictory process of both perpetuation and destruction. Secondly, the reserves 'collapsed' at different times in different regions. Thus missionaries record that parts of the Ciskei had become virtually mine villages by 1910, whereas, it has been argued that Ovamboland, as late as 1971-2 still provided some alternative agricultural economy for striking Namibian workers to withdraw to.
- (18) "By economic backwardness, we mean the persistence of pre-capitalist relations of production within society. ... The production of part (even a majority) of the necessities of life under pre-capitalist relations of production implies... that the value . . of labour power is (not) determined (wholly in the process of capitalist production..." E. Dore and J. Weeks. Capital, Class Struggle and Wages in the Context of Backwardness. Seminar on Third World Strikes, 1977. Institute of Social Studies. The Hague. An attempt to apply this analysis to industrial conflict in S.A. has been made by A du Plessis. Industrial Relations: A Structuralist Critique. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1978.
- (19) Schlemmer L. (1975), "The African Industrial Worker Views his situation, in D Horner (ed), Labour Relations and the African Worker, Johannesburg, SAIRR.
- (20) D Hindson, "Conditions of Labour Supply and Employment of African Workers in Urban Based Industries in S.A. 1946-1975". Workshop on Unemployment and Labour Reallocation. Development Studies Research Group, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg

APPENDIX IMethod of Selection(1) Lapsed Members:

Definition: A person was defined to be a lapsed member of the union if he was at least 28 weeks in arrears with his membership fees.

- (A) The list of 266 names from which the required sample of 40 was to be selected was drawn up in the following way.

Since the names to appear on the list were to be from the membership lists of the three unions, Chemical Workers Industrial Unions (CWIU), Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the National Union of Textile Workers (NUIW) a ratio to determine what proportion of the people in the list were to be from each of the individual unions was set up. This ratio was taken to be the same as the ratio of the total number of people who had ever joined each of the individual unions. In this way a ratio of 2:5:7 was arrived at in respect of the above three unions taken in the order mentioned. Thus:

$$\frac{2}{14} \times 266 = 38 \text{ names were drawn from CWIU}$$

$$\frac{5}{14} \times 266 = 95 \text{ names were drawn from MAWU}$$

$$\frac{7}{14} \times 266 = 133 \text{ names were drawn from TWIU}$$

$$\underline{\text{Total:}} \quad 266$$

- (B) The combined list of 266 names from the 3 unions was then divided according to the section of Kwa Mashu the person was resident in and then interviewer was asked to select every fifth name from the new list and keep going until he had interviewed 40 people.

(2) Shop Stewards:

For the total of 20 shop stewards that were to be interviewed it was decided that the number coming from each of the above 3 unions was to be in proportion to the total number of active shop stewards (i.e. shop stewards who had been attending

meetings continuously over the last 6 months) in that particular union. Thus since the number of active shop stewards in the above unions was found to be 19, 55 and 95. The shop stewards were chosen thus:

$$\text{CWIU} \cdot \frac{20}{170} \times 20 = 2$$

$$\text{MAWU} \frac{55}{170} \times 20 = 7$$

$$\text{TWIU} \frac{95}{170} \times 20 = \frac{11}{20}$$

Acknowledgement is made to TUACC for allowing me access to their membership records and Ravi Joshi of the IIE, for helping selecting the sample.

Definition of skills -(1) Unskilled labour

(a) Definition:

Jobs requiring only from one to a few days induction. The tasks are essentially repetitive, involving mostly manual effort from light duties to heavy physical tasks.

(b) Type of positions:

General labourer - cleaner - sweeper - loader - teamaker - packer - warehouse labourer - watchman - etc. ...

(2) Lower Semi-Skilled Jobs

(a) Definition:

Positions requiring the acquisition of elementary skills which the worker exercises on his own. There is not very much scope for initiative. Decisions are characterised by the use of simple check lists.

(b) Type of positions:

Mechanic attendant, mechanic and artisan assistant, office messenger, machine operator (learner) - plant greaser - production assembler (inexperienced) - learner bookbinder - fireman/stoker - induna or bossboy, or any person in charge of unskilled labour, etc. ...

(3) Higher Semi-Skilled Jobs

(a) Definition:

Positions requiring the acquisition of elementary skills which the worker exercises on his own. There is not very much scope for initiative. Decisions are characterised by the use of simple check lists.

(b) Type of positions:

Motor car driver - forklift driver - crane driver - scooter driver - production assembler (experienced) - chargehand, overseer in charge of lower semi-skilled and unskilled labour, etc. ...

(4) Lower Skilled Jobs

(a) Definition:

People without theoretical-technical background performing similar jobs as in the higher skilled category; people in a stage of not having finished their theoretical studies; for these positions some initiative and interpretation of instructions around some basic skills is required.

(b) Type of positions:

Apprentices (printer - carpenter - mechanic etc. ...) - laboratory assistant - handyman - heavy duty driver - sales van driver - storeman or warehouseman (manual) - section chargehand in charge of a production line - people supervising higher semi-skilled positions and positions at lower levels, etc. ...

99000

Source "Productivity and Wage Association Survey 1971-2"