

Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940–59

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'The Bantu of today regard it as normal procedure to spend the greater part of their working lives outside the Reserves in European employment. They adopt this mode of existence without reservation, as being in the natural course of events.'
Tomlinson Commission UG 61, 1955, p. 73.

Controller of Industrial Manpower to leaders of dock workers: 'If you do not wish to work for less than 8s a day, then, of course, you must go home and other people will come and do the work.' Zulu Phungula, spokesman for dock workers: 'The Government must show us where to go because our homes are here in Durban.'
Department of Labour, File 1496, Minutes of meeting 11 March 1942.

While there has been a comparatively large literature on African migrants circulating between wage labour and agricultural/pastoral production in the reserves, very little has been written on the state of consciousness of these workers, their forms of organization, and the struggles in which they have been engaged. Anthropologists have been preoccupied with concepts such as 'detrribalization', 'urbanization' and cultural change, rather than attempting to understand the forms of working class action in the cities. In defence of the rights of African people to live in urban areas liberal social scientists have conceived of migrant workers as institutionalized undercutters of wages, and others who have written on the class struggles of workers in South Africa consider that repression and labour circulation have seriously retarded the consciousness of migrant workers. Jack and Ray Simons consider that migrant labour has been developed by the state as a defence against the emerging African proletariat.

The perpetual rotation of Africans under intensive police surveillance has had a crippling effect on African labour and political organization. The fear of being 'endorsed out' of towns has been a major deterrent to mass action against apartheid. Labour migration accordingly delays the process of consolidating Africans into a class-conscious proletariat.¹

¹ H. J. and R. E. Simons, 1969, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1950–1960*, Penguin African Library, p. 616.

They would perhaps argue that migrant workers were capable of national consciousness, particularly because of their continued links with the land, but that, of necessity, they would not be the advanced class conscious section of the black working class as they are emasculated through coercive labour circulation. They frequently refer to African workers in the mining sector as ‘peasant workers’, taking up the language of Woddis who describes the phenomenon of labour circulation in the wider African context. Woddis analyses the production of ‘that peculiarly African phenomenon, the continually migrating peasant-worker’ by imperialism and argues that the migrant worker has lost his old world without gaining a new one.² Contrary to the Simons’ pessimistic assessment he writes that migrant labour contains within itself contradictory features, both the prevention of a stabilized and permanent proletariat but also widespread experience of wage labour on mines, plantations, railways and factories and the spread of political ideas. Workers who are circulating between wage labour and the reserves also join trade unions, take part in strikes, become members of political parties, and take part in political processions and demonstrations. This knowledge and experience is taken back to the rural areas and increases political activity in the countryside.

Thus, in the busy market-of-ideas of the urban centres they have become new men, with enlarged horizons and an awareness of class interests and class solidarity, and a new national consciousness . . . The migrant worker is also a migrant peasant, and the African worker-peasant with knowledge of both worlds, is able to bring to the countryside the spirit and political consciousness that has grown in the towns.³

These assessments of migrant workers’ consciousness pose the questions of the degree of their proletarianization, of the structure of the African working class, and the forms of action which are taken by workers who are forced to maintain their families in the rural areas through being denied urban residence by employers refusing to meet workers requirements in an urban setting and through the operation of influx control. The answers to these questions will be sought in this article in the conditions and struggles of *togt* (day) dock workers in Durban.

During the Second World War and the 1950s the comparatively ‘free’ form of labour (migrant workers paid on a daily basis in the Durban docks) was transformed into contract labour under a strict labour regime. This took place at a time of intense conflict in Durban characterized by a close identity of interest between stevedoring employers and the state, in which the issues of stabilization of the African labour force, employer–state responses to strike action, and specifically the formation of an employers’ organization to control labour supply in the docks, were discussed and action taken to limit resistance to existing structures of labour control. In this period of class struggles the daily paid dock workers (both stevedoring and railway workers) revealed

² Jack Woddis, 1960, *The Roots of Revolt*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, p. 46.

³ Woddis (1960), p. 252.

themselves as a volatile and class conscious element within the working class in Durban.

The struggles of the dock workers had a significant effect on the development of administrative measures to deal with labour leadership, on the argument on how to reconcile a smooth-flowing labour supply with tightened influx control, and on the intra-working class relationships between Indian and African workers. The process of laying down minimum wages for unskilled labour was initiated, controls were introduced to contain and direct the flood of workers from the reserves, influx control was implemented for the first time ('endorsing out' or deportation became a permanent feature of urban administration), and new relationships between Indian and African political and industrial organizations were born in the aftermath of the riots of January 1949. In Durban the base was laid for the mass organization of industrial workers which developed in the 1950s with the growth of SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions), a phenomenon which placed the Durban area as a leading centre of militant trade unionism, mass political action, and a high level of strike activity.

The dock workers were a significant although proportionately small section of the total African labour force by the late 1930s. As has been described in a number of surveys, the African workers in Durban were concentrated in the tertiary sector (a high proportion of domestic servants, transport, and commercial workers) with a growing proportion of workers in industry and construction.⁴ The dock workers made up 43 per cent of the section of transport workers; 22 per cent railway workers (2,168) and 21 per cent (2,001) stevedoring workers.⁵ The most profound characteristic of the African labour force in Durban was the extent of labour circulation as evidenced by the preponderance of the working age group (15–60) out of the total African population, and an extraordinarily high masculinity ratio (4.13 as compared to 4.32 for the mining Witwatersrand).⁶ This notable feature of the African labour force in Durban (in strong contrast to the relatively stabilized African populations in Port Elizabeth, East London, Kimberley and Bloemfontein) was a result of the emphasis placed by the state on retarding urbanization by a variety of measures controlling land occupation in urban and peri-urban areas and through a state policy reinforcing the role of the reserves in reproducing the particular form of migrant labour. Wolpe has argued that because the means of subsistence and the reproduction of labour power have been met from subsistence agriculture, the value of labour power of African workers has been reduced.⁷

⁴ R. H. Smith, 1950, *Labour Resources of Natal*, Oxford University Press and John R. Burrows, 1959, *The Population and Labour Resources of Natal*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.

⁵ 1936 Census, U.G.12/1942, p. 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii, Table 7.

⁷ Harold Wolpe, November 1972, 'Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid'. *Economy and Society*, 1(4) pp. 425–456.

When the migrant-labourer has access to means of subsistence, outside the capitalist sector, as he does in South Africa, then the relationship between wages and the cost of the production and reproduction of labour-power is changed. That is to say, capital is able to pay the worker *below* the cost of his reproduction.⁸

This argument has to be treated cautiously given the steady decline in agricultural productivity of land in the reserves but does help to explain why Durban, where reserves were particularly accessible and where economically active males were more successfully separated from the household economy, has historically been a low wage area even in comparison with lesser developed areas such as Port Elizabeth. In 1939/40 the Native Affairs Commission used this argument to make a precise calculation of material benefits obtained by migrant workers maintaining their rural links. It estimated that the migrant worker had in addition to his wages a 'reserve subsidy' of approximately £30 per annum, equal to some 60 per cent of the then average black urban wage.⁹ Despite the struggles of African workers and their organizations such as the Industrial and Commercial Union (which had a powerful base in Durban), during 1920–38 the most common wage of African workers in Durban was 18s a week; 58 per cent of wages being between 15s and 20s a week.¹⁰

Dock workers and wage struggles during the war

The dock workers in Durban had a long history of resistance to the general level of wages in the area and their specific conditions of employment. In a broader context they had taken up issues of wider economic and political struggle. They had led the struggles against the poll tax, against passes (which culminated in the death of a number of protestors in 1930 including the dock leader Johannes Nkosi), and the institution of a municipal monopoly in beer brewing. In 1940 the dock workers were a group of approximately 3,000 to 4,000 workers employed by the day by four major stevedoring companies and the South African Railways and Harbour. These workers were employed on average 3–4 days a week because of fluctuations in shipping but also because the employers wished to maintain a supply of labour at a level equal to that of the maximum demand which could be made under peak conditions, i.e., a permanent surplus. As in all ports which have not undergone decasualization, it was in each company's interest to maintain a reserve supply of labour over average daily requirements. The pressure on wage rates was maintained by this reserve which encouraged competition among workers for vacancies every day. Behind this immediate reserve in the dock area pressed the relative surplus population (surplus to the increasingly deficient peasantry economy) of the

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁹ *Report of Native Affairs Commission, 1939–40*, U.G.42/1941, p. 16. The Native Affairs Commission argued that the African workers living in urban areas were being undercut by 'subsidized' migrant labour from the reserves.

¹⁰ Smith (1950), p. 65.

'Native reserves' available to replace workers who 'struck' for higher wages at the docks, i.e., refused en masse to sign on for the day.

Accommodation for the dock workers (an issue which was resolved in the 1870s) was in barracks constructed by the municipality and some private employers. These barracks were constructed so that the greatest number of people possible could live in them, according to an African resident writing to a radical journal in April 1940:

there are narrow, dark, winding stairs, that lead to the room occupying the floor above, and the air is foul . . . for 3d a man is given what passes for a bed . . . this consists of the frame of a bed with a wooden board in place of the spring . . . the men must provide their own blankets . . . the rooms are terribly stuffy, the windows being situated so high that it would be a job to open them . . . the 'comfort' and 'rest' to be got from sleeping on a wooden board in a room where a harsh light burns throughout the night must be experienced to be appreciated.¹¹

Barrack accommodation such as this was condemned by the Smit Commission which reported that the Bell Street compound (the primary accommodation for *togt* workers) was 'over-crowded, dirty, and quite unfit for the purpose for which it was being used'.¹² Apart from some extension of the premises, no improvements were made.

The dock workers, who referred to themselves as *inyati* (in Zulu buffalo, i.e., strong men), had a relatively advanced consciousness as they saw themselves as 'instrumental' (the chief instruments of the means of production) in the labour process in the docks; their labour was central to all work operations in landing and shipping cargo. Despite the recognition and institutionalization of some skill differentials among the workers (the categories by the end of the 1950s were indunas, winchmen, gangwaymen, and stevedoring hands) there was a high degree of co-ordinated action. The position of the dock workers could be contrasted with that of labourers in industry who performed 'service' roles, e.g., sweepers and carriers in garment, leather, footwear, and furniture industries, and with the large number of domestic servants who were atomized among a large number of employers. Even in those industries where African workers were advancing into operative positions, such as in the metal industry, their position was not strategic in the labour process due to the relatively low level of skill involved in their work and their subordination in a tight pattern of skilled/operative/labourer relationships.

The dock workers were probably the only group of black workers in Durban who provided leadership from among their own ranks without relying on non-labouring educated strata who took up the leadership of working class organization during the Second World War. (There was a South African Railways and Harbour Union organized by Philemon Tsele which operated on

¹¹ *The Call*, April 1940, 1(4).

¹² Report of the Inter-Departmental Commission on the Social, Health, and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives, 1942, para. 208 and 209.

a national basis, but it appears that the dock workers employed by the railways in Durban owed their allegiance primarily to the *togt* element in the harbour labour force rather than to weekly employed workers employed by the railways). Some time in 1939 more than 1,000 *togt* workers elected Zulu Phungula as their leader. Phungula was a migrant worker from the Ixcopo district in Natal and became a fiery populist leader who would be a key figure in the struggles of the dock workers.¹³ His style of leadership was clearly distinguishable from that of the urbanized intelligentsia who led the African trade unions during the war years based on the administrative recognition granted to unregistered unions during that period.

There was a considerable increase of working class action during the Second World War brought about by increased organization, rising prices, and expanded production. In 1939 there were five strikes in Natal by African workers in whaling, timber, excavation, and coal mining, and in the country as a whole there was increased strike activity. The state responded by providing increased controls over strike action and the mobility of labour and by increasing the activity of the Wage Board to provide remedial action.¹⁴ The process of wage investigation and setting of minimum wage levels by the Wage Board set in motion by the wage demands of African workers in 1937 in Durban considerably heightened the consciousness of dock workers and led to a militant upsurge in strike activity. Following its investigation the Wage Board published a wage determination for unskilled labour on 27 September 1940, of a minimum wage of 20s a week and 4s a day which benefited 11,410 out of a total of 15,528 workers. The *togt* workers who were already earning 4s a day did not benefit at all even though their skills were acknowledged. The Wage Board said that it had not been possible to separate out the stevedoring *togt* workers for a higher wage despite a recognition that 'their work requires greater care and skill'.

It is to be noted that the wages recommended, whilst they involved the maximum load which the employers concerned (i.e., as a whole) may reasonably be asked to carry, do not directly benefit what may be regarded as the most advanced class of the harbour workers, namely the daily paid stevedoring employees. The reason is . . . that some of the employers utilize 'togt', monthly, and contract labour for the combined trades of stevedoring and bunkering and the increase recommended for the two latter classes is as much as the employer can at this stage carry.¹⁵

Although their position relative to the average unskilled labourer's wage had deteriorated, the dock workers were experiencing a fairly high level of employment because of stimulated war production. In the year 1939/40 the harbour tonnage landed at Durban exceeded two million tons for only the third time in

¹³ *Daily News*, 13 May 1949.

¹⁴ *Monthly Labour Review*, September 1943, Wartime labour control in the Union of South Africa, 57(3) pp. 473–483.

¹⁵ Wage Report No 460, para. 36 and 59.

the history of the port and the total tonnage handled increased by 493,911 tons over the previous twelve-month period.¹⁶ During May 1941, eight months after the wage determination came into operation, four spokesmen for the dock workers submitted demands for 8s a day to the Commissioner of Native Affairs in Durban. A counter offer was made but not accepted by the workers.¹⁷ The demands were then backed up by short-term strike action on 27 May. There then followed a lengthy correspondence between the employers (who argued no significant wage increases were possible) and the Department of Labour (who felt an increase to 5s a day was reasonable).

Following two other strikes among African workers in July, the stevedoring workers came out on strike on 17 August 1941 in support of demands for 8s a day and 10s for working on Sundays. The strike began initially at the Bell Street *togt* barracks, but soon spread throughout all barracks housing dock workers.¹⁸ Some 1,000 railway workers on the wharves were unable to work and the docks came to a standstill. The dock workers gathered around the compounds in Bell Street quietly discussing their grievances and listening to speeches by their leaders. A meeting of municipal officials, employers, and the police was held on the same day. The stevedoring employers now argued that they did not object to any increase (the costs would be simply transferred to the shipping companies they served), but that the change in wages would have to be imposed by government regulations because of long-term contractual obligations in the stevedoring trade. At this stage the Department of Labour which was acting to attempt to defuse strike situations for fear of general working class action felt that the employers were stalling on the issue. The Divisional Inspector of Labour, J. P. Martens reported that: 'The employers hitherto have not been helpful and are in my opinion shielding behind the National Emergency. Irrevocable long-term contracts are a useful excuse but such contracts should not be entered into while operating under a Determination with the possibility always present of demands for improvement'.¹⁹ During the negotiations between the authorities and employers a specific wage investigation into the stevedoring trade was rejected as too cumbersome and time-consuming and it was decided to call in Ivan Walker, who had been appointed the Controller of Industrial Manpower in terms of war regulations, to ratify wage increases through proclaiming emergency regulations.²⁰

¹⁶ *Report of the General Manager of the Railway and Harbours for the Year Ending 31 March 1940*, U.G.41/1940. One harbour ton equals 2,000 lb.

¹⁷ This and subsequent references come from records of the Department of Labour held in the Transvaal Archives. I had permission from the Minister of National Education to consult these files, but this permission was later withdrawn without reasons being given. File 1496, Controller of Industrial Manpower, Strike: Stevedoring, Durban.

¹⁸ Meeting held at Native Commissioner's Office, Durban, 11 March 1942, File 1496, and *Natal Mercury*, 19 August 1941, p. 10.

¹⁹ Notes of meeting held in the Government Buildings, Durban, on Tuesday, 19 August 1941, in connection with the Native *togt* labour strike at the Point, File 1496, and Report of Divisional Inspector to the Controller of Industrial Manpower, 18 August 1941, File 1496.

²⁰ Ivan Walker was later joint author with Ben Weinbren of *2,000 Casualties*, a book on trade

Since a strike in the harbour affected the strategic shipping situation, Walker was rushed down from Pretoria and discussed the wage issue with two representatives of the dock workers: Zulu Phungula and Willie Kumalo. He chaired a meeting of employers and authorities²¹ the day after the strike had begun and brought about agreement between employers and state officials on a similar basis to that originally proposed by the Department of Labour: 4s 6d a day, a cost of living allowance of not less than 6d a day, and special rates for overtime. The workers' representatives did not agree to these proposals as they were 'not at the notch' which they wanted, but the workers agreed to go back to work. Despite this proposal, which was later officially published,²² the dock workers had not accepted that the wage issue was closed. The stevedoring trade was declared a 'controlled industry' in terms of War Measure No 6 of 1941 which gave the Controller of Industrial Manpower powers to regulate employment, wages and working conditions, and to settle any labour dispute.²³ The arbitrary methods used and the low level of wages prescribed aroused the hostility of the trade unions and social movements. *The Guardian* concluded that the Government had brought the strike to an end 'without compelling the employers to make any substantial concessions to the workers', and that Walker's action had struck a blow against all dock workers in South Africa. In Cape Town dockers were already earning 8s 8d a day and state intervention and the use of war regulations as a strike-breaking weapon could undermine trade union action.²⁴

The dock workers persisted in their demand for 8s a day and drew upon the contradictory nature of the wage regulations which had not covered the position of railway workers. Fearing further strike action after a round of strikes by other African workers towards the end of 1941 negotiations started once again, and the railways system manager called together a meeting of railway officials and representatives of *togt* workers on 11 March 1942. Phungula argued that the stevedoring employers had offered to pay any wage laid down by the government and had agreed to pay 8s per day,²⁵ but now the workers had been

unionism in South Africa which does not mention the struggle of the Durban dock workers despite first hand experience.

²¹ Notes of meeting held in the Government Buildings . . . File 1496.

²² These conditions were published in the form of a proclamation GN 1163, 1941.

²³ *Monthly Labour Review* (September 1943) gives a summary of these powers and other war-time emergency measures affecting workers.

²⁴ *The Guardian* (editorial), 28 August 1941. *Inkundla* responded more affirmatively in an article 'Good news for workers', 5 August 1941, and asked the question 'What would happen if all the Natives in Durban would follow the same lead?'. The radical *Call* wrote that the emergency regulations raised the spectre of a fascist order in South Africa.

²⁵ There is some confusion on this point, but during the Wage Board investigation preceding Wage Determination No 76 it was undoubtedly true that the stevedoring employers had offered to pay 9d an hour; in equivalent terms 6s per day. During the early negotiations on 17 August 1941 the employers, who were mainly concerned to get the state to legislate wages rather than be forced to grant increases, may well have said they would pay 8s or any wage the government decided upon.

cheated out of their increase. He attempted to drive a wedge between the state officials and the employers, 'it would seem that the government is refusing to give us 8s per day, because our employers have already agreed that we should get the 8s'.²⁶ He said the workers had concluded that the government was withholding the wage increases. Workers had to pay for accommodation at work, dipping of cattle, taxation, and were now also being asked to contribute towards the Paramount Chief's War Fund, he argued. In putting forward the wage demands of the dock workers Phungula was arguing for the dock workers to be accepted as full proletarians (i.e., rejecting the conception of a rural subsidy) and to be paid a wage which would enable workers and their families to live under urban conditions, arguing for increased wages for productive workers as opposed to white clerical workers, and implicitly rejecting 'scientific' notions such as the poverty datum line as a standard for wage increases. He argued from a conception of the perceived necessities of urban workers.

We have been taught by the Europeans what to eat and we like to eat the same things as the European, for instance eggs and tea in the mornings, we would like to fly in aeroplanes and drive round in motor cars. The shops are full of clothes and motor cars, but we cannot buy these things because we have no money . . . We do not want 8s a day, we want 25s a day (the wage of white clerks employed by the stevedoring companies). Even if we get 8s a day we will not be satisfied. If we had not agreed with our masters for 8s we would not have asked for that today . . . the government only gives us an empty dish to lick.²⁷

Walker denied outright that it had ever been agreed to pay 8s and said there must have been some misunderstanding between the workers and the stevedoring employers. The authorities had an interest in denying this increase (which was the existing wage level in the Cape Town docks) as it would have changed the cost structure of transport considerably and threatened the whole structure of wages in Durban. Walker debated the issue for a while and then issued an ultimatum: if the workers did not wish to work for less than 8s they could 'go home' and other workers would be recruited. Phungula rejected these alternatives and countered the threat by telling the officials, 'the government must show us where to go because our homes are here in Durban'. The argument between Phungula and Walker was not over whether the dock workers were migrants who were forced to maintain their links with the land because urban rights were denied to them but over the working class right to work which was being denied by the state. Phungula was in effect arguing that African workers were fully proletarianized and challenging the state's powers to crush the organization of workers and allocate labour in the interests of the employers. Walker's ultimatum showed a new level of determination by the authorities to deal decisively with the particular conditions of class struggle in

²⁶ Meeting held at Native Commissioner's Office, Durban, 11 March 1942, p. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Durban and to maintain the overall level of labour circulation in the Durban labour market by restricting the workers' rights to a level of wages which would permit complete proletarianization. When necessary the authorities were prepared to make use of the reserve supply of dock labour (to be obtained by breaking organized action and by recruiting those not then employed from the urban area), and if this failed, to draw upon the relative surplus population in the rural areas.

Despite the ultimatum and the stevedoring trade having been declared a 'controlled industry', a further strike broke out on 28 July 1942 in support of the workers' demands. The war government was placed in a quandry by this latest strike as it did not want to disrupt shipping or recruitment of Africans to the army even further by punitive counter action. At the same time there was strong pressure for the authorities to come to terms with the strikers because of the strategic implications of the major port being disrupted when the movement of war material was essential. The strike came under the control of Phungula and ten committee members. Two days after the strike had begun he was arrested, but then brought out of prison the following day on condition that he urge the workers to return to work. But when he was brought before the strikers by the police, he told them to carry on. The article which appeared in *Inkululeko* written by Wilson Cele (a journalist/trade unionist of the Communist Party) gives a vivid account of the oratory and colour of the event.

When Phungula got out of the car with the police, he greeted the people in the style of Shaka: 'Bayete Zulu'. He then started to address the public: 'The Dutch people have seen that General Botha had fought for them and today they say that the Natives are good; we better fight and die for what we want until we get it. I do not know what will be the outcome of it as they have now even taken our country. Look, we now dig gold for them, diamonds for them, and all they do is to sit on the chairs which can even reach heaven. What makes them not to give us enough money to feed our children?'

The Europeans said: 'Well, go to work'. The strikers said 'We won't go', and some of the strikers started speaking to the public. When the white people found out that the strikers were not prepared to go to work, they asked Phungula to tell them that if they went to work he would be released. One of the committee members then asked the white people if they thought that it was Phungula's strike, and told them that all the strikers were after was money. After the meeting, Mr Phungula told the public that he was prepared to go to jail and that the strike should continue.²⁸

In his speech Phungula brought out the political dimensions of the struggles of the black working class despite some moments of confusion (which could have arisen in transcription and from the official translation). His uncompromising militancy, and the inability of the state to co-opt him despite considerable pressure, his radical style and imagery, all reflected the type of leadership expected by the dock workers.

The strike which came at a time when the Communist Party of South Africa and other left-wing groups were mobilizing support for a Second Front in

²⁸ Official translation of article in Zulu appearing in *Inkululeko*, August 1942. File 1496.

Europe did not initially enjoy their support. The first report of the strike in *The Guardian* described the workers as being 'engaged on vital work for the war effort, and their refusal to work means a serious hold-up for the many ships tied up at the quaysides in the Bay', and subsequently wrote approvingly of Walker's intervention.²⁹ This attitude soon changed, however, after the drastic action taken by the state to reassert control in the docks.

The strategy of using Phungula as a hostage having failed, Walker finally promulgated War Measure 86 on 31 July 1942 which gave the police the authority to expel any *togt* worker from the municipal area if he refused to work at the prescribed wage. Any labourer refusing to work under these conditions could be fined up to £25 (equivalent to about 100 days' work for *togt* labourers) or imprisonment for six months or be liable to both fine and imprisonment. The state used this extreme measure to break the strike as the *togt* workers' demands posed a challenge to the general level of unskilled wages in Durban. As it was, strike action gained momentum among African workers in industries employing migrant workers in Durban and its hinterland: in brick and tile, plaster boards, quarrying, and sugar. A fundamental problem faced by the authorities was the loose form of control over employment at the docks; the *togt* system regulated only the relationship between workers and their employers during their working hours and if the labourers decided not to work on a particular day there was not much that could be done in terms of the law that could force them to return to work apart from deportation from the urban area. Contract labour would have made the workers liable to prosecution for breach of contract, but was not considered as appropriate to the labour process in the docks at this stage.

The local press reported that by 4 August all the registered *togt* workers had returned to work after the promulgation of special war measures. It was reported that Major A. J. Smart, District Commandant of the Police, was appointed to give effect to the regulations but had found the use of force to be unnecessary as the workers had returned. By the next day, however, the *Natal Mercury* carried the news that 'prompt steps were taken to replace the *togt* labour and the position is now normal'.³⁰ Apparently the strike of the *togt* workers had been broken by African troops sent down from Ladysmith despite qualms about the effect of strike-breaking on the military recruitment drive, and it was by no means certain when full work activity was resumed at the docks. These official decisions aroused the anger of the Cape Town Stevedoring and Dock Workers Union (CTSDWU) which expressed 'strong dissatisfaction' with the repression of strike action at a general meeting on 5 August.³¹ It was decided to send a deputation from the CTSDWU to Durban

²⁹ *The Guardian*, 30 July 1942 and 6 August 1942.

³⁰ *Natal Mercury*, 5 and 6 August 1942.

³¹ *The Guardian*, 13 August 1942. As late as 18 August a correspondent of *Inkululeko* reported the docks 'as quiet as Sunday'. There was widespread protest against War Measure 86 of 1942 from the left trade unions and some Labour Party MPs. *The Guardian*, 27 August 1942.

to establish a branch of the union there. Phungula was committed for trial on charges of incitement to violence after being remanded several times. Eventually he was granted bail of £15 provided he did not address meetings of his fellow workers unless an Inspector of Labour was present. Advocate Harry Bloom in asking for bail pointed out that Phungula was recognized as leader by *togt* workers and 'could be of special assistance in present negotiations to convert the dockers into a trade union along the lines of the Cape dock workers'. The Secretary of the CTSDWU, F. C. Welcome arrived in Durban and reported that progress was being made in the formation of a branch of the union, with Bloom apparently the mid-wife of the new organization. The local Department of Labour apparently accepted these conditions and encouraged Phungula to form a trade union which could be given official recognition. While he was still awaiting trial for incitement in September, Phungula was appointed organizer of the CTSDWU in Durban, and with F. C. Welcome and J. Veldtman held several meetings at the Bell Street barracks.³² Welcome told the workers that the present wage of 4s 'over which there had been several fruitless clashes with employers' was barely equal to what Cape Town dockers had got in 1919. He spelt out a strategy for organization and negotiated improvements which provided for increased wage differentiation among the workers, an issue which had not been raised previously as a demand of the workers as a whole.³³ 'By strictly constitutional means, using the machinery of negotiation, Cape stevedores through their union had raised the average wage to 8s a day, with corresponding increases for winchmen, gangwaymen and foremen.' The trade union was enthusiastically accepted by the dockers who turned down Welcome's proposal of a weekly subscription of 6d which they considered too small and demanded that the subscription be 1s. The workers also agreed to levy their members to raise a fund for the defence of Phungula. Abel M. S. Mhlongo was elected secretary responsible to a small committee. In September he wrote to the local Divisional Inspector requesting recognition in respectful terms. 'It is hoped that from henceforth grievances will be settled on constitutional lines, also that power tactics will be on both sides avoided'³⁴. After leaving Durban, Veldtman subsequently wrote to the South African Police in Durban that peaceful negotiations would be used by *togt* workers and that there would be

³² *The Guardian*, 3 September 1942 and 17 September 1942. The relative liberalism of the authorities at this point has to be seen in conjunction with the relaxation of the administration of the pass laws, and the statement by Madeley that African trade unions would be recognized. This liberalization period died with the onslaught of War Measure 145 of 1943.

³³ Willie Kumalo, who accompanied Phungula during negotiations, had, however, previously mentioned that he earned a 6d bonus for operating a winch while Coloured and White workers earned £1 a day for doing the same work. This statement was heavily underscored by the Department of Labour officials but wage differentials were not demanded by the workers as a whole and Kumalo's arguments have to be seen in the context of his stressing the collective skills of the stevedoring dock workers.

³⁴ Abel M. S. Mhlongo to Divisional Inspector of Labour, Durban, 10 September 1942, File 1496.

no more retarding of the war effort.³⁵ By adopting the administrative form of trade unionism and open organization Phungula and the dock workers had by no means moderated their position or accepted collective bargaining through wage differentiation. A subsequent letter by Phungula and Mhlongo to the Controller of Industrial Manpower in Pretoria made further demands of the order of a flat rate of 25s per day and more.³⁶ Phungula was told that any further strike action would lead to the immediate replacement of the workers, and against this background he accepted the concessions on the terms offered, i.e., a wage freeze binding for two years. On this basis the state secured industrial peace in the harbour for the war years.

Trade unions and the suppression of working class action

Having secured its position in the harbour, the state was able to deal firmly with strike action in other industries in Durban, particularly with those strikes involving joint action between African and Indian workers of which there were a number in late 1942 in the paper, laundry, and textile industries.³⁷ As a result of inter-racial co-operation initiated and sustained by the Communist Party in Durban, a number of parallel and independent African trade unions had been formed in the early 1940s. Although the Communist Party provided the stimulus and resources for these unions, there was little central direction and control and a variety of tendencies developed, particularly as a number of registered trade unions developed parallel unions for African workers under their control. Apart from those unions formed by members of the Communist Party there were a group of unions with a definite Africanist tendency (of whom Jacob Nyaose, later a leading trade unionist in the Federation of Free African Trade Unions was the foremost), and another section subordinated to the registered trade unions (particularly those in the garment and furniture industries). As the number of African workers in manufacturing industry increased, a united working class was essential for strike action to be successful. Such unity in the paper board making industry (where African workers were in the majority) and in the textile industry (where Indian workers were dominant)

³⁵ Meeting with representatives of stevedoring *togt* labourers at Durban on Friday, 20 November 1942, p. 1.

³⁶ Meeting, 20 November 1942. There was no letter in the file to give the precise level of the wage demands, but in speaking of these demands the Deputy General Manager of the Railways wrote as follows: 'The wages they asked to be paid were very high and we are sure that neither Phungula nor Sumongo (confusion for Mhlongo) ever really expected that such high rates of pay would be granted to non-European workers. Some of the rates mentioned by Phungula and (Mhlongo) are higher than those paid to skilled European workers.' pp. 1–2.

³⁷ *House of Assembly Debates*, 29 February 1943, Col. 579–582. I am indebted to Baruch Hirson for sources on the strikes preceding the proclamation of War Measure 145 of 1942. For a list of strikes in Natal, 1882–1946 (which does not specify the industry and exact dates and omits the Dunlop strike, but is otherwise very useful), see H. G. Ringrose (1949?), 'A history and description of trade unions in Natal', Cyclostyled. The version of this work published in the Natal Regional Survey leaves out many of the statistical and other tables.

secured victories in both cases in 1942.³⁸

The successful thrust of workers' organization and the growth of working class unity not only in Natal but more particularly in the Transvaal where there were a number of serious strikes and mass unrest towards the end of 1942 brought a concerted counter-attack by employers and the state. On 19 December the Government proclaimed War Measure 145 of 1942 which outlawed strikes by African workers, exposed strikers to a prohibitive maximum penalty of a £500 fine or three year's imprisonment, and imposed compulsory arbitration at the discretion of the Minister of Labour.³⁹ As the Simons' argue, the measure confirmed the subordinate position of African workers even though it was immediately designed to meet a particularly forceful upsurge of strike action.⁴⁰ In Durban employers responded to militant working class action by attempting to build company unions and by an increasingly co-ordinated response to crush strikes. The suppression of strike action at Dunlop rubber factory marks a watershed in the momentum and direction of working class organization.

The strike at Dunlop which broke out late in December 1942 in response to the imposition of a company union and the dismissal of members of the non-racial Rubber Workers' Union was decisive in undermining radical leadership in registered trade unions and in causing distrust and hostility between Indian and African workers. During the strike for the reinstatement of the victimized workers and for recognition of the union which was supported by Indian and African members, the employers resorted to recruiting African workers from the reserves in busloads.⁴¹ Despite a prolonged and bitter struggle supported by the left-wing of the labour movement and particularly by Zulu Phungula, Philemon Tsele of the SAR&H Workers' Union, and Gladman Nxumalo of the Metal Workers' Union, the union members were replaced and no further Indian workers employed. While there were 378 African workers employed in December 1942, in January 1943, 290 of these workers were dismissed, and 581 new workers taken on displacing Indian and African union members. African employment increased to a peak of 1,250 workers in June and July 1945 and the company was confident enough to have a survey of the African labour force made in the immediate post-war years.⁴² Through a selective use of the reserve army of labour in this case as strike breakers, labour militancy was curbed for the rest of the war period and non-racial trade unionism blunted. Zulu Phungula who was possibly the only person capable of providing

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ War Measure: Settlement of Labour Disputes, 318 of 1942 (War Measure 145 of 1942) amended by Proclamation 201 of 1944 (War Measure 81 of 1944), Proclamation 202 of 1944 (War Measure 82 of 1944) and Section 3 of Act 18 of 1948.

⁴⁰ Simons (1969), p. 557.

⁴¹ Information on the Dunlop strike from M. P. Naicker, interview 12 April 1976.

⁴² Department of Economics (University of Natal), 1950, *The African Factory Worker*, Oxford University Press. Appendix III, p. 213.

inspired leadership to migrant workers was banished from the Durban area for five years.⁴³

As important as the repressive role of the state was the response of employers. Management from multinational companies (Dunlops played a leading role) and from sectors of industry in Durban such as the textile industry and stevedoring trade, coalesced in the wake of the Dunlop strike to form the Natal Employers' Association. This Association aimed to provide specialist information on labour issues and 'to enable industry to present a united front to extravagant demands of organized labour', in particular the left trade unions. The Association was to prove essential in co-ordinating the policies of employers in different firms and industries towards trade unions, and the interests of employers and the state in regard to measures to suppress strike action and implement effectively urban regulations directing the flow of African labour supply.

While the Dunlop strike had the effect of increasing the co-ordination of the employers' response to organized working class action it also had the corresponding negative effect of heightening the problems of working class unity. The strike accentuated the tendency for political activists in the Indian community to be diverted from working class organization (in particular from the organization of unregistered trade unions of Indian and African workers) towards political action in defence of the Indian community. While Communists had taken a leading role in the establishment of trade unions of Indian and African workers in the early 1940s, towards the end of the 1940s these unions were described by Ringrose as being basically apolitical and having only limited links with political movements such as sharing the same offices.⁴⁴ The direction of political action was more towards aggressive defence of the trading, investment, and residential rights of Indian people (the African National Congress in Natal, led by A. W. G. Champion, at this time being virtually dormant and almost limited to a pressure group making the same demands for the African people). The tendency among Indian workers was towards inward-looking trade unionism keenly aware of the necessity of protecting selected industries and occupations for Indian employment. In the atmosphere of political independence for India and the excitement of the passive resistance campaign of 1946,⁴⁵ contact between Indian and African workers and trade unionists became superficial. More than that, at a time when Indian traders and landowners were coming under increasing pressure from the

⁴³ *Inkululeko*, 11 April 1943, 'Union leader deported'.

⁴⁴ Ringrose (1949?) reported that 'as far as Natal is concerned at any rate, the presence of political influences among Native trade unions is not as serious as is sometimes alleged', and 'as far as Indian unions are concerned, the grouping of a number of them in offices near the headquarters of the Natal Indian Congress does perhaps suggest some form of affinity, but it is easy to overrate this suggestion'. p. 106.

⁴⁵ For a description of the 1946 campaign and the rise of the 'radicals' in the South African Indian Congress see E. Pahad, July 1972, 'The Development of Indian Political Movements in South Africa, 1924-1946' (Ph.D., Sussex, 1972).

state,⁴⁶ political mobilization in the struggle against segregation of the Indian community subordinated Indian trade unions and workers to the defence of the Indian petty-bourgeoisie. In evidence to the Natal Indian Judicial Commission the secretary of the Chemical Industry Employees' Union, E. J. Moolla, said that White agitation against Indians acquiring property was aimed at stopping Indians from competing economically as a capitalist class.

The Indians in hostels and as servants in houses were not objected to, but directly an Indian acquired property near a European the cry was raised of Indian penetration. That showed that the opposition was to the economic advancement of the Indian.

Mr A. L. Barns (Member of Commission): Do you want the Indian to become a capitalist class?

Mr Moolla: In the present constitution of South Africa, yes.⁴⁷

In this situation the tendency was for African trade unions in Durban to develop 'on their own lines' and to avoid collective action with registered trade unions. Many of these unions took on a strong Africanist flavour, while some of the largest Indian trade unions (for example, the Garment Workers' Union and the Furniture Workers' Industrial Union) were actually opposed to close co-operation between Indian and African workers. There was undoubtedly an increase in hostility between African and Indian workers during this period. African workers saw the expansion of industrial employment and upward mobility in certain industries and occupations (for example municipal employment and weaving) as being blocked by Indian workers. The rapid expansion of employment in manufacturing during the war years to some extent obscured this problem, but with the downturn of economic growth in the immediate post-war period, the lines of demarcation became clearer.

In other respects, however, although the relationship between African workers and the Indian petty bourgeoisie was basically exploitative, Indian enterprises did enable African workers and their families to break out of the straitjacket of municipal control. Indian traders provided the basic infrastructure of the squatters' slums: the bus services and retail outlets—the services which could be provided because of the particular position of Indian people as a 'buffer group' in the racial hierarchy of urban segregation. In the Cato Manor area on land owned by Indian people—there were only a few shacks in 1932,

⁴⁶ Commissions were held investigating the 'penetration' of Indian landowners into 'White' areas and official action against Indian people culminated in the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill of 1946. Both Pahad (July 1972) and Frene Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans 1860–1946' (Ph.D., Oxford, 1974), deal with these events in some detail, but in neither is there an analysis of the class alignments within the Indian political movements nor accounts of the attempts during the war years to develop united action between Indian and African workers. Ginwala does, however, bring out the relationship of Mahatma Gandhi to Indian traders and his reluctance to endorse the revolt of Indian workers against indentured labour in 1913. Pahad has argued that the struggle against control over Indian people owning land was a campaign involving all classes as many Indian workers owned land and the Indian people as a whole were desperately overcrowded.

⁴⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 2 September 1944.

by 1939 their number had grown to 500, and by 1944 there were some 3,000 shacks housing about 17,000 African people.⁴⁸ About half of the African population in Durban was estimated to be living in shack slums on Indian-owned land at this time. Some of these people were dock workers who caught the early buses into the harbour area.

Proletarianization, influx control and unemployment insurance

During the war years there was an undoubted increase in the number of Africans who were forced into wage labour through the degeneration of the rural economy in the reserves and the application of government regulations to redistribute land to locate the growing numbers of landless workers in the reserves and not in the urban areas. The numerous government commissions which investigated the conditions of rural impoverishment in the reserves merely recognized a process which was already well advanced: considerable inequality among the residents of the reserves, the growth of a landless and cattleless African rural proletariat totally dependent on wage labour for its reproduction, and a large proportion of African workers who owned some cattle and had limited rights to arable land for whom agricultural production met only a small amount of their material needs and who were also basically dependent on wage labour. One after the other the commissions and other contemporary reports describe the conditions of decline in agricultural production, massive erosion, ill-health, and permanent dependence on food imports to feed the reserve population. While many of the reports describe the growing inequality of income, the wide ranges of ownership of cattle and access to land, none of them describe any significant peasant economy for even the better-endowed.⁴⁹ The Lansdown Commission which acknowledged the differentiation in ownership of cattle and access to arable land argued that the Africans who came to work on the mines fell below the average in income and formed part of the 'poorer class' of worker-peasants, who were totally dependent on wage labour. 'For those natives who own no land or stock the Reserve subsistence is but a myth, and it is no doubt this class who finds it necessary to work almost continuously on the mine with only brief periods of stay in the Reserves.'⁵⁰ Despite a large group of workers having no agricultural subsidy to

⁴⁸ Department of Economics (University of Natal), 1952, *The Durban Housing Survey*, University of Natal Press. pp. 344–345.

⁴⁹ See the following investigations in the *Report of the Witwatersrand Mine Natives Wages Commission*, U.G. 21/1944 especially paras 114–238, *The Native Reserves and their Place in the Economy of South Africa*, Report No. 9, Social and Economic Planning Council, U.G. 32/1946, and the *Report of Native Laws Commission*, 1946–48, U.G. 28/1948. These investigations are related to the level of proletarianization during the war years in Dan O'Meara, July 1975, 'The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, XIII(2):146–173.

⁵⁰ U.G. 21/1944, para. 220. The same arguments apply to workers in those sectors of employment avoided by settled urban workers, e.g. the stevedoring trade.

their wages the state increased its efforts during the 1940s to force African workers to maintain their rural ties through proclamations requiring rural residents to return regularly to keep up their rights to land, through the establishment of 'villages' for the landless, and also through the operation of the Urban Areas Act which made it extremely difficult for African people not born in the urban areas to qualify for residence. Despite these regulations and policies this period saw an acceleration in the number of African workers who brought their families to the urban areas and demanded the rights to urban working class residence and a level of wages appropriate to the cost of the reproduction of their labour in urban conditions.

Material factors increased the dependence on wage labour and a further decline in subsistence agriculture in Natal. Drought conditions were widespread during the period 1944/45 (with the exception of the southern coastal areas), and the Msinga and Ladysmith areas were particularly badly hit, the latter being declared a drought area. Cattle losses were particularly heavy in Msinga, Ladysmith, Nongoma, and Hlabisa districts, and there was a severe shortage of the staple mealies.⁵¹ The following year 1945/46 did not bring relief. There was drought again in many areas of the province, a severe loss of cattle, and a great reduction in harvests. As in the previous year special arrangements had to be made to ensure that the available mealie supplies were equitably distributed.⁵² The migrant workers of Natal and Zululand had experienced considerable impoverishment by the end of the 1940s. In some areas it would not be an exaggeration to talk of the collapse of significant agricultural production, while in the few districts where cereal production was increasing the total output only supported a fraction of the total population of the district.⁵³ Rapidly declining agricultural production meant that the amount of maize imported into each district increased proportionately, which resulted in heavier dependence on wage labour by migrant workers. Those migrant workers who were trying to maintain their links with the reserves and some level of subsistence agriculture, both of which required cattle, suffered losses heavier than those of Africans in other reserves. The maintenance of the cattle population despite losses of over ten per cent in any year must have required a considerable cost, at £5 each the 611,000 cattle which died during the four years in the table would have cost in the region of £3 million.

There was a considerable increase in the number of African workers seeking employment during the 1940s and specific measures to control the movement of labour were proposed. In response to the fluctuations in employment and the increased flow of migrant labour to Durban, for the first time the implementation of influx control was seriously considered. The initial controls over the

⁵¹ Report of the Department of Native Affairs for 1944/45, U.G. 44/1946. p. 116.

⁵² Report of the Department of Native Affairs for 1945/1947, U.G. 14/1948. p. 24.

⁵³ Figures on maize production in selected areas provide evidence for the collapse of subsistence agriculture in certain districts where production had formerly been quite high in per capita terms, e.g., Polela and Ubombo.

*Cattle losses in Natal reserves*⁵⁴

	Cattle owned (000)	Losses (000)	Natal losses percent	All reserves percent
1946	1,106	195	17.6	13.6
1947	1,048	162	15.5	11.3
1948	1,058	118	10.9	10.3
1949	1,111	136	12.2	11.1

direction of the flow of labour were, however, controls over the movement from the reserve areas (now in the language of separate development, 'efflux control'). On completion of large-scale war contracts for the Defence Department and the Admiralty in 1944, large numbers of African workers were thrown out of work and suggestions were made to restrict the flow of labour to the city. At the request of the City Council the Chief Native Commissioner circularized all magistrates in Natal and Zululand to restrict the flow of labour to Durban until employment expanded again.⁵⁵ By June 1944, Philemon Tsele, Chairman of the local Anti-pass Committee in Durban reported that the pass laws were again being rigidly enforced with police raids at night and deportation from Durban for two years for those considered 'idlers'.⁵⁶ The considerable decline in employment between 1945–47 was probably the stimulus for the formula agreed upon in 1946 to tighten controls over the presence of Africans in Durban and to initiate criminal proceedings against those workers not registered with the Native Administration Department.⁵⁷

Arising from increased resistance to representative bodies (particularly a move to boycott the Native Representative Council and local elections), demonstrations in the city, and antagonism to the tightening of controls over the mobility of African people, a Commission was appointed to investigate the grievances of Africans in 1947. This Commission examined the provision of housing (which was the major complaint of the witnesses) and considered the various arguments over the location of the industrial army of labour. Justice F. N. Broome, the Commissioner, reported that most Whites thought the 'Native problem' of Durban could be solved by expelling redundant African workers from the area. Representative of this opinion was an article in a Durban newspaper which reported that between 3,000 and 4,000 African 'vagrants' had been deported to the reserves by the Native Affairs Department in 1947. 'Substantial as this number is, the problem of Durban's surplus Native population is as serious as ever . . .' the newspaper concluded. Broome disagreed with this analysis and defended the maintenance of a reserve supply of labour within the urban area to meet the requirements of seasonal industries (Durban has a marked holiday season) and the harbour.

⁵⁴ Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing, 1961, *Handbook of Agricultural Statistics, 1904–1950*. pp. 18 and 37.

⁵⁵ Mayor's Minute, Durban, 1944, Native Administration Department. p. 91.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, 22 June 1944, 8(18):6.

⁵⁷ Durban City Council, November 1947, Memorandum for Judicial Commission on Native Affairs in Durban. Annexure C to Chapter VII.

The demands of industry . . . fluctuate; all Native labourers cannot be employed all the time. But the requirements of industry demand that there shall be readily available a reservoir of labour that can be drawn upon to meet seasonal demands. This is particularly the case in the harbour area.⁵⁸

The arguments over the necessity of maintaining the reserve supply of labourers in the urban area and the contrary demands of agriculture came to a head over the issue of unemployment insurance for African workers. The implementation of the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1946 made possible a relatively stable urban proletariat to meet the fluctuations in the demand for industrially experienced African labour. The Act, insofar as it included African workers, existed in contradiction to the arguments of a reserve subsidy to the wage labour of African workers and recognized by implication an urban proletariat with no links to the reserves. Since the Act did not expressly exclude migrant workers it received the fierce opposition of agricultural employers who complained vociferously that migrant labour was being diverted from agriculture to industry.⁵⁹ Following an allegation by the Assistant Native Commissioner for Natal that large numbers of African workers were drawing benefits from the unemployment insurance fund, agricultural employers inundated Members of Parliament with letters and telegrams demanding that Africans should be excluded from the Act entirely and that unemployed workers be placed in agricultural employment.⁶⁰

Despite the continued increase in African employment in industry in the late 1940s, African workers struggling to maintain themselves and their families in urban conditions were under pressure from Native Administration officials, landowners threatening eviction, and declining real wages. The few benefits for urban African workers and recognition of urban rights were being undermined and would be restricted later.

General strike or racial conflict?

During the late 1940s the left in the South African Indian Congress won its ascendancy through championing the demands of the Indian people against segregationary measures, and against the vacillation of the political leadership of the Indian trading class. This campaign involved a broad alliance between petty bourgeois strata (e.g., the Indian traders, teachers, landowners, and professionals) and the Indian workers, but was not an inward looking movement. By 1947 the left within the South African Indian Congress was strong enough to lead to the Dadoo–Xuma–Naicker pact which heralded the growing co-operation of the South African Indian Congress and the African National Congress. Despite these achievements of the new leaders who ‘were radicals fixed with a burning

⁵⁸ Quotations from Durban City Council, *ibid.*, para. 29.

⁵⁹ See on this subject Margaret Ballinger, October 1944, *Industry versus Agriculture*; the problem of Native labour. *South African Industry and Trade Review*, 40(10):35T–41T.

⁶⁰ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 14 February 1948.

desire to articulate in a forthright, militant manner the grievances and aspirations of the Indian people',⁶¹ the unity of African and Indian workers in Durban was distant and the broad co-operation and collective organization of the early 1940s had disintegrated. In advancing the struggle against all forms of racial oppression experienced by the Indian people the Indian working class leadership was brought into direct support for mass campaigns taking up the demands of the Indian petty bourgeoisie, a group which had an exploitative relationship with the masses of African people. In response to the increasingly militant advance of the interests of the Indian people by the left leadership in the South African Indian Congress, a basis for common political campaigns with the African people was created (as argued by Pahad), but also distrust of the motives of Indian politicians was voiced (most emphatically by the trading section of the African petty bourgeoisie).⁶²

The immediate post-war period was characterized not by united working class action but by the growth of an African co-operative movement which included many African workers (at least two of the co-operatives were based on compounds). By June 1946 there were 95 co-operatives affiliated to the Bantu Co-operative Society, most of which were buying clubs. These co-operatives (popularly known as Nabantukop) penetrated the rural areas and 'whipped up considerable enthusiasm . . . particularly because of its nationalistic slogan of 'Mazibuye Emasweni': 'Let them (our cattle and our wealth) come back from foreigners!'⁶³ The journal of the Bantu Co-operative Society, *Ukubambisana*, carried reports on the growth of the movement and also exposures of the prices of goods in Indian shops.⁶⁴ The revival of the co-operative movement among African people in the post-war period continued a line of Catholic thought and action initiated by Father Bernard Huss which aimed at developing popular movements led by Christians which could displace mass organizations which tended towards militant working class action and Marxist language.⁶⁵

The African trade union movement which was described as not comparing unfavourably with similar movements in other areas was in a state of decay. The movement was weakened by a lack of stability rather than by a decrease in the

⁶¹ Pahad (July 1972):216.

⁶² The interests of the African and Indian trading class were in many ways sharply in conflict. Champion and other traders gave evidence to the Rural Dealers' Licensing Inquiry Committee in 1941 to the effect that preference should be given to African applicants in African areas. Indian taxis serving in African areas should be withdrawn. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 6 December 1941.

⁶³ Vilakazi, A., January 1958, *Zulu social structure and its dynamics today*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal, p. 228.

⁶⁴ *Ukubambisana*, June 1946, 1(1). The principal co-operative, Umgungundlovu in Pietermaritzburg, had a turnover of £7,350 7s 6d and a gross profit of £1,497 13s 11d in 1946. Maydon Wharf co-operative, consisting mainly of migrant workers in compounds, had 35 members and had accumulated £35 14s 7½d, showing the capacity for organized action by migrants. *Ukubambisana*, August 1946. When the co-operative movement collapsed the stores reverted to private ownership.

⁶⁵ Huss developed his views within the context of Papal Encyclicals and attempted to break the hold of the ICU on the masses in Natal by stressing hard work, rural development ('People's Banks'), and use of Africanist slogans. Vilakazi limits his analysis of the co-operative movement to the distrust created by 'its, too obvious Catholic leadership'. Vilakazi (1958):228.

number of unions. There was a lack of co-operation between them, and no African organization in Natal could claim to represent the movement as a whole. The nearest approach was the Natal Federation of African Trade Unions which had five unions affiliated in 1947 and which took an Africanist perspective and rejected non-African members. 'It would not accept as a member any union which had non-Natives in its membership roll, or which had a political creed.' The Federation which was described as 'neither very active nor very representative' in 1947 was moribund by 1948.⁶⁶ Gilbert Coka (who stood trial after the 1946 strike of African mine workers) described the trade unions in 1948 as 'fast going to sleep' and argued there had been a backward trend in political organization.⁶⁷ In comparison to the early war years there was a decline in strike activity although strikes continued in industries likely to employ migrant workers; sugar plantations, dairy, and quarrying. Emergency regulations introduced during the war were not withdrawn and there was a tendency to tighten controls both over the residence of African workers in town and at the workplace, and to prosecute workers who came out on strike. The employers in the docks produced a new series of regulations which were only withdrawn after decisive resistance by the workers. The new regulations laid down that if the workers went on leave for three months or more they would be dismissed on return, or be re-employed as beginners at a lower wage. Workers were also told they would be penalized if any of them stopped work to meet relatives (who would have come long distances to see them) or if they arrived late for work. When these regulations were explained to the workers early in June 1948 they immediately came out on strike and some 2,000 workers marched to the railway system manager's office. The manager refused to come out and the workers were told to appoint a delegation. They refused, demanded that the regulations be withdrawn immediately, and argued with officials for several hours. They only returned to work when assured that the regulations would be reconsidered and warned that if the regulations were not withdrawn altogether, they would strike again.⁶⁸

The incident displayed the uneasiness of the workers after the war at finding that the material sacrifices which had been imposed on them as part of the war effort were being intensified. Zulu Phungula who had completed his term of banishment, openly returned⁶⁹ to Durban in 1948 to take up his former oc-

⁶⁶ Ringrose (1949?): pp. 104 and 115. The five unions affiliated to the Natal Federation of African Trade Unions were the African General Labourers' Union, the African Building Workers' Union, the African Municipal Employees' Union, the Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union, and the Natal African Hospital Workers' Union. Two of these unions had originally been formed by members of the Communist Party. By 1948 two of these unions had gone out of existence.

⁶⁷ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 June 1948.

⁶⁸ *The Guardian*, 17 June 1948:6. No mention was made during this strike of the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union which had 2,700 members in 1948.

⁶⁹ Some Durban trade unionists state he had returned clandestinely on several occasions during his banishment to keep in contact with the workers' movement. Information from Baruch Hirson.

cupation as a *togt* worker. On 20 September 1948 he issued a report on the increased impoverishment of African workers; describing both the problems of getting employment, the needs of squatters, and the problems of the rural population.⁷⁰ What was needed was an expansion of employment for the waves of migrant workers streaming into Durban: 'One generation came in yesterday (by train) . . . all this generation will never get work.' Women were settling in town with the aim of supplementing male wages to provide collectively for the children and illicit brewing (*isiqata*) was essential for the family to survive. Peasant production, he argued, was becoming impossible because the land had been appropriated by the state for white farmers ('its all farms all over') and intensive farming required a much higher level of capital investment. Rural food production was becoming impossible for the most impoverished peasants who no longer owned oxen and had no money for agricultural implements.

Ploughing requires oxen and oxen require grazing grounds and they cost money because we haven't got them . . . we have got to hire them. Cultivators, rakes, sowing machines (planters), etc., all cost money. How can one plough because all this (costs) money?

The relative surplus population was rapidly expanding in the reserves as a product of the homestead growing within a confined land area, and arable land was no longer available.

In the location my grandfather had 5 wives and 20 young men. Let me mention one hut of the 5. My father had 4 brothers. His elder brother married 2 wives, the second had 4 wives, my father had 2, the other had 2 and the 5th had 3 wives. I am not mentioning the 15 half-brothers to him. Let us now look back to my father's brothers living on the area where my grandfather lived. Is this not crowded, because the land does not expand? Which place can be ploughed by the present generation?

Phungula's solution to impoverishment and proletarianization was not peasant but working class action. Rather than demanding more land, oxen for ploughing, or schemes for increasing rural production, he acknowledged that migrant workers were basically dependent on wage labour and proposed a wage demand of £1. 5s per day or £32. 10s per month. Armed with these proposals he approached the African trade unions and political organizations of Durban. He asked Christopher Mbonambi, a leading member of the African National Workers' Federation, a loose co-ordinating group of African trade unionists which had campaigned around the issue of unemployment insurance, for support for a general strike including all races across industrial divisions for a demand of a minimum wage of at least £1 a day. This proposal had the popular support of the workers, but Mbonambi told Phungula he was putting forward a revolutionary demand which would be quite impossible to accomplish.⁷¹ As the rumours of proposed action spread through Durban the

⁷⁰ Dock Workers' Union, Report of our workers in Natal, 20 September 1948. File 1496. The address on this report was that of the Communist Party in Durban.

⁷¹ These extraordinary events are not mentioned in *Ilanga*, whose editor may have been restricted in his report of the issue. The events are, however, corroborated by other African trade unionists of the time.

Divisional Inspector of Labour called in Mbonambi and warned him of the consequences of a general strike. He told Mbonambi to instruct the workers that demands should be put in a 'constitutional' way, industry by industry, and that the strike movement had to be stopped. Mbonambi arranged a large meeting at the Bantu Social Centre at which Phungula was called upon to explain his strategy. The meeting of African workers, which was attended by the Department of Labour officials, the Security Branch, and secretaries of African trade unions, gave Mbonambi a 'nasty time' at the start of the meeting. He explained to the workers how to make wage demands in terms of the existing regulations promulgated in terms of War Measure 145 of 1942 and said it would be impossible to get to £1 from an existing wage of 5s a day; a demand should be made somewhere between. Gradually, despite the popular feeling for a general strike, he won the workers over to his gradualist approach, and the proposed general strike was defeated. Phungula returned to his fellow dock workers, 'those were the people who understood him well, they did not want to understand what we said at the meeting' said Mbonambi later. Although in retreat, Phungula did not change his views. 'He would test out his ideas among the people and when he had the right response nothing would move him from his standpoint.'⁷²

Despite opposition from the African trade unionists of the time, Phungula had correctly assessed the mood of the African workers and their desire for mass action to change their conditions. As a dock worker he may well have been aware of the strikes and resistance to colonialism in other African ports from seamen on the coastal routes. In Lourenço Marques there had been radical discontent in 1947 combined with political agitation which produced a series of strikes in the docks and in neighbouring plantations which had culminated in an 'abortive uprising' at Lourenço Marques in 1948. There had also been strikes of dockers in Dar es Salaam and a general strike in Zanzibar.⁷³ The strategy of a general strike having been defeated, the African workers turned towards more nationalistic forms of action. Instead of class action the African workers turned against Indian people; both petty-bourgeois shopkeepers and landowners, and Indian workers.

The riots which broke out on 13 January 1949 in the afternoon after an incident between an African youth and an Indian shop assistant were one of the most destructive social upheavals in South African history. The most dominated and repressed section of the South African working class turned against a minority group which possessed urban land and trading rights and preferential treatment in employment. The newly elected National Party government stood back at first from the spectacle of two oppressed groups in struggle among themselves before ordering in police and troops to restore

⁷² These are Christopher Mbonambi's views on Phungula.

⁷³ Eduardo Mondlane, 1969, *The Struggle for Mozambique*, Penguin African Library, p. 115 and John Iliffe, 1970, 'A history of the dockworkers of Dar es Salaam', *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71, pp. 131-134.

order. In the violence which took place 142 people were killed: 87 Africans, 50 Indians, 4 'others', and 1 White; a large number of people were injured, and considerable amounts of property was destroyed or damaged.⁷⁴ African workers housed in compounds, and the *togt* workers in particular, took a leading part in the violence against Indian people. Easu Laflete, considered by the authorities to be the spokesman for Cato Manor, said in evidence to the Commission of Inquiry which followed, that the worst attackers of Indian property in Cato Manor came from the Point barracks in the dock area through the central area of the town into Booth Road and then on into Cato Manor itself.⁷⁵ In the Report of the Commission, the fact that African males were 'herded together' in compounds was considered a contributing factor to the riots. 'Such congregations of men are ready tinder to any spark, and it is clear that the compound-dwellers took an important part in the excesses.'⁷⁶ In his evidence to the Commission of Inquiry which followed Phungula proposed a radical solution to racial conflict and redirected attention to the role of the state in generating antagonism among racial groups.

My Lord this land of ours is in a state of great confusion, it is a country that has already been steeped in blood . . . if we had our way we would tell the Government . . . 'you are no longer competent to govern this country, it will be better for you to hand it over to the coloured people'.⁷⁷

Through selective legislation the state had given Indian people privileges over African people whose hearts 'are red because of the encouragement which the Government gives to the Indians to lord it over us'. Finally, however, he succumbed to the mass feelings of the time and said that the Indian people should be repatriated, even though they were only as much foreign as the Whites.

The African National Congress issued a statement shortly after the upheaval which accepted that the events constituted a 'race riot', resulting from differential and discriminatory treatment of various racial groups. Described in these terms, the riots were catastrophic and dwarfed other violent struggles of the period. In Chicago 15 Whites and 23 Blacks were killed in race riots while the anti-colonial demonstrations in the Gold Coast in 1948 led to the deaths of 29 people.⁷⁸ By avoiding mention of the actual relations between Indian and African workers and petty bourgeois and the manifest points of conflict, the statement tended to reduce the actions of African workers to that of a haphazard and uncontrollable outburst. The government's policy of racial differentiation, it argued

⁷⁴ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the riots of Durban*, U.G. 36/1949. pp. 4–5.

⁷⁵ Judicial Commission appointed to enquire into the Durban riots, 1949, Transcript of evidence, Volume 1, p. 159.

⁷⁶ U.G. 36/1949, p. 20.

⁷⁷ Judicial Commission (1949), Volume 1, p. 169.

⁷⁸ These comparisons were made by Mary Benson, 1966, *The struggle for a birthright*, Penguin African Library, p. 124.

has rendered the African the football and servant of all which he silently resents. It has given him an accumulation of grievances and a sense of frustration which find expression in unpredictable actions of violence or otherwise, to which no section is immune.⁷⁹

In the later documents setting out a common strategy for both the African National Congress (Natal) and the Natal Indian Congress, united action between Indian and African workers was not mentioned, and the forms of inter-racial solidarity suggested were joint councils. In the uneasy situation following the riots African traders and landlords mobilized rapidly, extended the building of shacks, raised rents, and formed business groups which capitalized on anti-Indian feeling.⁸⁰

Phungula had not given up his idea of a general strike to change the wage structure of Durban. Early in April 1949 he called a meeting of sanitation workers employed by the Durban Corporation and said if the employers did not listen to the demands of the workers a general strike would be called.⁸¹ Later that month he issued a pamphlet as President of the Natal Zulu National Workers' Union which called on all African workers in the Durban area to demand £32. 10s a month. If the demand was not met the workers should strike from 1 May.⁸² This call met with an immediate response from the docks. On Monday, 2 May 1949, according to press reports, 800 stevedoring workers refused to start work. The strike movement spread to workers in the ship painting, baking and milling, whaling, timber, sugar, and chemical industries. Armed police and armoured cars were called out and the industrial workers were threatened with immediate prosecution in terms of war measures if they did not return to work. The general strike did not have the momentum that Phungula would have wished (he was arrested on the first day) but it was certainly more widespread than the initial newspaper reports described. The strike was strongly criticized by the African trade union movement and by the District Committee of the Communist Party as undermining the African trade unions. The occasion was used to repeat demands for the recognition of these unions. The leaders of the strike 'cannot be described as anything but irresponsible'.

By calling for a stoppage of work on the part of all African workers in Durban, they have not only usurped the authority and function of existing African unions, thereby creating confusion among the workers, but alienated the sympathy of trade union leaders. As the strike has demonstrated, such action can only end in defeats and disillusionment for the workers.

While condemning the leaders the Communist Party acknowledged the un-

⁷⁹ Statement on the Durban riots, by the Working Committee of the ANC, signed by Dr A. B. Zuma, 20 January 1949. Published in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (eds), 1973, *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 2, *Hope and Challenge 1935–1952*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, pp. 286–287.

⁸⁰ L. K. Ladlau, December 1975, *The Cato Manor Riots 1959–1960*, MA Thesis, University of Natal, Durban, describes the 1949 riots and their aftermath.

⁸¹ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 14 May 1949.

⁸² *Natal Mercury*, 3 May 1949.

derlying discontent of the workers without mentioning the wage demand. 'The fact that the so-called Natal Zulu Workers' Union's call for a strike, irresponsibly led and badly organized though it was, met with some response is a clear indication that the African workers have real grievances, which can be removed not by repression but by doing away with the causes of such grievances.' By making an appeal for the 'elementary democratic right of collective bargaining' to the government and employers of African workers, the statement avoided the issue of uniting all sections of the working class in Durban around the wage demands which had been supported by hundreds of unorganized workers. The strike had also popularized the wage demand of £1 a day, a slogan which became the demand of SACTU in the late 1950s.⁸³

Phungula was brought before the Native Commissioner's Court on the first day of the strike for a judicial inquiry in terms of Section 29 (the vagrancy clause) of the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1945. The court was filled with African workers and armed police. Evidence was led that Phungula had no visible means of support as leader of the Natal Zulu National Workers' Union which did not keep proper books of account and that he had worked only five days in 1948.⁸⁴ Phungula said that the people he organized gave him money for food and collections were taken at meetings, and that he had been unemployed for long periods because the employers called him 'Hitler' and would not take him on.⁸⁵ After hearing evidence that Phungula had persisted in making 'excessive' wage demands at a time when tensions had not subsided after the riots, the Assistant Bantu Affairs Commissioner, J. J. M. Stander, ordered that he be banished to Ixcopo for ten years and not be allowed to return to Durban without the written consent of the Secretary for Native Affairs.⁸⁶ The Durban District Committee of the Communist Party protested vigorously against this measure as a threat to the right of all workers to organize freely and withhold their labour and called for its withdrawal.⁸⁷ Phungula's banishment was a prelude to a vigorous reassessment of the controls over *togt* labour and a determination to crush militancy in the harbour area at a time of a virtual collapse of trade union organization among African workers.

Influx control, wage struggles, and the labour supply company

During the early 1950s the National Party government enacted a variety of measures to maintain the circulation of African labour between the reserves and wage labour and to provide a basis for 'rural urbanization'. Amendments

⁸³ *The Guardian*, 12 May 1949 p. 3 and *Natal Mercury*, 3, 4, 5 May 1949. The strike was one of the few occasions in which a co-ordinated campaign around immediate industrial issues had been attempted.

⁸⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 3 May 1949 and 7 May 1949. Phungula was defended by Roley Arenstein a leading member of the Communist Party.

⁸⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 14 May 1949.

⁸⁶ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 21 May 1949 and *Natal Mercury*, 17 August 1950.

⁸⁷ *The Guardian*, 26 May 1949.

were made to African labour legislation to encourage a more efficient migrant labour system, labour bureaux were established to direct the supply of labour, and tribal government was strengthened to reinforce controls over the industrial reserve army of labour.⁸⁸ Contrary to liberal opinion on the implementation of these wide-ranging measures, employers were not opposed to more controls over the supply of African labour, although there were negotiations and on occasion arguments over their imposition in particular sectors. Labour-intensive industries and services obviously benefited from a system which encouraged and later forced African workers to return to the reserves after completing a period of service, 'for otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labourer would tend to become a permanent resident . . . with increased requirements'.⁸⁹

The general principles contained in 'Bantu labour regulations' were phased in through negotiations in the dock area. The stevedoring companies, the municipality, and the departments of state grappled with the problems of maintaining policies which could be in conflict: influx control and a low wage structure. The problem was to ensure unlimited access to a reserve army of labour for employers while implementing a state policy of influx control and regulation of all service contracts. These two policies were not directly contradictory, although there could be short-term conflicts between particular employers and sectors and the overall programme of systematic controls which required greater sophistication in their operation and even new administrative institutions. The immediate problem of the state in the post-riot situation in Durban was to limit the number of unemployed workseekers who could be drawn into radical political and industrial action. Investigations were made by officials of the Native Administration Department into the number of workless African people in the Durban area and wide publicity was given to the figure of 10,000 'surplus' Africans.⁹⁰ On 8 July 1949 it was decided to take decisive action; the Durban City Council decided to enforce strictly the provisions of Proclamation 39 of 1940 which prohibited entry of African workseekers into the urban area if there was already full employment and for the removal of all unemployed Africans.⁹¹ The implementation of influx control had an immediate effect on African workseekers pouring in from the rural areas. The Native Commissioner for Natal reported that many Africans could not find the work they

⁸⁸ There was a decisive increase in pressures for the retention and extension of the migrant labour system in the 1950s. See particularly Martin Legassick, October 1974, 'Legislation, ideology, and economy in post-1948 South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1(1) pp. 5-35.

⁸⁹ This quotation is taken from the Lansdown Commission, U.G. 21/1944, para. 309 and describes how the mining industry benefits from the migrant labour system. The argument also applies with considerable force to labour-intensive services and industries such as hotels, docks, civil engineering, and construction, which employ almost exclusively migrant labour.

⁹⁰ See *Ilanga lase Natal* editorial comments, 23 July 1949.

⁹¹ See Mayor's Minute, Durban, 1949, Native Administration Department, p. 132, and Natal Employers' Association, 7th Annual Report, 1949/50, p. 19.

wanted to do and were forced to accept work at lower wages; in this sense the regulations were serving the function of redirecting labour and depressing wages. The Native Commissioner for Durban reported that the restrictions had resulted in the reduction of the estimated surplus of African workers in Durban from 10,000 to 6,000.⁹²

While these restrictions were implemented with the general consent of employers through their representative organizations, the effects of a restricted and directed labour supply affected certain groups of employers more than others. The employers of *togt* labour were most directly affected and their position was further aggravated by the City Council's policy of refusing to issue any further *togt* licences until more accommodation was provided by the employers. Some anxious negotiations and an appeal to the Minister of Native Affairs followed, resulting in a temporary administrative suspension of part of the regulations restricting the issue of *togt* licences to the amount of suitable accommodation available, and the threat to the supply of *togt* labour was removed. As a *quid pro quo* the stevedoring employers agreed to extend the existing accommodation to provide for 1,500 labourers at their own expense. When the national system of labour bureaux was brought into operation, further concessions were granted to *togt* employers to avoid having to register service contracts every day. Stevedoring employers were also exempted from having to contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund.⁹³

Despite the banishment of Phungula and the implementation of influx and other labour controls, strikes continued in the dock area. Railway workers came out on strike for short periods in 1950 and 1951. Painters and chippers demanded 15s a day in a strike which started on 2 June 1952 and lasted for over fifteen days.⁹⁴ As the African trade unions of the 1940s disintegrated in a period of declining wages and official repression, working class action was driven underground and led by politically active workers such as Fanyana Majosi in the dock area.⁹⁵ The most determined thrust of working class action in the docks came in the period between 1954 and 1959. The stevedoring *togt* workers came out on strike on 1 July 1954 with a demand for 4s. 9d a day wage increase which would have brought their wages up to 15s. This strike, in which the painters and chippers joined, was well organized by the workers with pickets throughout the harbour area who acted against scab labour.⁹⁶ After some offers of small wage increases, S. D. Mentz, the Chairman of the Central Native Labour Board was brought from Pretoria to settle the strike. He addressed the strikers with armed police standing by, told them to appoint spokesmen, and threatened to have them replaced unless they acted on his advice. 'Like an indomitable army, however, the strikers faced Mr Mentz and an

⁹² Report of the Department of Native Affairs, 1950, U.G. 61/1951, p. 44.

⁹³ Natal Employers' Association, 7th Annual Report, 1949/50, p. 19.

⁹⁴ *The Clarion*, 12 June 1952.

⁹⁵ There is a short profile of Majosi in *New Age*, 29 October 1959.

⁹⁶ *Daily News*, 1 July 1954.

armed police force, refusing to return to work or to appoint a deputation and expose their leadership.' The strikers used the occasion to demand the return of Zulu Phungula;

When we are speaking to our employers the Government interferes. The man we want back to speak for us has been taken away. We are still looking for him.

Faced with the determined opposition of the strikers, the company served notices on the workers either to go back to work within 24 hours or be charged with trespass. This was a new tactic, and combined with an offer of further negotiations, was sufficient to break the strike. The workers returned without illusions about the possibility of increases being made without pressure from the workers.

We can barely exist on our present wages and have nothing left over to send our wives and children. Only a substantial increase will save our families from starvation. We will return to work only for the purpose of keeping a roof over our heads, and until we are better organized, but we will strike again and again if we do not get more money. We strike not to make trouble, but because we must live.

The strike which demonstrated the workers' contempt for the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act which was being used to eliminate trade union organization among African workers received the unqualified support of political movements and from the Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions. The Congress of Democrats statement declared: 'A victory for the dock workers is a victory for the entire working class of South Africa.' As promised, negotiations began on 8 July between the Central Native Labour Board, executives of Durban stevedoring companies, and nine spokesmen for the *togt* stevedores.⁹⁷ The stevedoring companies finally conceded an increase of 1s 3d per day with a variety of smaller increments. Mentz recommended the establishment of a permanent labour force on a weekly or monthly basis, 'the number of men to be employed based on the lowest number of men employed during any week over the past year.'⁹⁸ Such a system would not eliminate the necessity for casual labour but would reduce the reliance of the stevedoring trade on this form of labour and a central core of workers would be employed who would be under direct contractual obligation to the employer. Further negotiations with the Central Native Labour Board followed in 1954 and 1956 in which the workers were assisted by Fanyana Majosi (who had been dismissed from employment in the docks) and Stephen Dhlamini of SACTU.

In the late 1950s the conflict between dock employers and the state which had been temporarily resolved in 1950 flared up again. In November 1957 the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H. F. Verwoerd, announced that most of the stevedoring compounds at the Point dock area would have to go and that only 2,000 African stevedores would be allowed in that area.⁹⁹ Employers of labour

⁹⁷ *Daily News*, 5 July 1954, *Advance*, 15 July 1954, and *Daily News*, 8 July 1954.

⁹⁸ *Daily News*, 9 July 1954.

⁹⁹ *Daily News*, 21 November 1957.

in the dock area protested that there would be a serious decline in the efficiency of work at the harbour if the workers were housed at Kwa Mashu to the north of Durban, that they would possibly refuse to work overtime because of the long hours which they would be away from their homes, and that there was a possibility that Durban would be by-passed by ships which would be diverted to Lourenço Marques. The Stevedores' Association which housed 1,520 workers submitted a memorandum to the Government pointing out the 'serious repercussions' which could follow if their compounds had to be demolished.¹⁰⁰ While the future of *tozt* labour was being discussed by officials, the workers responded to the call of the African National Congress for a three-day stay-at-home.

The employers, local authorities, state departments, and the police reacted vigorously to the threat of mass strike action. A meeting was called by the local Native Commissioner of all African foremen ('indunas and boss-boys') which was addressed by the Chief of Police, the head of the Durban City Council Native Administration Department, and by A. W. G. Champion (no longer president of the Natal African National Congress). This meeting 'received a most hostile reception from those present for suggesting that all workers should go to work on these three days'. The workers wanted a response to the demand of £1 a day put forward by SACTU and the Congress Alliance, and reportedly said they would not work on the three days of April 14, 15, and 16. The *Natal Mercury* printed a message from the Zulu Paramount Chief on the front page calling on African workers not to take part in the strike.¹⁰¹ The stay-at-home in April 1958 had mixed success (it was described by the sympathetic *New Age* as 'on the whole a failure') and was called off by the African National Congress. In Durban the strike was 30–40 per cent effective, many factories closed completely and others carried on with considerable absenteeism, the market was deserted, and Indian shops were closed. The dock workers responded to the strike call and many left the dock area altogether. Those who remained were forced out of the privately owned compounds by the police but struck at work and demanded £1 a day. The police and Department of Labour officials 'intimidated and coerced the workers to return' and many arrests were made but these workers refused to do any overtime during the three days of the campaign. When those who had left the dock area returned the workers un-animously decided not to work overtime unless they were paid £1 a day.¹⁰² Harbour congestion resulted from the three-day stay-at-home and was aggravated further by the tactic of banning overtime as a bargaining lever. The standard amount of overtime was four hours, but from Monday, 14 April 1958, the first day of the stay-at-home, the workers refused to work after

¹⁰⁰ *Daily News*, 22 November 1957.

¹⁰¹ *New Age*, 17 April 1958: 1 and 3, which also reported that the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Durban City Corporation, and the police used 'every possible intimidation' to get workers not to participate in the political strike.

¹⁰² *New Age*, 24 April 1958:5.

5 p.m. On the Sunday after the overtime ban had begun the workers again came out on strike and demanded £1 a day. Negotiations between the workers and employers followed and the *togt* workers gained an increase of 1s 6d per day with improved conditions of overtime and better Sunday wages.¹⁰³ After this pay increase was announced 2,000 railway workers gathered outside the offices of the Port Goods Superintendent demanding increases, and negotiations were started. Pressure on the employers was increased on Sunday, 27 May when no workers reported for work. An emergency meeting was held between stevedoring employers and the Divisional Inspector of Labour and negotiations continued between the workers and employers. A settlement was reached on Sunday at 11 a.m. providing for a basic wage of 14s per day and other increases, and the workers returned to work.¹⁰⁴ The tactical weapon of boycotting overtime and Sunday work (both theoretically voluntary) proved an extremely successful technique of increasing pressure on employers without jeopardizing the position of the workers housed in the compounds. Throughout the period of the overtime ban severe congestion resulted in the docks; on Sunday the 27 May there were over 25 ships lying idle in the port.

The disruption brought about by strike action and prohibition of overtime coupled with the state policy of tighter control over surplus labour, brought together officials and employers to consider measures to control the workers more effectively. The Natal Employers' Association convened a meeting of the employers, the Department of Labour, the Department of Native Administration, and municipal officials, on 27 November 1958. The chairman of the meeting, a stevedoring employer, said the meeting had been called to extend controls over stevedoring labour and to eliminate the *togt* labour system; two changes which were intimately related given the relatively 'free' form of contract in day labour. A centrally administered compound system had been accepted by the Durban Stevedores' Association which controlled the large compounds, as an answer to the 'complete lack of discipline over the *togt* labour force'. The new system would be introduced by the formation of a separate non-profit making company which would have, as its directors, nominees of each of the existing stevedoring companies in Durban. This company would then control all the barracks then owned by the various companies and all employers would draw on the labour of the monopoly labour supply company. The employers' response to working class militancy in the dock area was the concentration of controls in one central institution and the elimination of competition for labour. While previously a labourer out of favour with one company could find employment at another company, with the new system of labour control 'undesirable' labour would be eliminated from employment by the employers and from the area by the state.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *Daily News*, 21 April 1958.

¹⁰⁴ *New Age*, 1 May 1958:1 and 5.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of a meeting . . . Durban, 27 November 1958. File 1496.

Since 1949 there had existed in legislation provision for the centralized control over African labour supply by employers¹⁰⁶ but, given the conflicts over labour supply in the 1950s, the approval of the Department of Native Administration was essential to the new plan. The Assistant Secretary of the national Department of Native Affairs, H. H. L. Smuts, outlined the policy of the government to the meeting. He felt that although there was a great amount of work to be done in the 'cleaning up' of Durban he could see 'no objection whatsoever' to the accommodation being controlled by a central labour supply company. Conflicts between the employers and the state would be resolved by a division of administration: the labour supply company would exercise complete discipline over the workers, and the only aspect not controlled by it would be the actual authorization of the worker to be in the urban area which would remain with the local authority. The other officials were not unexpectedly all in favour of the central supply company, although the Divisional Inspector of Labour correctly forecast trouble in the transition from *togt* to a monthly contract system of employment. He optimistically foresaw that the new form of control would permit 'weeding out troublemakers' in a short time and 'peace in the industry for the rest of your lives'. Such were the hopes and aspirations of the Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company.¹⁰⁷

As foreseen, there were severe difficulties in changing the structure of employment in the stevedoring trade to contract labour. The Company itself was only successfully inaugurated after the most severe resistance of the workers had been broken by employer action fully supported by the state. The first step towards its construction were measures designed to incorporate *indunas* more effectively into the structure of authority of the stevedoring companies.¹⁰⁸ Previously, it would appear that the *indunas* had some independent position in being partly responsible for recruiting and marshalling workers in particular gangs for which they received a bonus from employers and a cash payment from workers. In a centrally administered compound system these tasks were removed from them and performed by the labour supply company, and the *indunas* tasks were transformed into that of sergeant-majors of the company. The *indunas* were compensated for this change of status by a substantial wage increase. This led to further industrial action by *togt* workers; the immediate cause being the differential introduced between the basic wages of *indunas* and labourers. The issue came to a head after the Wage Board had investigated the trade for the first time in 1958. The local committee of SACTU

¹⁰⁶ Important amendments to the Native Labour Regulations Act (No 15 of 1911) provided in Act No 56 of 1949 for the formation, registration, and control of groups of employers recruiting labour in agriculture and enabled the Minister to declare African workers in industries other than mines to be employed on the same basis as those employed on mines and works, Official Year Book, 25, 1949, p. 503.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes (27 November 1958), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Indunas* are African foremen; the language of tribalism has been incorporated into South African industrial relations. Management has embedded the concept of *induna* with its military and tribal associations into the supervision of labour at the place of work.

having given evidence that some workers were without employment for weeks, had suggested that the workers should be paid weekly, and had demanded a considerable increase in wages.¹⁰⁹ The workers had looked to the Wage Board for relief, but the Wage Determination 183 which resulted from the investigation provided no wage increase for labourers, laid down differential rates for winchmen and gangwaymen, and had prescribed large increases for *indunas*. The strike broke out on 24 February when it became known there would be no increase for labourers and a 4s increase for *indunas*. Two stevedoring labourers were arrested on a charge of assaulting an *induna* in a compound, and the workers demanded a pay increase proportionate to that granted to the *indunas*.¹¹⁰ Rather than negotiate with the workers, the employers, the Department of Labour and the police went ahead with the plan to force the labour supply company on the workers. All the strikers were dismissed and ordered to leave the premises of the stevedoring company's compounds. A strong detachment of police arrived at the compounds, an *induna* called upon the workers to disperse, and the police made a baton charge and attacked those in the immediate vicinity. Some thirty minutes after the attack at least four seriously injured workers were still lying on the ground in pools of blood, and 87 workers were arrested. These workers were defended by lawyers briefed by SACTU, although some pleaded guilty of trespass and were fined £5 with the alternative of 25 days imprisonment with hard labour.¹¹¹ The companies took advantage of the defeated strike and the pleas of workers for re-employment to introduce the labour supply company, and the majority of the strikers, together with other workers, were re-engaged on a permanent basis. The change was initially seen by SACTU as an advance in the conditions of employment. '*Togt* labour has long been a source of friction between the workers and employers, and the introduction of a weekly-paid permanent labour force is a definite gain by the workers.' Despite the low wage offered (£3 per week) the introduction of permanent employment seemed to offer the basis for union organization. 'With the establishment of a permanent labour force it is now possible to organize the workers into a union and we hope that the employers will negotiate with this union and avoid any further trouble in the docks.'¹¹² But the men objected to the new wage system on the grounds that they could earn more under the previous system if work were available throughout the week (a potential of 84s per week) as opposed to the 60s weekly wage. Again they demanded increased wages and refused to work overtime. A severe crisis resulted as the ships were unable to be unloaded and labour discipline in the dock area was being threatened with possible strategic implications. The workers complained about the intensification of labour in the docks as a result of the ending of the *togt* labour system.

¹⁰⁹ *Workers' Unity*, May 1959, 'Dock strike: the facts'.

¹¹⁰ *Daily News*, 25 and 26 February 1959.

¹¹¹ *New Age*, 5 March 1959:3.

¹¹² *New Age*, 5 March 1959:5.

The employers want to kill us with overtime. In the past we used to take off a day or two whenever we felt tired, but now that we are employed on a weekly basis we could not do this. We feel that more workers should be employed by the stevedoring companies and at the same time we should be paid a decent wage for the hard work we do.¹¹³

The employers responded by dismissing the entire labour force and recruiting new workers from Zululand to take their places. Despite the congestion in the harbour which resulted and a high accident rate suffered by the inexperienced workers who replaced those who were dismissed, the successful operation of the labour supply company was secured. The pattern of mass discipline established by employers and the state during the war was again enforced to break down the workers' resistance to a system which they correctly saw as dramatically increasing their employers' control over their labour-time.

Conclusions

The study of social action by Durban dock workers throws some light on the debate of the relative consciousness of a particular group of migrant workers and on the level of their proletarianization. Their consciousness is exemplified by their actions, their demands, and the ideology of the leadership which came up from their ranks. For the overwhelming mass of African workers during this period agricultural production in the reserves became insignificant and the statements and wage demands of the workers part of a struggle to have their rights as proletarians acknowledged. As a leader, Zulu Phungula was possibly unique in being able to link effectively the issues of rural impoverishment and working class struggle in the cities. Phungula was able to avoid the worst aspects of labour organization (despite his inability to keep proper financial records); the bureaucratization of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union with its internal confusions and financial excesses, and the limited industrial strategies of the African trade unions of the war period. Despite being described as a 'one man show' by African trade unionists of the time, he was able to articulate the ideology and demands of the migrant workers while avoiding all forms of personality cult (as can be readily seen in contrast to A. W. G. Champion with his 'great leader' style). His proposals for working class action had they been supported by African trade unionists would not only have revolutionized the wage structure of Durban but also laid a basis for sustained action in the 1950s. Although his strategy was limited by the repressive power of the state, he did lay the basis for organization in the compounds which may have survived to the present.

While the legislation on African labour supply provided the general context in which the employers and the state acted to crush the unity of the workers and extend the system of contract labour, the 'Bantu regulations' were im-

¹¹³ *New Age*, 9 April 1959:6.

plemented and modified to meet the particular conditions of working class struggle. The means by which migrant labour was reinforced by the action of employers and the state, from the dock strike of 1942 until the culmination of collective capitalist reaction in 1959 in the form of the labour supply company, helps to illuminate the processes by which ideological and physical forms of control over the black working class as a whole were enforced. During this period 'tribal' government which has a vested interest in the continuation of the contract migrant system was strengthened and the regulations which reinforced migrant workers' dependence on land in the reserves (such as the 'one-man-one-lot' system) meant proletarianization was accompanied by 'rural urbanization'.

After the banishment of Phungula the dock workers' resistance took a leaderless form not because of the primitiveness of their struggle (the first recorded collective action of dock workers took place in 1874 and subsequent developments showed that dock workers were prepared to lay down a bedrock of informal organization during periods of intense repression) but because of their relatively advanced nature and experience. These organizational forms were able to survive longer among these workers than among those with more formal methods of organization. (The strike of dock workers in 1969 signalled the reawakening of black working class action after the suppression of the labour movement in the early 1960s.) This is not to glorify the dock workers as a heroic group of workers who set the pace in industrial struggles but to argue that the forms of control which forced organization 'underground' in the 1950s made them more capable of sustaining social action. The evidence tends to contradict those who would argue that compounds are total institutions and make impossible collective action among African workers. The concentration of workers in increasingly centralized and controlled barracks both facilitates greater communication among workers and more effective control over these workers when on strike.

The co-ordination between employers and the state changed over time in response to the different objectives at hand; the development of 'tribal' governments and controls over African workers in urban areas on the one hand, and increasing the rate of exploitation (increasing the pace at which workers were loading and unloading cargo in the main port of South Africa) on the other. While it is true that as Lenin argues:

Strikes . . . teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalist only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes 'a school of war', a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people, of all who labour, from the yoke of government officials and from the yoke of capital;¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Lenin, 1976, On strikes, in *On Trade Unions*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, pp. 64–65.

it is also demonstrably true that employers and the state learn from the struggle of the workers. The issues are not resolved to the point where no further contradictions within the system of control are possible; it is not as though there is an undifferentiated and unrelentingly successful form of repression despite the tremendous powers wielded by capital. It can be doubted that capital has been able to break the lines of communication and resistance in the docks built up by networks of association of workers and has been able to achieve uniform ideological subordination.