Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940

The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution

With a New Preface by the Editors

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REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM, COMMUNISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIALISM, 1886–1928

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This chapter examines the manner in which anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists confronted the national question in South Africa, particularly during the 1910s, the period of unquestioned syndicalist hegemony on the revolutionary left. The national question has been perhaps the single most important issue facing labour and the left in South Africa. It centres on two main elements: the deep racial and national divisions in the country, and the national oppression of the African, Coloured and Indian majority. Both elements were deeply rooted in its colonial history, but also tightly entangled in its modern economy, as will be discussed later.

I argue that the local anarchists and syndicalists maintained a principled opposition to racial discrimination and oppression, and a principled commitment to the creation of a multiracial anti-capitalist, anti-statist movement. These two positions constituted the irreducible core of the libertarians' approach to the national question—a distinctive approach that differed in critically significant ways from the later, Communist, "national-democratic" approach (of which more below).

However, it is important to distinguish between two key expressions of this approach, which had different tactical and practical implications. The first may be termed abstract-internationalism: this opposed popular prejudice as well as official discrimination, but failed to take a crucial step of combining this principled position with *active*, and *specific*, efforts to mobilise African, Coloured, and Indian workers around both their class and national grievances. In practice, this approach was identified with a *de facto* focus on white labour.

The second may be termed the activist-integrationist approach: it developed strategies that moved from analysis and principle to consistent and targeted efforts to *mobilise* African, Coloured, and Indian workers around both class *and* national issues. It enabled, it will be argued, the construction by 1921 of a genuinely multiracial revolutionary syndicalist

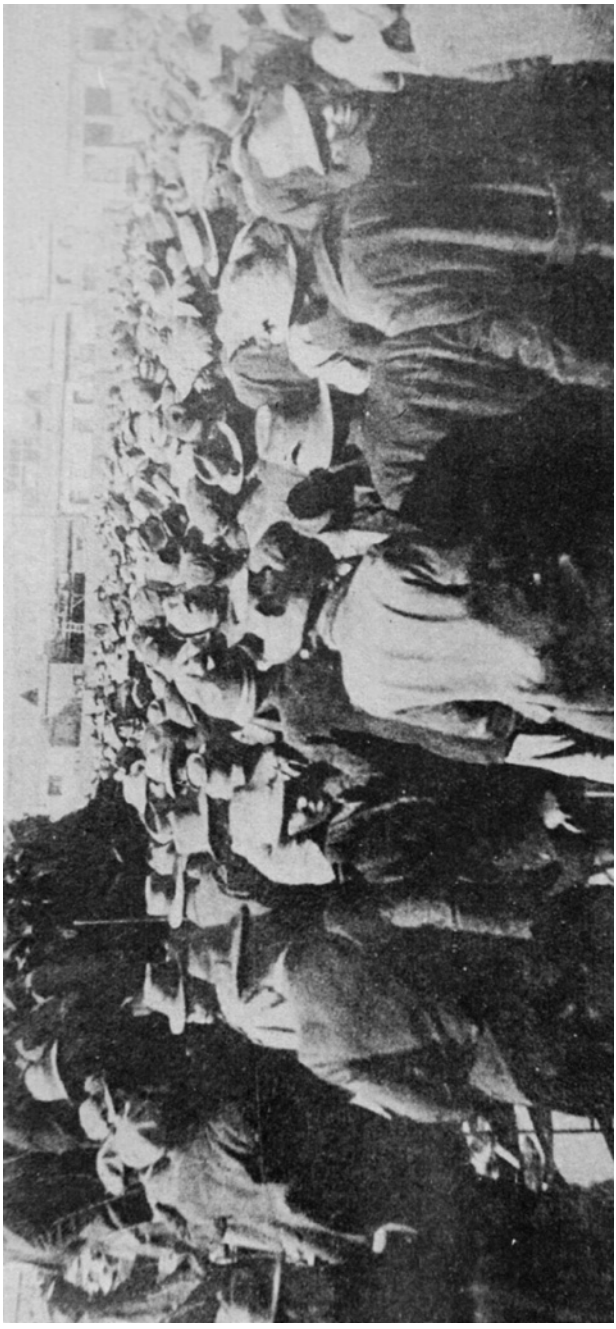

Fig. 1. African workers attend a rally in Johannesburg, addressed by members of the Industrial Workers of Africa, the International Socialist League and the South African Native National Congress, June 1918.

movement, organised in a network of newspapers, unions and political groups, firmly committed to uniting the local working class to struggle simultaneously against the specific national oppression of the African, Coloured and Indian majority, and the capitalist exploitation and state domination of the whole working class, African, Coloured, Indian and white.

The vehicle of this combined struggle was usually envisaged as a revolutionary interracial One Big Union on the model of the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW, or Wobblies): "The key to social regeneration…to the new Socialist Commonwealth is to be found in the organisation of a class conscious proletariat within the Industrial Union",[1] creating an Industrial Republic "administered…democratically by the workers themselves".[2]

The One Big Union was to be the proletarian forge in which a common society embracing all, regardless of colour, would be created. The aim of the working class revolution was not to constitute an independent national *state*. It was to overcome national and class inequality through the working class battle to constitute a self-managed libertarian socialist "Industrial Republic": this would unite the African, Coloured, Indian and white working people, and also form "an integral part of the International Industrial Republic".[3]

Not only did this vision come to dominate the radical left in the 1910s, but it enabled the anarchists and syndicalists to pioneer multiracial left-wing organisation, as well as union work amongst the African people, to work alongside Coloured and African nationalists, and to develop an increasingly sophisticated analysis of—and strategy to resolve—the national question.

While the libertarian movement was pioneered by white immigrant radicals, mainly of British and Jewish origin, the demographic profile of the movement changed radically over time. Thus, the local roll call of anarchists and syndicalist militants includes revolutionary people of colour, like Fred Cetiwe, K.C. Fredericks, Johnny Gomas, Hamilton Kraai, R.K. Moodley, Bernard Sigamoney and T.W. Thibedi, alongside white radicals like W.H. 'Bill' Andrews, A.Z. Berman, S.P. Bunting, Andrew Dunbar, Henry Glasse, Wilfred Harrison, H.B. 'Barney' Levinson and Ferdinand Marais.

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[1] *The International*, 5 May 1916, "What's Wrong with Ireland", hereafter *Int.*
[2] *Int.*, 21 January 1916, "The Most Effective Means".
[3] *Int.*, 22 February 1918, "Industrial Unionism in South Africa".

The local syndicalist movement also came to centre on a number of IWW-style unions in the major centres, based amongst people of colour. Anticipated by the practice of South African (SA) General Workers' Union in Cape Town in the first decade of the century (and by the aims of the local IWW formed in 1910), these unions included the Clothing Workers Industrial Union, the Indian Industrial Workers' Union, the Horse Drivers' Union, the Industrial Workers' of Africa, and the Sweet and Jam Workers' Industrial Union in the 1910s. Together they represented several thousand people, and were amongst the very first unions amongst workers of colour. Amongst white workers, the syndicalists had some influence in the Cape Federation of Labour Unions, the shopstewards' and workers' committee movement, and the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU). Political groups that promoted anarchism and syndicalism included the local Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the International Socialist League (ISL), the (separate) Industrial Socialist League (IndSL), and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP).

In the late 1910s, the local syndicalist movement also had a significant impact on formations like the South African Native National Congress (SANNC, 1912, renamed the African National Congress, or ANC, in 1923), and the African Political Organisation (APO, 1902), representing African and Coloured nationalist formations, respectively. Into the 1920s, syndicalist influences would continue within the radical wing of white labour (especially the Council of Action of 1920–1922), the early Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA, 1921), and the (predominantly African) Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU, 1919), which spread from South Africa into neighbouring South West Africa, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia).[4]

This analysis and research goes directly counter to the prevailing interpretation of the early history of the left in South Africa, and of its approach to the national question. Scholarship on these issues remains dominated by the interpretations developed by what I term the "Communist school": writers identified with the CPSA and its underground successor, the South African Communist Party (SACP, f. 1953).

While the Communist school undoubtedly played a key role in pioneering left and labour history in South Africa from the 1940s, it has consistently caricatured the pre-CPSA left. Besides downplaying the

[4] Now independent Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively.

achievements of anarchism and syndicalism, it has tended to treat the early left as basically a overwhelmingly white movement that at best viewed "the national oppression of the majority" as "not really very worthy of consideration"[5]—and, at worst, embraced "white supremacy" and a "segregation policy".[6] This is part of a larger interpretation of history—to which we return below—which treats the CPSA/SACP, and the larger Communist International (Comintern), as the unique repository of a revolutionary, socialist, answer to the national question.

Only recently has the history of anarchism and syndicalism started to be taken more seriously,[7] but there has been little in the way of a serious reappraisal of their engagement with the national question.[8] Such a reappraisal not only has significant implications for the interpretation of labour and left history in South Africa, but also enables the recovery of the impressive history of early black socialist radicalism—ironically, a casualty of the Communist school's analysis.

Background: the national question, labour and the left

The area that became South Africa comprised a range of distinctive agrarian societies—English, Afrikaner, and African—in the 1860s, when the discovery of diamonds (1867) in Kimberley, followed by gold (1886) on the Witwatersrand (the 'Rand' or 'Reef'), precipitated

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[5] Jeremy Cronin, 1991, "Origins and 'Native Republic' ", in Colin Bundy (ed.), *The History of the South African Communist Party*, Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Cape Town, 12.

[6] Jack Simons and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950*, London: International Defence and Aid Fund, [1969] 1983, 192–4, 212.

[7] Besides the work of this writer, there is some material in Jonathan Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: J.T. Bain, a Scottish rebel in colonial South Africa*, Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2004 (Bain briefly embraced syndicalism in the early 1910s), and Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades: identities and loyalties on the South African left*, Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2002, especially 20–40. Also of importance are sections of Elaine Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: a history of white workers in the Transvaal and the general strike of 1913*, Johannesburg: Institute for African Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 1976, and Evangelos Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles in South Africa: the forgotten pages, 1903–1921*, Windhoek and Durban: Collective Resources Publications, 1995.

[8] Thus, the view remains widespread that the CPSA, under pressure from the Comintern, was the first socialist organisation to "put South Africa's pressing social problems, the national, democratic and land questions, at the top of their political programme": Allison Drew (ed.) *South Africa's Radical Tradition: a documentary history, volume one, 1907–1950*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press/Buchu Books/Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1996, 22, also 16.

an industrial revolution. Large-scale foreign investment poured in from large European investors seeking new outlets for capital, and by 1913 nearly half the world's total gold output came from roughly fifty square miles on the Witwatersrand.[9] Less than 15 percent of gold mining shares were held locally in 1913,[10] with mining investments dwarfing all other Western investments in the entire continent.[11] Mining was centralised in a small oligopoly, working closely with state industries and infrastructure: this set the pattern for the industries that followed.

The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 by British imperialism as a self-governing Dominion. It brought together a multiracial, multinational and polyglot population under a single state, but not on equal terms. The Transvaal and Orange Free State—the Afrikaner republics—were conquered in the brutal Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), yet were included as provinces alongside Britain's Cape and Natal colonies. The African polities, such as the Pedi and Zulu kingdoms, which had been conquered in 1879, were included as well, but as subject "Native Reserves". Following World War I, German South West Africa came under South African trusteeship, but was not formally incorporated.[12]

The majority of the country's mine workforce was drawn from the defeated African majority of South Africa and the neighbouring territories (such as Basutoland, Mozambique,[13] and Northern and

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[9] Riva Krut, "The Making of a South African Jewish Community", in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, edited by Belinda Bozzoli. Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988, 135–6. By 1990, South Africa had produced nearly 40 percent of all gold *ever* mined.

[10] Martin Legassick, "South Africa: capital accumulation and violence", *Economy and Society*, 3: 3, 1974, 253–291, 260.

[11] Bill Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry in South Africa: 1915–1945", in Alan Mabin (ed.), *Organisation and Economic Change*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 81.

[12] Known as South West Africa, its white population had representation in parliament from 1924. It is today independent Namibia.

[13] Now Lesotho and Mozambique, respectively. The total population in 1911 comprised 4,000,000 Africans (67 percent), 1,276,000 Whites (21 percent), 525,000 Coloureds (9 percent), and 150,000 Indians (2,5 percent), although whites formed half of the urban population in major centres. Ten years later, the urban population was only 1,733,000 out of 6,928,000. See D.J. Kotzé, "Die Kommunistiese Beweging in Suid-Afrika tot die Stigting van die Kommunistiese Party van Suid-Afrika in 1921", Institute for the Study of Marxism, University of Stellenbosch, 1987, 73–4; Lis Lange, *White, Poor and Angry: white working class families in Johannesburg*, Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003, 12, 39, 84; Peter van Duin, "South

Southern Rhodesia). The Africans—the indigenous, black, Bantu-speaking population, or 'natives' in colonial parlance—had been subject to accelerating processes of white conquest in the 19th century, and held no independent territories by the turn of the century. In 1920, barely half (51 percent) of the African miners were drawn from within South Africa itself: 36 percent came from Portuguese Mozambique, and the remainder from other colonial territories.[14] Most were male migrants who lived in closed hostels ('compounds'), later returning to their rural homesteads, a model of controlled migrant labour pioneered on the mines but emulated in other urban industries.[15]

This cheap and nominally unskilled workforce was effectively indentured by rigid contracts, unlike the skilled miners and artisans, who were initially mainly immigrant, often English-speaking, white workers, drawn largely from across the British Empire.[16] Later including a growing number of Afrikaners, they developed into a permanently urbanised, and free, workforce. By 1913, the Witwatersrand mines employed 195,000 Africans (mainly labourers, but also clerks and security guards), and 22,000 white workers.[17] A further 37,000 Africans worked in domestic service, with 6,000 in factories, workshops and warehouses; there were also 16,500 white workers in building, tramways, printing, electricity and other industries, including 4,500 on the state railways.

Besides ongoing African-white conflicts, boiling over into race riots in some of the multiracial Witwatersrand slums, there were also ethnic

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Africa", Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870–1914*, Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Koln: Brill, 1990, 640 note 38.

[14] David Yudelman and Alan Jeeves, "New Labour Frontiers for Old: black migrants to the South African gold mines, 1920–85", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13: 1, 1986, 123–4; also see Peter Alexander, "Oscillating Migrants, 'Detribalised Families,' and Militancy: Mozambicans on Witbank collieries, 1918–1921", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27: 3, 2001, 505–525, 508.

[15] In 1916, sixty Witwatersrand mine compounds housed an average of four thousand men each: Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: migrant labourers in Mozambique and South Africa c. 1860–1910*, Johannesburg/Portsmouth NH/London: Witwatersrand University Press/Heinemann/James Currey, 1994, 195–196.

[16] 85 percent of skilled miners in the 1890 were immigrants; in 1921, more than half of all typesetters, fitters and barbers, and over 40 percent of carpenters and electricians were foreign-born: Elaine Katz, *The White Death: silicosis on the Witwatersrand gold mines, 1886–1910*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994, 65; Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", 83.

[17] D. Hobart Houghton, *The South African Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 141.

divisions amongst the Africans. Compounds were divided on ethnic lines, and there was a degree of occupational segregation underground and a long history of violent inter-ethnic "faction-fights".[18] There were also divisions between the (largely skilled) white immigrants and the (largely unskilled) local Afrikaners, further complicated by substantial East European Jewish immigration. A third of whites were classified as poor or very poor: most were proletarianized Afrikaners, *trekking* to the unfamiliar cities to take "orders like black people" and speak the English of the conquering British.[19]

Free workers in general—the whites, the large Indian population of Natal, and the Coloured group, mainly in the Cape—were concentrated in the cities, terrified of replacement by each other, as well as by the mass of cheap African labour, concentrated at the very bottom of society. The small urban African population (that is, excluding the mining compounds) outside the mines was around 40,000 in 1909 in Johannesburg, the hub of the Witwatersrand; most were South Africans.[20] It lived in a twilight world: faced with segregation and discrimination, it was at the bottom of the local racial hierarchy, yet at the same time also free labour. Compounding all these divisions were issues like language: on the mines, for instance, communication between African and white took place mainly through an impoverished pidgin called *fanakolo*; in 1904, only five percent of Natal Indians were literate in English.[21]

The marginalised African and Coloured middle classes formed and led the early nationalist movements like the SANNC, and the APO. They lived in a situation where cheap African labour formed the bedrock of the mines—as well as state industry, and the growing commercial farming and manufacturing sectors—and where the cheapness of

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[18] See, for example, Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho miners and shaft-sinking on the South African gold mines", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14: 2, 1988, 257–278; Harries, 121–124; John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875–1940: the impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2000, Chs. 5 and 6.

[19] Sandra Swart, "'Desperate Men': the 1914 Rebellion and the politics of poverty", *South African Historical Journal*, 2000, 42: 161–175, 172.

[20] Harries, 199; in 1931, over 90 percent of newly arrived African labour on the Witwatersrand, not employed in the mines, was from the Natal and Transvaal provinces: Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", 83.

[21] Maureen Swan, *Gandhi: the South African experience*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, 12.

African labour was primarily a function of the blacks' historic incorporation into the country as a subject people: in this sense, local "capitalist relations of exploitation were constructed upon colonial relations of domination".[22]

The Union parliament was restricted to white men, the new British Dominion being founded firmly on a principle of white supremacy. Africans were represented largely through traditional authorities—by indirect rule—or through various advisory structures, but were largely ruled by fiat. In the Cape, however, a pre-existing qualified franchise based was retained into the 1930s. In that province, one-third of white men were disenfranchised in 1909, while Africans and Coloureds comprised 15 percent of the electorate.[23] A similar, albeit far more restrictive, system operated in Natal. In the two northern provinces, race sufficed as a voting qualification.

Labourite and Communist approaches to the national question

On the eve of *apartheid* in 1948—in which Afrikaner nationalists extended the segregation policies of the first four decades of Union—there were two main approaches to the national question on the part of labour and the left.

The first was identified with the mainstream white labour movement, and dated back to the late 19th century: social democracy plus segregation, with welfare and industrial reform running alongside job reservation and preferential employment for whites, urban segregation, and Asian repatriation. Essentially, this "White Labourism" answered the national question by seeking to perpetuate white domination—sometimes softened by a rhetorical support for Africans and Coloureds "developing on their own lines" in reserved areas.

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[22] Colin Bundy, "'Left, Right, Left, Right': the CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s", in Colin Bundy (ed.), *The History of the South African Communist Party*, Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Cape Town, 1991, 32.

[23] David Ticktin, "The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888–1910", Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 1973, 42; see also Mohamed Adhikari, *'Let us Live for Our Children': the Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913–1940*, Cape Town/Rondebosch: Buchu Books/UCT Press, 1993, 48. The total rose to over 21 percent in 1921. While people of colour could not sit in parliament, they could sit in local and provincial governments in the Cape.

White Labourism was the platform of the union-backed South African (SA) Labour Party launched in 1910.[24] It was also identified with the main union centre, the South African Industrial Federation (SAIF), a loose body claiming 47,001 members in 45 affiliated unions in 1919.[25] White Labourism's roots lay partly in the traditions of the first unions: these were craft bodies formed by immigrants, mainly from the 1880s, and their craft exclusiveness soon blurred into a larger racial exclusiveness; this was carried over into later industrial unions, and was reinforced by fierce class struggles that saw employers pit African and white against one another. The most tumultuous was the great Rand Revolt of 1922—a general strike by white labour that escalated into an armed rebellion, as well as racial clashes—which was directly precipitated by an attempt to replace white miners with African miners. Many elements of White Labourism would be adopted by mainstream Afrikaner nationalism.

The second key approach to the national question was identified with the CPSA from 1928 when—under pressure from the Communist International (Comintern)—it adopted the "Native Republic" thesis. This defined the key task of the party as establishing "an Independent South African Native Republic as a stage towards the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, guaranteeing protection and complete equality towards all national minorities".[26] This approach effectively answered the national question by separating national liberation and socialism into separate stages with distinct strategic tasks, with the first stage aiming at the "bourgeois-democratic" goal of black majority-rule in an independent republic. (The Comintern applied this two-stage approach—formal independence first, socialism later—across the colonial and semi-colonial world at this time, also considering it

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[24] South African Labour Party, "Programme of Principles", in D.W. Krűger (ed.), *South African Parties and Policies, 1910–1960: a select source book*, Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, [1910] 1960, 73.

[25] Bernard Hessian, "An Investigation into the Causes of the Labour Agitation on the Witwatersrand, January to March, 1922", MA diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1957, 6.

[26] Communist Party of South Africa, "Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa adopted at the seventh annual congress of the Party on 1 January, 1929", in Brian Bunting (ed.), *South African Communists Speak: documents from the history of the South African Communist Party, 1915–1980*, London: Inkululeko Publishers, [1929] 1981, 104. For the Comintern resolution itself, see Executive Committee of the Communist International, "Resolution on 'The South African Question'", in Bunting (ed.), *South African Communists Speak*.

as a programme for the "black belt" region of the United States of America).[27]

There was some disagreement in the CPSA over the concrete implications of the Native Republic. In the first place, the new approach was adopted during Comintern's "New Line" era (1928–1935), which stressed the need to Bolshevise parties by purging unreliable elements, and to end all cooperation with non-Communists: revolution was assumed to be imminent.[28] This suggested that the CPSA would lead both stages, if necessary through front organisations. This lent itself, in turn, to the view that the Native Republic would assume a radical character under party control, and so, shift rapidly into socialism—rather like Mao Zedong's and Le Duan's version of two-stage theory.[29]

After the New Line era ended, the approach was abandoned. The party was initially divided over whether the CPSA should lead the first stage of the struggle, or leave that role to the African (or perhaps even the Afrikaner) nationalists.[30] Ultimately, it decided to aim at a "united front" of "all nationalities and all anti-colonialist classes", led by the ANC and fighting for a unitary, democratic and capitalist state with land reform and partial nationalisation.[31] Thus if the two-stage theory had always suggested that the first stage be undertaken by some sort of cross-class nationalist front, this final formulation suggested that this must be embodied in an explicitly nationalist movement for "national-democratic revolution", independent of party control.

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[27] See, for example, Marc Becker, "Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America", *Science and Society*, 70: 4, 2006, 450–479.

[28] Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, 108.

[29] See Mao Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: in commemoration of the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Communist Party of China", in Editorial Committee for Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung (ed.), *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, [1949] 1971.

[30] A revealing debate took place in the Cape-based CPSA theoretical review, *Freedom/Vryheid*, in the 1940s: see, *inter alia*, Harry Snichter, January 1941, "A People's Programme", *Freedom/Vryheid*; "G", March 1941, "Short-Term Programme: a critique on comrade Snichter's 'Peoples Programme", *Freedom/Vryheid*; Cape District Committee, March 1941, "The Cape District Committee and the People's Programme", in *ibid*.; East London Group, March 1941, "Comments on 'A People's Programme", in *ibid*.

[31] South African Communist Party, "The Road to South African Freedom", in Bunting (ed.), *South African Communists Speak*, 311, 313–20. See also David Everatt, "Alliance Politics of a Special Type: the roots of the ANC/SACP alliance, 1950–54", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18: 1, 1991, 19–39.

The party had, in effect, ultimately reduced itself a support group for the African nationalists, viewing *nationalism* as the true bearer of national liberation, rather than as merely *one* approach to *national liberation*. Thus, the CPSA/SACP—which was in the 1930s and 1940s both numerically larger than the ANC, and dramatically more influential in unions and in black communities—surrendered its energies, and its proclaimed vanguard role, to its weaker nationalist rival.

The Communist school analysis of the early left

As the CPSA developed, its leadership naturally wished to chronicle its history and to establish its claims to be "the true vanguard of the workers in the fight for the liberation of South Africa", bathed in the "light of Marxist-Leninist science".[32] As part of this project, the Communist school argued that the pre-CPSA left was comprised of two main currents, often co-existing within the same groups.

The first comprised the proto-Bolsheviks, a minority described as the "Communist nucleus" of "true socialists".[33] This referred to a number of veteran radicals who not only helped found but also played a key role in CPSA. In Communist school texts, these activists are seen to have a sort of instinctive Bolshevism even before the CPSA, supposedly "closely approaching the stand of Lenin".[34] Later, this provided the foundation of the CPSA. The other current comprised, supposedly, everyone else on the early left—the anarchists and syndicalists featuring prominently but, critically, as never more than an annoying minority—and was basically seen as providing a series of object lessons in the errors of "ultra-left" posturing, sectarian ineffectiveness, and abstract dogmatism.

In general, then, the pre-CPSA left was seen as rather a failure, although it contained within itself the germs of the "true vanguard". This was exemplified by its approaches to the national question: the proto-Bolshevik minority advocated "a more strictly 'working class'

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[32] Dedication on frontispiece of Michael Harmel [writing as "A. Lerumo"], *Fifty Fighting Years: the Communist Party of South Africa 1921–71*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 1987 [1971].

[33] Yusuf Dadoo, 1981, "Introduction by Dr Yusuf Dadoo, National Chairman of the South African Communist Party", in Bunting (ed.), *South African Communists Speak*, xv.

[34] Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African revolutionary*, London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975, 20; Bunting (ed.), *South African Communists Speak*, 48; Harmel, 33–37.

attitude towards the blacks";[35] the rest, predictably, failed to address the national question adequately. At best, they "ignored" the "revolutionary significance" of equal rights.[36] Viewing "the national oppression of the majority of people in our country" as "not really very worthy of consideration",[37] they "studiously" "evaded the colour issue".[38] At worst, they embraced key elements of White Labourism, and overtly supported segregation and colour bars.[39]

It fell to the proto-Bolsheviks, then, to "pioneer socialist work amongst the black workers", and move "step by step" towards an "appreciation" of the "true nature" of the problem.[40] Despite their great efforts, even these bold pioneers failed. It was only in the CPSA of the late 1920s that the national question was first adequately addressed, when with the "fraternal assistance of the world Communist movement and the inspiration of Lenin's ideas", the CPSA adopted the "Native Republic" thesis.[41] Only then could the party grasp the 'revolutionary' character of African nationalism, leading to the 'fusion' of class struggle and national struggle—in concrete terms, an alliance between the CPSA/SACP and the ANC, finally established in the late 1940s.[42]

According to this narrative, in short, the left before the CPSA was basically a white movement; it could only indigenise from the late 1920s when it adopted the two-stage approach; and it was the growing understanding of Marxism-Leninism—the achievement, alone, of the CPSA/SACP—that first provided an adequate basis to address the

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[35] Eddie Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: a history of the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa*, second ed. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, [1964] 1978, 129.

[36] Harmel, 42.

[37] Cronin, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", 12.

[38] Eddie Roux, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, University of the Western Cape, Bellville: Mayibuye Books, [1944] 1993, 74–7; see also Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 129–135; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 139–141, 144–145, 154.

[39] Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 191–192 .

[40] Bunting, *Moses Kotane,* 20.

[41] Cronin, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", 14; Harmel, 42.

[42] Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 186; Jeremy Cronin, "Rediscovering our Socialist History", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 15: 3, 1990, 99–100; Forman, 3 July 1958, quoted in Sadie Forman and Andre Odendaal, "Introduction", in Sadie Forman and Andre Odendaal (eds.)., *Lionel Forman: a trumpet from the rooftops*, London/Cape Town, Johannesburg/Athens, Ohio: Zed Books/David Philips/Ohio University Press, 1992, xxiv; Harmel, 86, 87–9, 93–4, 96–7; Jack Simon, "Lectures on Marxism-Leninism, Novo Catengue 1977–1979", in edited by Marion Sparg, Jenny Schreiner and Gwen Ansell (eds.), *Comrade Jack: the political lectures and diary of Jack Simons, Novo Catengue,* New Doornfontein/Johannesburg STE publishers/African National Congress, [1977–1979] 2001, 183, also 153.

national question. This narrative then points to the rapid recruitment of people of colour into the CPSA in the late 1920s as evidence of the correctness of the Native Republic, and as, supposedly, the first instance of black adherence to a radical socialist position.

Emergent anarchism and syndicalism in South Africa, 1886–1913

These claims are all highly doubtful, as indicated in the opening statements in this chapter, and as will be now demonstrated in the following discussion. The local anarchist tradition may be dated back to the 1880s and the tireless efforts of Henry Glasse. An Englishman born in 1857 in Surat, India, Glasse was involved in radical London circles before moving to Port Elizabeth by the start of the 1880s.[43] This was a thriving port but rapidly losing ground to Cape Town—capital of the Cape Colony, and later the seat of the Union parliament—in the battle for trade with the inland mining centres.[44]

Glasse worked in a range of jobs, including a stint on the Witwatersrand mines, wrote for Peter Kropotkin's *Freedom* in London and the Cape labour press, and engaged with workers through the local Mechanics' Institute, a worker-education centre.[45] In short, he was rather typical of the radical European immigrants who introduced the various socialist trends into South Africa in the late 19th century.[46]

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[43] Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, London: Freedom Press, [1934] 1996, 382; H. Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London*, London/New Jersey,: Croom Helm/Rowman and Littlefield, 1983, 4–5, 7, 46, 70, 145–146, 149; John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: the lost history of the British anarchists*, London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Paladin, Grenade Press, 1978, 8–9.

[44] Alan Mabin, "The Rise and Decline of Port Elizabeth, 1850–1900", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 19: 2, 1986, 288–289, 295–298; also see Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995, 11–13, 16–17, 43–6, 129–130.

[45] Henry Glasse, 1901, *Socialism the Remedy: being a lecture delivered in the Mechanics' Institute, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, by Henry Glasse*, Freedom Press, London, International Institute of Social History library holdings, catalogue no. AN 90/65; Henry Glasse, 6 October 1905, "To Work! To Work! A reply to Brutus", *The Cape Workers Vanguard* (hereafter *CWV.*) and Henry Glasse, 13 October 1905, "To Work! To Work! A reply to Brutus (Concluded)", *CWV.*; [Henry Glasse], November-December 1905, "International Notes: South Africa", *Freedom* (kindly provided by Marrianne Enckell of the Centre for International Research on Anarchism, Switzerland); Nettlau, 262, 382; Oliver, 70 note 34, 46, 70, 145–6, 149.

[46] Cf. the profile of immigrant English, German and Italian radicals developed in Sheridan W. Johns, *Raising the Red Flag: the International Socialist League and the*

It was in South Africa that Glasse translated a number of key works by Kropotkin; these remain the standard English editions. He also acted as a local distributor of Freedom Press materials, like Errico Malatesta's pamphlets, and Kropotkin's Russian-language paper, *Kleb i Volya* ("Bread and Liberty"), which was sold mainly to local Jewish anarchists.[47] In 1901, Freedom Press published Glasse's *Socialism the Remedy*,[48] and the following year his *The Superstition of Government* was honoured by being jointly published with Kropotkin's *Organised Vengeance, Called "Justice"*.[49] Around this time, he managed to form a Socialist Club, to which he gave his "exposition of Socialism from the Anarchist or Libertarian Standpoint" to a "very good audience".[50] Like Kropotkin, he was very favourably disposed to syndicalism, looking to the "great and final conflict—the General Strike which will also be the Social Revolution".[51]

While Glasse's writings sometimes rested on fairly general and abstract arguments ("Peasant, seize the land; workman, seize the factory"),[52] he was keenly aware of the impact of colonialism, and the *specific* problems faced by Africans as a conquered people. Writing to Kropotkin, he argued:[53]

> I have worked in the mine with them, and lived amongst them in the Cape Colony, and now I am trading with them; and I can assure you, dear comrade, that I would rather live amongst them, than amongst many who call themselves 'civilised'. You can still find amongst them the principle of Communism—primitive Communism…I have seen amongst them, such brotherly love, such human feelings, such help for one another that are quite unknown between 'civilised' people…

Communist Party of South Africa, 1914–32, Bellville: Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, 1995, 24–30.

[47] Henry Glasse, 6 September 1896, letter to C.M. Wilson, and H. Glasse, 12 December 1900, letter to J. Turner, manager of Freedom, both in Alfred Marsh Papers, International Institute of Social History; [Henry Glasse], "International Notes". On *Kleb i Volya*, see Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967, 54, 61, 63, 84, 107.

[48] Henry Glasse, 1901, *Socialism the Remedy*.

[49] Peter Kropotkin/Henry Glass, 1902, *Organised Vengeance, Called "Justice"/The Superstition of Government*, Freedom Press, London, International Institute of Social History library holdings, catalogue no. AN 29/1202A.

[50] Henry Glasse, 12 December 1900, letter to J. Turner.

[51] Henry Glasse, 13 October 1905, "To Work! To Work! A reply to Brutus (Concluded)", *CWV*.

[52] Glasse, 1901, *Socialism the Remedy,* 11.

[53] [Glasse], "International Notes".

Glasse's idealisation of pre-capitalist cultures (and ironic play on the Western claim to be 'civilised') was linked to a detailed critique of an order that "robbed and ill-treated" the Africans:

> They must not walk on the pavement, but in the middle of the road. They must not ride in cabs or tram, and in the trains there are separate compartments for them, just like cattle trucks. They must have passes *a la* Russia, and are allowed to live only in the 'location', those Ghettos set aside for them. They are not allowed to be on the streets after 9 p.m., in the land that was once their own—their Fatherland!

This outraged critique was a critical step in the application of anarchist working class internationalism to the South African situation. Glasse took a further, crucial, step when he argued for an interracial working class movement with the correct position "in regard to the native and coloured question": race hatred was used to divide and rule.[54] "For a white worker in this South Africa to pretend he can successfully fight his battle independent of the coloured wage slaves—the vast majority—is, to my mind, simply idiocy".[55]

This line of thought was also characteristic of the Cape Town-based SDF. This was founded on May Day, 1904, emerged from amongst skilled white workers, and in 1905, co-organised Cape Town's first May Day with the local Trades and Labour Council.[56] The city had grown dramatically: in 1891, Port Elizabeth's population was 23,000 compared to Cape Town's 79,000; by 1904, the figures were 33,000 to 170,000, respectively.[57] It had been boosted by 70,000 newcomers: 34,000 from Europe, mainly from Britain, but including 9,000 Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe; 21,000 Coloureds; 9,000 Africans; 2,000 Afrikaners; and 2,000 Indians.[58] A major port, it benefited from close links to Kimberley and Johannesburg and British military activity, and developed a significant manufacturing and service sector with the aid of access to cheap imported inputs for products like paint and soap.[59]

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[54] Wilfred Harrison, 1 July 1910, "Anarchy", *The Voice of Labour*, hereafter *VOL*.

[55] See, for example, *VOL*., 26 January 1912, letter from Glasse.

[56] Jack Erasmus, 8 June 1905, "Social Democratic Federation: annual report", *South African News*, press clipping, Max Nettlau Collection, International Institute of Social History; Ticktin, 330.

[57] Bickford-Smith, 11, table 1.

[58] Bickford-Smith, 130–131.

[59] Bickford-Smith, 130; Bill Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders: the Indian working class of Durban, 1910–1990*, Portsmouth/Pietermaritzburg/London: Heinemann/University of Natal Press/James Currey, 1995, 29–31; also see Martin Nicol, "A History of

Port Elizabeth was a largely African and white city, but Cape Town was shaped decisively by the large Coloured population. In the South African context, 'Coloured' refers to a category of Westernised, mixed-race, people of colour largely descended from the old Cape's underclasses, and mainly Afrikaans-speaking. In the local racial hierarchy, Coloureds stood above the Africans, but below the dominant whites, although most were wretchedly poor. Not only did the majority of Coloureds live in the western and northern Cape, including Cape Town and Kimberley, but in these regions they formed the clear majority overall. Moreover, the combined Coloured and white population in these areas greatly overshadowed the African population. Africans were only 4 percent of the Cape Town population by 1921,[60] and just 14 percent of the city's industrial workforce in 1924 despite rapid industrialisation.[61]

This demography was quite unique in the Union, and meant that the majority of the Cape Town working class was free labour. While most Coloureds were labourers, there was an important and growing artisan layer,[62] many of whom could vote. There was also a relatively high degree of social integration between Coloured and white: for example, many although not all Cape craft unions admitted Coloureds, quite unlike the situation in other regions.[63] The Cape Federation of Labour Unions (1913, succeeding bodies like the Trades and Labour Council) therefore remained outside the segregationist SAIF, which in turn made few inroads into the northern and western Cape.[64] The Federation was rather small, with sixteen affiliates by 1919, the largest

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Garment and Tailoring Workers in Cape Town, 1900–1939", Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 70–71.

[60] Debbie Budlender, "A History of Stevedores in Cape Town Docks", Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1976, 6 table IV.

[61] Nicol, 75.

[62] Ian Goldin, "The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity in the Western Cape", in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, London: Longman, 1987, 159; Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*, Cape Town, Johannesburg David Philips, 1987, 12, 65–66; Nicol, 19–21.

[63] R.C. Stuart, August 1950, "I Look Back", *Trade Union Bulletin*, 3–4. Also see Bickford-Smith, 164–185; Lewis, 16–17; also see Pieter van Duin, "Artisans and Trade Unions in the Cape Town Building Industry", in Wilmot G. James and Mary Simons (eds.), *The Angry Divide: social and economic history of the Western Cape*, Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philips, 1989; Duin, "South Africa".

[64] Lewis, 94–95; Nicol, 93–95.

with barely 400 members; it was not more than 6,000 strong.[65] Yet Coloureds faced growing official segregation and popular discrimination from the late 19th century, with low Coloured wages a symptom of a widening divide in the working class movement.[66]

The SDF appears in the Communist school texts as a small church of "evangelical socialists" that ignored issues like race,[67] while supposedly cleaving to the dogmatic Marxism of "Hyndman in England".[68] This is rather an uncharitable, not to mention misleading, description of an organisation that was by any measure one of the most important socialist groups before the CPSA. With a large and often dominant anarchist wing, its achievements included organising interracial unions and unemployed demonstrations, producing the country's first 20th century socialist paper, and being the first left group to have its members jailed for their anti-capitalist beliefs; it also helped found the CPSA itself.

Initially, the SDF was a moderate body, and statist besides, with a reform platform that did not even mention socialism, despite the group's early sympathy for H.M. Hyndman's Marxist SDF in Britain.[69] From this improbable beginning, the group would come to play a key role in the emergence of a strong anarchist current in Cape Town.

In the first place, unlike the Hyndman SDF, its membership was always politically diverse, including "anarchists, reform socialists, guild socialists",[70] with the strong "anarchist section" including key figures like "Levinson, Strauss, Hahne, Ahrens and others…all of European

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[65] See G. Giffard, "'Cutting the Current': Cape Town tramway workers and the 1932 strike", Department of Economic History, University of Cape Town, 1984, 10.

[66] Duin, "Artisans and Trade Unions", 98.

[67] Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 139–140, 142–143.

[68] R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W.H. Andrews, workers' leader*, Cape Town: Stewart Printing, [? 1943], 96.

[69] Jack Erasmus, 8 June 1905, "Social Democratic Federation: annual report", *South African News*, press clipping, Max Nettlau Collection; also see Special Correspondent, 6 February 1905, "Capetown's Meeting of Sympathy", *Cape Daily Telegraph*, press clipping in *ibid*., and James Kier Hardie, 5 May 1908, "In Cape Colony", *The Labour Leader* and James Kier Hardie, 22 May 1908, "South Africa: Conclusions", *The Labour Leader*; Social Democratic Federation, [1904] 1973, "The Cape Town Social Democratic Federation's Fighting Platform, 1904", available as appendix B, I, 2 in Ticktin, 497, Cf. the British SDF: Social Democratic Federation, 1904, *Programme and Rules, as revised at the annual congresses held at Shoreditch Town Hall, London, Easter, 1903, and at St. James's Hall, Burnley, Easter, 1904*, London: Twentieth Century Press, International Institute of Social History library holdings, catalogue no. E 1600/260.

[70] Johns, 31.

origin".[71] Glasse also linked up with the group, writing for its press.[72] These anarchists played a key role in pushing the organisation to the left, and set its pace; although it was never a purely anarchist formation, it cannot be described in any meaningful way as 'Marxist',[73] nor properly understood unless the often dominant anarchist influence is admitted.

In the second place, there was a major conflict amongst the founder members in the first two years: this led the more moderate and statist element to withdraw, and left Harrison, a carpenter, unionist and ex-soldier, the key figure in the SDF. Harrison's ascendancy was important not only because of his excellent organising skills, charisma and dynamism, but also because of his deep commitment to anarchism. A "staunch and unwavering class fighter",[74] he was a brilliant speaker who embraced the views of his friend Kropotkin.[75] It was Harrison who first used the word 'communism' in the South African press, discussing anarchist-communism.[76] An "inveterate soap-box orator" who breathed "hellfire and brimstone at capitalism" with a "fluent tongue",[77] he told crowds of Africans, Coloureds and whites at SDF rallies that:[78]

> Capitalism was on its last legs…Fields, factories and workshops were to be owned and controlled by those who worked in them…Kropotkin had proved that the problem of production had been solved. It now remained only a question of ownership and distribution…laws—as we know them—will be quite unnecessary.

Even sceptics were impressed by the "forceful and appealing way" he "presented his case", which "might almost have convinced many that the Social and Economic Revolution was about to take place next day,

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[71] Wilfred Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903–47*, foreword by Tommy Boydell, Cape Town: Stewart Printing, [? 1947], 16, 118– 119.

[72] For example, *The Cape Socialist Vanguard*, July 1905, includes a lengthy Kropotkin translation by Glasse.

[73] Contra. Cope, 96–7; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 76; Ticktin, 339; Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, 194.

[74] Cope, 96–7.

[75] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 32, 38, 119–120; Wilfred Harrison, 1 July 1910, "Anarchy", *VOL*.

[76] Wessel Visser, "Die Geskiedenis en Rol van Persorgane in the Politieke en Ekonomiese Mobilisasie van die Georganiseerde Arbeiderbeweging in Suid-Afrika, 1908–1924", Ph.D., University of Stellenbosch, 2001, 217.

[77] Tommy Boydell, *"My Luck was In": with spotlights on General Smuts*, Cape Town: Stewart Printing, n.d., 41.

[78] Tommy Boydell, [? 1947] n.d., "Foreword", to Harrison, *Memoirs*, viii, ix.

or at the very latest by the end of that week". The SDF's short-lived monthly, the *Cape Socialist*, continued the theme, mixing commentary and notices with lengthy extracts from Kropotkin, courtesy of Glasse.[79]

The SDF set up a bookshop, reading room, refreshment bar, a "Socialist Hall" and reading circle at its first offices in Adderley street, and held Sunday talks at the van Riebeeck statue on the Cape Parade, the central public space; it also hired the City Hall on occasion; there were also SDF events at the 'Stone' in Clifton street in District Six, a multiracial but mainly Coloured slum.[80] Both the statue and the Stone provided Hyde Park-style speaker's corners, the former frequented mainly by Coloureds and whites, the latter mainly by Coloureds and Africans. Activities at the Stone were organised via former APO leader, unionist, and SDF sympathiser, John Tobin. Obsessed with using every available platform for propaganda, the SDF, the anarchist Harrison included, stood candidates in elections—without any real intention of taking office if elected.

Major SDF events could attract thousands of people. When the SDF campaigned against World War I, its meetings at the Parade packed the Dock Road from the Flat Iron Building to the Carlton Hotel.[81] Unlike the more segregated public sphere elsewhere, these public events routinely attracted significant numbers of Coloureds, as well as some Africans. As the SDF grew, it relocated to larger offices in Plein and Barrack streets, where it sublet space to unions,[82] ran a refreshment bar, and kept a printing press.[83] It provided members with an active social life, with visits to the beach, a choir, and even a few socialist christenings.[84]

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[79] The sole surviving issue, named as *The Cape Socialist Vanguard: official organ of the Social Democratic Federation—Cape District*, is in the folder "The Cape Socialist Vanguard: organ of the Forward Labour Movement", mixed up with the *CWV.*, in the serials collection, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam. On the paper, see Harrison, *Memoirs*, 5–6, 9–10.

[80] Erasmus, 1905, "Social Democratic Federation"; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 13. On the "Stone" and Tobin, see Lewis, 18–19, 26–27, 45, 56–57.

[81] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 50–62.

[82] Union resentment of SDF rates (and noise from SDF events) eventually led to the rooms being provided free, a generous subsidy to the unions: *CWV.*, May 1906, "Trades and Labour Council: Friday, April 27".

[83] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 6.

[84] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 16.

The SDF kept its platform open to a range of controversial speakers, like the young Mohandas Gandhi—then emerging as a champion of the local Indians—who at the time "declared himself a Socialist".[85] When James Keir Hardie of Britain's Independent Labour Party toured South Africa in 1908, he was dogged by hostile white crowds incensed at his defence of African and Indian claims.[86] After the Cape Trades and Labour Council fearfully cancelled his reception, it was the SDF who hosted Hardie in an event that he fondly recalled as "far and away the most enthusiastic I had".[87] In 1910, it hosted British syndicalist Tom Mann, another radical who defended people of colour, impressing the APO with his "vigorous appeal to all wage-earners to organise and present a united front".[88]

Across the colour line: the SDF achievement

These actions show up the Communist school claim that the SDF "ignored" race or saw it as a "side issue", or never "in practice" took "steps to organise the non-white worker or to openly propagate racial equality".[89] Identifying with Hardie, and then Mann, strengthened its already favourable reputation amongst Coloureds, but that reputation rested on a deeper opposition to racism. Like Glasse, Harrison viewed racial prejudice as basically caused by capitalism, and as antithetical to working class interests: he was quick to put down the perennial hecklers on this issue.[90]

Alone on the Cape union and left scene, the SDF condemned the draft Act of the Union of South Africa in 1909: its colour bar clauses were "contrary to all Democratic principles, and an insult to the

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[85] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 36, 143.

[86] See James Kier Hardie, 17 April 1908, "South Africa: in Natal", *The Labour Leader*; Jonathan Hyslop, "The World Voyage of James Keir Hardie: Indian nationalism, Zulu insurgency and the British labour diaspora 1907–1908", *Journal of Global History*, 1, 2006, 343–362.

[87] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 19–22; Hardie, "South Africa: Conclusions".

[88] Quoted in Lionel Forman, [1959] 1992, "Chapters in the History of the March for Freedom", in Forman and Odendaal (eds.), *Lionel Forman,* 43; also see John Philips, "The South African Wobblies: the origins of industrial unions in South Africa", *Ufuhama*, 8: 3, 1978, 122–138, 123.

[89] Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 139–140; van Duin, "South Africa", 649.

[90] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 105.

coloured races of South Africa".[91] This aligned it with the APO, then mounting a vigorous campaign against what it viewed as an "un-British" and "retrogressive" bill.[92] While the SDF participated in several of the meetings leading to the founding of the SA Labour Party, it withdrew once a reformist and segregationist platform was adopted.[93] The SDF's unstinting critique of the British Empire even garnered praise from *De Burger* ("The Citizen"), the Afrikaner nationalist paper then edited by D.F. Malan.[94]

By 1910 the SDF could report that it was developing a Coloured constituency,[95] anticipating the interracial membership of the CPSA by nearly twenty years. Such, indeed, was its credibility of the SDF amongst Coloureds that Harrison won 212 votes against APO leader Doctor Abdullah Abdurrahman's 543 in a campaign in District Six,[96] notwithstanding Abdurrahman's powerful political machine. Meanwhile, the SDF set up a propaganda commission to reach Africans, gave talks in Afrikaans as well as isiXhosa, drew people of colour into its committees, and reach out to the APO; this influenced Abdurrahman himself to sometimes employ socialist rhetoric.[97] The APO hired the Socialist Hall for its 1909 conference, and backed an SDF candidate in the 1910 municipal elections.[98]

Meanwhile, SDF activists like Harrison and J. Dibble of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners sought to remove union

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[91] Quoted in Ticktin, 340; *VOL.*, 21 August 1909. The Transvaal Labour Party, a forerunner of the SA Labour Party, sent a secret counter-appeal to British Labour, opposing any amendments: Lewis, 53.

[92] Abdullah Abdurahman, "The 1909 Presidential Address, Cape Town, 13 April 1909", in edited by R.E. van der Ross (ed.), *Say it Loud: the APO presidential addresses and other major speeches, 1906–1940, of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman*, Bellville: The Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, [1909] 1990, 48.

[93] Cope, 112.

[94] Visser, "Die Geskiedenis en Rol", 18.

[95] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 23; Forman, "Chapters", 42–4; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 13; A.W. Noon, 22 April 1910, "Cape Notes", *VOL.*

[96] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 24.

[97] Cope, 143; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 23; Forman, "Chapters", 35, 42–44 ; Harmel, 29–30; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 13; Lewis, 54–55, 78–79, 98 ; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 76–77, 122, 125–128; van Duin, "Artisans and Trade Unions", 104–105.

[98] See A.W. Noon, 22 April 1910, "Cape Notes", *VOL.*; also see Lewis, 54–55; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 113.

colour bars, to unionise Coloureds, and to secure equal pay.[99] As noted, some Cape craft unions admitted Coloureds. Now, Harrison and company pushed this further: in 1905, the SDF, with Trades and Labour Council backing launched the SA General Workers' Union, "open to all branches of labour who have not a specific Union to join", regardless of race.[100] It drew in Coloured and white bricklayers and painters, Jewish tailors and boot makers, tramway workers, and Greek and Jewish cigarette rollers, becoming a major part of the local union movement.[101] SDF members and Jewish workers also initiated a tailors' union of "all nationalities", although this had little success in drawing in Coloureds.[102] With the APO and others, the SDF set out to unionise the cabinet makers, painters, printers and paperhangers. When the cigarette rollers struck, and were locked out, the strikers set up a "Knock Out" and "Lock Out" cigarette cooperative on SDF premises; SDF enthusiasts had previously set up short-lived co-operatives by bakers and boot makers.[103]

The onset of depression helped drive the strikes, and also prompted SDF efforts at running soup kitchens in District Six.[104] The SDF also took the lead in organised mass meetings of the multiracial unemployed in mid-1906, where cigarette maker and SDF anarchist Levinson called for direct action by the hungry.[105] Young German radical Otto Meyer demanded the crowds "Bring arms, and plenty of ammunition and a black flag".[106] Marches on parliament, led by Harrison, Tobin and others, and backed by the APO and the unions, eventually led to

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[99] Forman, "Chapters", 42–4; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 17–18, 22–26; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 139.

[100] *CWV.*, 27 October 1905, 2; also Bickford-Smith, 174.

[101] *CWV.*, March 1906, "Tramway Guards and Motormen"; Bickford-Smith, 174; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 1995, 32–39; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 74; Visser, "Die Geskiedenis en Rol", 10.

[102] Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 32–40, quote from 38; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 74; also see Lewis, 19.

[103] Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 36–37, 56–61; *CWV.*, June 1906, "Men versus Money: the Lock Out"; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 10; Evangelos Mantzaris, "From the History of Bundist Activity in South Africa", *Bulletin of the Bund Archives of the Jewish Labour Movement*, 3: 31, 1981/82, 3; Ivan L. Walker and Ben Weinbren, *2,000 Casualties: a history of the trade unions and the labour movement in the history of South Africa*, Johannesburg: South African Trade Union Council, 1961, 18–19.

[104] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 9.

[105] *Cape Times*, 7 August 1906, "[Editorial] Hooligans and Unemployed"; *Cape Times*, 8 August 1906, "[Editorial] Leaders and Led"; Harrison, *Memoirs*, 8–9.

[106] Quoted in R. Hallet, "The Hooligan Riots: Cape Town: August 1906", University of Cape Town, mimeo, 1978, 15.

three days of looting and clashes with police.[107] Nearly fifty rioters were arrested and charged,[108] while Levinson, *Cape Socialist* editor Abraham Needham, and Meyer were arrested for inflammatory speeches—"the first time…South African socialists found themselves jailed for their beliefs".[109] Although Levinson was acquitted, Meyer got twelve months with hard labour.[110]

Syndicalism on the Witwatersrand

Around this time, the left on the Witwatersrand displaced that of the western Cape in importance. A critical development was the 1908 launch of South Africa's first socialist weekly, the *Voice of Labour*, in Johannesburg. Initially this paper was a free information sheet used to promote a short-lived General Workers' Union at the Witwatersrand, Kimberley and Bloemfontein, the latter the capital of the old Orange Free State. When the union foundered, the paper was reinvented as a socialist paper by Archie Crawford, a radical fitter, and his partner Mary Fitzgerald; it claimed a very respectable circulation of 2,000 at its height. The energetic Harrison helped proofread the paper, wrote pieces, and arranged for its Cape distribution via the SDF.[111]

In practice, the *Voice of Labour* was basically an open forum that networked "the leading Socialists of Durban, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, Cape Town and Johannesburg",[112] and sometimes Southern Rhodesia. Its contents were consequently very varied, especially initially: alongside articles on "The State and the Child" and "Good Government" could be found articles on anarchism, syndicalism, and the merits of direct action over parliamentary politics by Glasse, Harrison and others.[113]

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[107] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 8–9; also see *Cape Times*, 7 August 1906, "Hooligans and Unemployed: disgraceful scenes", Hallet, 15–27.

[108] *Cape Times*, 7 August 1906, "Hooligans and Unemployed: disgraceful scenes"; *Cape Times*, 8 August 1906, "Mob and Police"; *South African Times*, 7 August 1906, "Unemployed Raids in City"; *South African Times*, 8 August 1907, "Hooligans Renew Raids".

[109] Forman, "Chapters", 42–44.

[110] Hallet, 27–31.

[111] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 36.

[112] Archie Crawford, 14 August 1909, "A Socialist Party", *VOL.*

[113] For example, it could carry W.H. Pritchard, 14 August 1909, "Good Government: a noble legacy", *VOL.*, alongside Henry Glasse, 15 September 1910, "My Notion of Anarchism", *VOL.*, and Wilfred Harrison, 1 July 1910, "Anarchy", *VOL.*

Crawford (and thus, the *Voice of Labour*) appears in the works of the Communist school as a man "tempted to compromise" on race, who "evaded the colour issue" and failed to critique the SA Labour Party's embrace of "white supremacy".[114] This demonstrates the Communist school's tendency to caricature the pre-CPSA left, for Crawford repeatedly insisted, on the contrary, that "Socialism passes over geographic boundaries and transcends all lines, which some diseased organs of society seek…to draw between Races and colours".[115]

Crawford dismissed segregation as "foolish in the extreme", lambasted the unions for ignoring the "300,000 coloured workers on the Rand, two-thirds…on the mines", and championed the local Indians' struggle against increasingly restrictive legislation.[116] He walked out of the founding of the SA Labour Party when his opposition to its segregationist platform was rejected,[117] and ran as a candidate for the small Socialist Party in the 1910 general elections. In his campaign, Crawford argued "on the question of Colour, and at more than one time it looked like he would be torn to pieces by an ignorant mob".[118]

The significance of Crawford's stance as editor was that it set the tone for the *Voice* and the network that emerged around it, with a solid commitment to working class solidarity across the colour line that also linked it to IWW-style syndicalism then emerging locally. Local radicals shared the "disillusion…in the value of parliamentary reform" that was "spreading from Europe, from Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand", and embraced the "doctrines of the revolutionary Syndicalists with their faith in the industrial struggle and the general strike and their mistrust of politics".[119]

Mann's 1910 tour, which preached the "gospel…of a complete change of society" and the "perfected system industrial organisation to

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[114] Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 141, 144–145, 154.

[115] Archie Crawford, 31 July 1909, "Irrespective…of Colour", *VOL.*

[116] Archie Crawford, 8 March 1910, "From the Watch Tower", *VOL.*; Archie Crawford, 4 December 1909, "Economic Considerations", *VOL.*; *VOL.*, 13 March 1909, "In Defence of the Indians".

[117] See Ticktin, 420–424.

[118] *VOL.*, 16 September 1910; *VOL.*, 20 November 1909, "Notes of the Week: no compromise!"; Contra. the Communist school version, expressed in Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 141, 154, and replicated in the work of Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy,* 273.

[119] Cope, 108–110.

make this possible",[120] directly inspired the founding of the local SLP in Johannesburg in March 1910.[121] Often misunderstood as a "Marxist" organisation,[122] it was a syndicalist group following the doctrines of Daniel De Leon, the American IWW leader. Links with De Leonism were mainly, however, with the SLP in Scotland, which was the core of the British SLP (1903),[123] rather than De Leon in Detroit. Scots provided key members of the local group: Jock Campbell, the "leader",[124] J.M. Gibson, the key ideologue, John Campbell, and Ralph Rabb and W. Reid. Also important were Jews like Israel Israelstam, who also had links to the Jewish Bund and the SDF,[125] Englishmen like the union activist Charlie Tyler, and even that rarity on the left, an Afrikaner, the chemist Philip Roux.

At Mann's urging, the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council—forerunner of the SAIF—sponsored an Industrial Workers Union to organise workers ineligible for the craft bodies.[126] This held regular Sunday night meetings at the Market Square—Johannesburg's equivalent of Cape Town's Parade—and managed to secure the affiliation of the independent Bootmakers' Association, the Bakers' and Confectioners' Society, and the Tailors' Society. Local syndicalists like the Irish tram driver Tom Glynn nonetheless viewed the union as a "disgrace to the originators" of radical industrial unionism, the IWW, because of its links to the moderate Council and the segregationist SA Labour Party.[127]

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[120] Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, London, Reading and Fakenham: MacGibbon and Kee, [1923] 1967, 245, 247.

[121] "Socialist Labour Party of South Africa—Incorporation", Department of Law, file LD 1806–AG677/10, National Archives, Pretoria.

[122] For example, Eddie Roux and Win Roux, *Rebel Pity: the life of Eddie Roux*, London: Rex Collings, 1970, 7.

[123] Nan Milton, "Introduction", in Nan Milton (ed.), *John MacLean: in the rapids of revolution: essays, articles and letters*, London: Allison and Busby, 1978, 13.

[124] Walker and Weinbren, 319.

[125] Mantzaris, "From the History"; Evangelos Mantzaris, "Radical Community: the Yiddish-speaking branch of the International Socialist League, 1918–20", in Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict*, 161, 163; F.J. Grobler, "Die Invloed van Geskoolde Blanke Arbeid op die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek van 1886 tot 1924", PhD diss., University of Potchefstroom, 1968, 51, 57, 60; Ticktin, 182–183, 185, 229, also 518 appendix B, IV, 6; Visser, "Die Geskiedenis en Rol", 15–16; Harmel, 31; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 102.

[126] Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 299.

[127] Tom Glynn, 15 July 1910, "The Movement: present and future", *VOL.*

Rather than boycott the Industrial Workers Union, however, the syndicalists entered it. Glynn was soon elected its secretary-general, and along with other "industrialists"—notably the Scottish blacksmith, Dunbar—"captured the organisation and put it on a proper basis" in June 1910.[128] It was renamed the IWW, called itself a "class-conscious revolutionary organisation embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour", declared war on craft unionism, and linked up with the IWW in Chicago.[129]

Dunbar was a "hefty, stubborn-headed, well-meaning Scotsman": a fine orator, he made his reputation leading a two-week strike on the Natal railways in 1906,[130] and despised all political parties.[131] He was a fixture at the IWW's Sunday night meetings at the Market Square—held separately from those of the SLP, which met there in the mornings, where the party sold a "steady stream of journals and pamphlets" like *The Socialist* from Scotland and *The Weekly People* from the United States.[132]

Despite the loss of supporters like the Bootmakers', who protested the new direction, the IWW held successful meetings at the government railway yards in Pretoria, the old Transvaal capital which lay just north of Johannesburg, setting up a "Pretoria Local".[133] The IWW was also established in the port city of Durban, the principal centre in Natal.[134] This section was strongly identified with a "comrade Webber", who specialised in "phrase-making, blood-curdling class war

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[128] Archie Crawford, August 1911, "The Class War in South Africa: the growth and outcome of industrial unionism", *International Socialist Review*, vol.. XI, 82–83; Andrew Dunbar, 24 November 1911, "IWW Propaganda Notes", *VOL.*; *Solidarity*, 1 October 1910, "Industrial Unionism in South Africa". Also see Cope, 111.

[129] *Solidarity*, "Industrial Unionism"; Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 301; Philips, 123.

[130] See W.H. Andrews, 23 July 1937, "Natal Railway Strike", *The Guardian*, folder 8.1, W.H. Andrews Papers, Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape; Boydell, "My Luck was In", 35; Cope, 103–107; Walker and Weinbren, 26–28.

[131] Andrew Dunbar, 21 July 1911, "IWW Notes", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 29 September 1911, "IWW Notes", *VOL.*

[132] Andrew Dunbar, 24 November 1911, "IWW Propaganda Notes", *VOL.*; *The Socialist*, June 1912, "South African S.L.P"; Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 7; also *The Socialist*, October 1910, "The 'Socialist' May be Obtained at the Following Newsagents" and *The Socialist*, January 1912, "The I.W.W. in the United States".

[133] Tom Glynn, 24 November 1911, "'Recognition'", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 24 November 1911, "I.W.W. Propaganda Notes", *VOL.*; 1 December 1911, "The 'Sherman' Agitation", *VOL.*

[134] *VOL.*, 14 June 1912, "Heard and Said".

propaganda".[135] He debated Tommy Boydell of the SA Labour Party before a large crowd at the Durban Town Gardens on "Syndicalism versus Socialism".

Like Cape Town, Durban was defined by "the harbour, the railway and the commerce with the mineral-rich interior",[136] and developed a significant service and manufacturing sector. The two cities accounted, in fact, for more than half of national manufacturing by the 1920s.[137] From 1905 Durban had the shortest rail link to the Witwatersrand, enabling it to replace Cape Town as the main port.[138] The population by 1910 was 65,000 (around half was white, primarily English-speaking),[139] although the total number doubles if the outlying areas are included.[140] A quarter of the settled population were Indians, mainly descended from indentured labourers, largely low-caste Hindus. While an Indian bourgeoisie emerged, most local Indians were workers, along with small farmers and an educated elite: doctors, interpreters, lawyers, teachers and clerks.[141] Despite the best efforts of officials to whittle down the Indian vote, it was a serious factor in a number of wards in Durban.

While the IWW in Pretoria and Durban seem to have been primarily propaganda circles, in Johannesburg the IWW successfully formed a powerful Municipal Industrial Union among the white tram drivers and conductors employed by the city. This followed a successful wildcat strike led by Glynn, which was also supported by the munici-

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[135] Boydell, "Foreword", xii; *VOL.*, 14 June 1912, "Heard and Said".

[136] Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 29.

[137] Bickford-Smith, 130; Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", 80–82; Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 29–31; also see Nicol, 70–71.

[138] Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 29.

[139] John Lambert and Robert Morrell, "Domination and Subordination in Natal, 1890–1920", in Robert Morrell. (ed.), *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: historical and social perspectives*, Pietermaritzburg/Johannesburg: University of Natal Press/Indicator Press, 1996, 66.

[140] Extrapolated from figures in the late 1920s, from Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", 33.

[141] In the Umlazi district of Durban at this time, amongst Indian men there were 3,474 farm labourers, 127 labourers, 77 railway labourers, as well as 256 skilled manual workers, 107 waiters and 53 clerks, in addition to 1634 market gardeners, 176 storekeepers, 169 small cultivators, and 38 grocers: see Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 44–45, table 3.5. "Skilled manual workers" includes bakers and confectioners, barbers and their assistants, basket makers, bricklayers, carpenters and their assistants, jewellers, painters, and printers. On the bourgeoisie, see Lambert and Morrell, 66. See also Vishnu Padayachee and Robert Morrell, "Indian Merchants and *Dukawallahs* in the Natal Economy, c1875–1914", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17: 1, 1991, 71–102.

pal power station's staff. Gathered at the tram yards in Newtown, and wearing "bits of red ribbon", the strikers forced the municipality to capitulate within hours.[142] The IWW subsequently boasted of its intention to break the restrictive labour laws, which stipulated compulsory conciliation, whenever necessary.[143] The American IWW press was enthusiastic: "they are getting on the right track down in the Southern Hemisphere".[144]

With between 300 and 400 members, the IWW now compared favourably to major unions like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (the ASE, with 1351 in 1910) and the Transvaal Miners Association (at 800 in 1909).[145] A second strike followed on the trams in April 1911. This was precipitated by the sacking of Wobblies Glynn and W.P. Glendon after the IWW led a boycott of an official enquiry, in the course of which a witness was assaulted.[146]

Following fiery speeches at the tramway sheds and at the Market Square, attended by around 500 people, a second strike began. It was waged in the face of a ban on public meetings, with clashes with police led by women like Fitzgerald, and the arrest of the SLP's John Campbell, the IWW's Dunbar and the SA Labour Party's Andrews

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[142] *The Star*, "Tram Strike: scenes in the city", undated press clipping, in "Tramway Strike Johannesburg. Report by Inspector White Labour on above dated 24 January 1911", Mines and Works, MNW 44/01, M331/11, National Archives, Pretoria; W.H. Andrews, 6 August 1937, "Tram and Typo Strikers 1911", *The Guardian*, folder 8.1, W.H. Andrews Papers, Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape; Archibald Crawford, "The Class War in South Africa", *International Socialist Review*, vol. XI, 82; Walker and Weinbren, 28–9; *VOL.*, 9 February 1912, "IWW (S.A. Section): Annual General Meeting: New Officers Elected".

[143] "'Industrial Workers of the World' Union expresses contempt for the 'Industrial Disputes Prevention Act'. Inspector's comments", a letter to Acting Secretary for Mines by Inspector of White Labour (R. Shanks), Department of Mines and Works, MNW National Archives, Pretoria.

[144] *Industrial Solidarity*, "Industrial Unionism in South Africa", 1 October 1910.

[145] Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 176, 252.

[146] Letter to Acting Secretary for the Mines, 12 May 1911, Inspector of White Labour (R. Shanks), in "Johannesburg Tramway Employees Strike. Special Report on by Inspector of White Labour", MM331/11, National Archives, Pretoria; Crawford, August 1911, op cit. 82–3; Archibald Crawford, February 1912, "The Pick Handle Brigade: fun and fight on the Golden Rand", *International Socialist Review*, vol. XII, 494–495; *Solidarity*, 24 June 1911, "South Africa IWW"; *The Transvaal Leader*, 12 May 1911, "Tramway Crisis", press clipping, both in "Johannesburg Tramway Employees Strike. Special Report on by Inspector of White Labour", MM331/11, National Archives, Pretoria; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 May 1911, "Trams Today" tramway men on strike", press clipping in *ibid*.; W.H. Andrews, "Tram and Typo Strikers 1911".

for speeches.[147] Two IWWs, William Whittaker and T. Morant, were arrested when dynamite was found on the tram tracks.[148] The strike collapsed after a week, 70 workers were fired, and Glynn got three months hard labour, commenting that "if Government ownership, as our political Socialists tell us, is a 'step in the right direction' God help the slaves when they take the wrong one".[149]

Still, the IWW scored a point when it was shown that Whittaker and Morant had been framed by John Sherman, an *agent provocateur*.[150] This led to a series of large IWW meetings in Pretoria that denounced that "working class traitor and spy", now working on the railways.[151] In Johannesburg, meanwhile, the Market Square meetings continued to attract considerable crowds.[152] In October 1911 a "Pickhandle Brigade", including Dunbar, Glynn, Fitzgerald and Morant, disrupted the election meetings of incumbent councillors who had been involved in the crackdown on the IWW tramway workers.[153] Glynn, however, was blacklisted locally, and eventually left the country: he ended up in Australia, where he edited the IWW's *Direct Action* and was arrested during the wartime repression of the Wobblies.[154]

The *Voice of Labour* had also become something of a *de facto* syndicalist organ at this time. Crawford left the country from 1910 to 1911, visiting radical labour groups in three continents. The editorship now passed to 'Proletarian' in Cape Town—probably the Cape militant Ferdinand Marais—a vociferous syndicalist. The paper never quite lost its open character, but its copy was now heavily weighted towards

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[147] Appendix in "Johannesburg Tramway Employees Strike. Special Report on by Inspector of White Labour", op cit. Also see Walker and Weinbren, 30.

[148] *VOL.*, 12 January 1912, "Whittaker-Morant Case: a short history".

[149] Tom Glynn, 24 November 1911, "Recognition", *VOL.*

[150] Cope, 119.

[151] Tom Glynn, "Recognition"; Andrew Dunbar, 24 November 1911, "IWW Propaganda Notes", *VOL.*; *VOL.*, 1 December 1911, "The 'Sherman' Agitation". Also see *VOL.*, 1 December 1911, "The Story of John Lafayette Sherman: working class traitor and spy".

[152] Andrew Dunbar, 16 June 1911, "Things You Should Know", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 15 September 1911, "Industrial Union Propaganda", *VOL.*

[153] See Crawford, "The Pick Handle Brigade", Andrew Dunbar, 27 October 1911, "Revolutionary Methods", *VOL.*; T. Morant, 15 September 1911, "Hooliganism", *VOL.*

[154] Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: the IWW in Australia*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 36, 77, 88, 115, 207; also see Tom Barker, *Tom Barker and the I.W.W.*, recorded, edited and with an introduction by E.C. Fry, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1965, Ch. 3.

IWW and SLP materials.[155] As an observer noted at the time, "From Trades Unionism and Politics", the *Voice* had "flowed to Industrial Unionism and Direct Action".[156] Even the SDF was swept up in the syndicalist wave. It joined the IWW, SLP and the Johannesburg-based Socialist Party in a short-lived "Industrial Freedom League" for a "united advocacy of Industrial Unionism" in May 1911.[157]

The IWW, the SLP and the national question on the Witwatersrand

As noted above, Crawford's reputation has fared badly at the hands of the Communist School. So, too, it must be said, have those of the IWW and SLP. Relying on the Communist school, Elaine Katz viewed these groups as failing to take a principled position on the national question.[158] She added the charge that the IWW complained bitterly in the *Voice of Labour* about the use of auxiliary African police in the May 1911 tramway strike.[159] Pieter van Duin cited Communist school works, plus Katz, to make even bolder critiques of the IWW.[160] Marcel van der Linden, in turn, cited Katz and van Duin in order to suggest that the South African IWW was remarkable for breaking with the traditional syndicalist opposition to racism.[161]

The problem, however, is that the primary material provides little support for these arguments. In the first place, the IWW's statement in the *Voice of Labour*, to which Katz alluded, did not take issue with the race of the police—only the repressive actions of the police in general, black or white.[162] One speaker who took the platform in the mid-1911

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[155] For example, Vincent St. John, 27 October 1911, "History of the Industrial Workers of the World", *VOL.*; Philip R. Roux, 29 March 1912, "An Open Letter to Socialists", *VOL.*; Philip R. Roux, 12 July 1912, "Patriotism", *VOL.*; Philip R. Roux, 11 October 1912, "The Truth about the Defence Act: straight talk to workers", *VOL.*

[156] Jim Davidson, 4 August 1911, "Can We Save the 'Voice'", *VOL.*

[157] Cope, 108–110; Wessel Visser, "Suid-Afrikaanse Koerantberriggewing en Kommentaar ten opsigte van Arbeiderspartye, Socialistiese Partye en ander Radikale Grope en Bewegings, 1908–1915", MA diss., University of Stellenbosch, 1987, 247–8.

[158] Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 273, 299, 320, citing Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 139–140.

[159] Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 273, 320.

[160] Van Duin, "South Africa", 648–649.

[161] Marcel van der Linden, 1998, "Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism: keynote address", presented at the Syndicalism: Swedish and international historical experiences, Stockholm University, 13–14 March 1998, 14–15; also cf. Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, 16.

[162] *VOL.*, 19 May 1911.

strike is on record for fuming against the use of black forces against white strikers: he was, however, a member of the SA Labour Party, not of the syndicalist IWW or SLP.[163]

The position of the IWW on the national question was unambiguous: "fight the class war with the aid of all workers, whether efficient or inefficient, skilled or unskilled, white or black".[164] The SLP men, too, were "pioneers in the adoption of an enlightened policy towards the Coloured peoples", promoting "unity among all wage slaves, regardless of colour"; Jock Campbell was famed as the first Witwatersrand socialist "to make propaganda amongst the African workers".[165] Mann's tour provided a further reference point, for he told his Johannesburg audience: "Whatever number there are, get at them all, and if there are another 170,000 available, white or black, get at them too".[166] He viewed the local unions as beset by a "suicidal sectional unionism" and lambasted the white man acting "towards the black man as a most superior and lordly personage".[167]

'Proletarian', likewise, advocated "an organisation of wage-workers, black and white, male and female, young and old", which would proclaim "a universal general strike preparatory to seizing and running the interests of South Africa, for the benefit of *workers* to the exclusion of *parasites*".[168] The African workers would inevitably organise for "mutual protection" and "revolt against wage slavery", and the "only logical thing for white slaves to do is to throw in their lot with the black wage slave in a common assault on the capitalist system". "Proletarian" opposed the Defence Bill introduced soon after Union, which established the national army while essentially restricting armed service in the national army to whites. This was partly on anti-militarist grounds, but partly because he viewed the Bill as a deliberate attempt to use white workers against black: a "native rising", he stressed, would be a

[163] On the speaker, see *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 May 1911, "Trams Today: tramway men on strike", press clipping in "Johannesburg Tramway Employees Strike. Special Report on by Inspector of White Labour", MM331/11, National Archives, Pretoria.
[164] *VOL.*, 25 November 1910.
[165] Cope, 93; Johns, 32.
[166] Cope, 110; Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 271.
[167] Tom Mann, July 1910, "Diamond Mining in South Africa", *International Socialist Review*, vol. XI, 3–6.
[168] *VOL.*, 27 October 1911, "The Problem of Coloured Labour", emphasis in original.

"wholly justified" response to "cruel exploitation" and should receive the active "sympathy and support of every white wage-slave".[169]

It follows that the *de facto* failure of the IWW and SLP to recruit across the colour line, thereby realising their vision of an interracial One Big Union, cannot be attributed to racial prejudice or to obliviousness to the national question. Rather, it reflected their overall weakness as union *organisers*, at least outside the trams. This was compounded by the enormous practical difficulties of organising the unfree African workers, the majority of the Witwatersrand working class.

The IWW and SLP's strength lay rather in public propaganda, like the Market Square meetings, where radical speakers traditionally attracted a "little knot of native and coloured men".[170] Leading politicians like John X. Merriman were convinced that the "ravings of the syndicalists" were "appealing, not I fear without success, both to the poorer Dutch [the Afrikaners] and to the Natives".[171]

At the same time, the failure to really organise across the colour line also indicated the lack of a clear strategy to systematically develop linkages with workers of colour. Specifically, the IWW and SLP did not link their *principled* opposition to racial oppression with active and specific efforts to *mobilise* African, Coloured, and Indian workers around both their class and national concerns.[172] In this sense, the SDF in Cape Town was more effective in addressing the national question, even though the SA General Workers' Union lacked the grandiose syndicalist programme of the IWW and SLP.

The stormy years, 1913–1914

In May 1913, a dramatic general strike on the Witwatersrand started, which "shook the country like nothing had done since the Boer War".[173] Initiated by white miners, it spiralled rapidly across industries. Just as quickly, it slipped out of the control of the main unions involved, the Transvaal Federation of Trade Unions (another predecessor of the

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[169] *VOL.*, 1 December 1911, "Sundry Jottings from the Cape: a rebel's review".
[170] *Int.*, 1 October 1915, "Branch Notes".
[171] Cited in Brian Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities: Johannesburg and Broken Hill, 1885–1925*, Johannesburg A.D. Donker, 1984, 88.
[172] See Lucien van der Walt, "Reflections on Race and Anarchism in South Africa, 1904–2004", *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, 1, 2004.
[173] Boydell, "My Luck was In", 66.

SAIF), and the independent National Union of Railway and Harbour Servants (NURHAS). On "Black Saturday", July 5, imperial troops shot 25 people dead.[174] Riots and gun battles left strikers in control of large parts of Johannesburg, the crowds drawing in the unemployed, the poor whites, and even some "Coloured men".[175]

This was followed by a series of impressive strikes by African miners, lasting three days and involving 9,000.[176] In October 1913, sporadic Indian passive resistance campaigns took a new turn with a general strike amongst Natal Indians on the coalfields, sugar farms and mills, and railways. This centred a £3 annual poll tax imposed on ex-indentured labourers, was initiated by Gandhi, and drew in 5,000.[177]

The failure of the compromise that ended the 1913 general strike then led to a second general strike in January 1914. This time the state acted quickly, mobilising the new South African Defence Force and the rural *commando* militia, declaring martial law, raiding the unions, arresting hundreds, and deporting nine key activists (among them, Crawford).

Several months later, the enforced social peace was again shattered when the country entered World War I on the British side. While the SANNC, APO and local Indian Congress suspended their activities to rally to the flag, hard-line Afrikaner nationalists launched an armed rebellion that split the army and mobilised around 12,000 insurgents, mainly rural poor whites.[178] The SDF suffered a split when its pro-war minority broke away in September 1914. The SA Labour Party—which had grown massively in the wake of the massive labour struggles of 1913 and 1914—also split in 1915, when its radical anti-war section walked out.

Anarchism and syndicalism certainly played a role in all of the events of the stormy years. However, the official insistence that the two general strikes were the work of a "Syndicalist Conspiracy" is

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[174] *The Strike Herald*, 2 August 1913, "Use of Troops"; *The Strike Herald*, 2 August 1913, "British Labour Party and the Imperial Troops". Also see the American IWW paper, *Industrial Solidarity*, 1 November 1913, "The Rand Slaughter".

[175] Contemporary report, cited in Kennedy, 85. Also see Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 418.

[176] Philip Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: a preliminary account", in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, Townships and Protest*, edited by Belinda Bozzoli. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979, 274.

[177] Swan, 246–256; also see Shamim Marie, *Divide and Profit: Indian workers in Natal*, Durban: Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, Department of Industrial Sociology, University of Natal-Durban, 1986, 29–31.

[178] Swart, 161, 165, 169–171, 173–5.

misleading.[179] The syndicalist movement on the Witwatersrand was weak and divided by 1913.

On his return to South Africa, Crawford had attempted to forge a United Socialist Party, "without discrimination as to race, sex, colour or creed", including the IWW, SDF, SLP and other groups.[180] The United Socialist Party platform was too vague to satisfy anyone and quite unable to overcome the existing divisions: the constituent groups were already firmly wedded to their existing programmes; besides, each group clung jealously to its autonomy.[181]

The SLP and IWW, for instance, had long sniped at one another, each being preoccupied with its claim to represent the 'real' IWW tradition.[182] Despite his professed interest in left unity, Crawford himself waged a campaign against Dunbar in 1911 and 1912 that effectively destroyed the IWW. The SLP also left the new party: "the U.S.P. believes in political reform whereas the emancipation of the working class can only be accomplished through their organisation on the industrial field";[183] SLP activists seemed to have then begun to work in the SA Labour Party.[184] The United Socialist Party fell apart, and the *Voice of Labour*, citing apathy and financial problems, closed in December 1912.[185]

In the form of an *organised* current, then, syndicalism was simply unable to plan, launch, or lead the 1913 and 1914 general strikes. Nonetheless, syndicalist ideas and slogans had "a considerable currency in labour circles" at this time.[186] This was shown, for instance, by speeches that described the "Trades Hall" as "the government", or

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[179] See Jan Smuts, 1914, *The Syndicalist Conspiracy in South Africa: a scathing indictment*, Government Printers, Pretoria, Smuts Papers, University of Cape Town Libraries, folder D10.10; also see *TSH.*, 25 June 1913, "Who are the Inciters".

[180] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 30.

[181] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 36; *VOL.*, 24 May 1912, "U.S.P. Notes"; 31 May 1912, "U.S.P. Notes"; 13 September 1912, "U.S.P. Notes".

[182] Andrew Dunbar, 21 July 1911, "IWW Notes", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 21 July 1911, "IWW Notes", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 29 September 1911, "IWW Notes", *VOL.*; Andrew Dunbar, 24 November 1911, "IWW Propaganda Notes", *VOL.; The Socialist*, April 1912, "Down with Sabotage and Other Forms of Physical Force".

[183] *VOL.*, 8 November 1912, "U.S.P. Notes".

[184] See Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 8.

[185] Archie Crawford, 24 May 1912, "The 'Voice'", *VOL.*; *VOL.*, 7 June 1912, "Our Changed Form"; 19 July 1912, "U.S.P. Notes", *VOL.*; 16 August 1912, "Editorial Notes", VOL; 13 September 1912, "U.S.P. Notes", VOL; 13 September 1912, "Voice Press Fund, 1912", VOL; 15 November 1912, "Press Fund, 1912", VOL.

[186] Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, 200.

suggested "it might be necessary for the strikers to take over the mines and work them themselves", or called on workers to "have a general strike, and have a revolution".[187] Such views also found expression in *The Strike Herald*, produced in 1913 (and revived briefly in 1914) by Crawford and Fitzgerald, both of whom were very prominent in the 1913 riots.

Moreover, the two general strikes plus the war issue re-energised existing anarchists and syndicalists, radicalised new activists, and evoked a widespread interest in radical ideas. There was, in the first instance, an outpouring of new materials, like the De Leonist tract entitled *The Great Rand Strike: July, 1913*. This drew "lessons" of "service to the proletariat".[188] As an example of radicalisation, an instructive case is provided by George Mason, a carpenter on the mines. Starting as a fairly orthodox SA Labour Party figure, he took the dramatic step of addressing African workers in 1913, when he called on them to strike as well; in 1914, he was deported; by the time public pressure forced the state to allow the deportees to return, he was becoming a staunch syndicalist.[189] As for popular interest in the left, it may be noted that SDF could attract thousands to anti-war rallies, with left influence seen as sufficiently serious that anti-war activists like Harrison were arrested for anti-war literature.[190]

Red, black and white: the ISL and One Big Union amongst people of colour

These developments provided the energy for the rise of the ISL in September 1915. Initial membership drew heavily on syndicalist veterans like Dunbar, Jock Campbell and Tyler. A large component was

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[187] See Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 466–467; Jan Smuts, 4 February and 5 February 1914, "Indemnity and Undesirables Special Deportation Bill: second reading", Union of South Africa: House of Assembly, 1914, Government Printers, Pretoria, column 101; *TSH*., 25 June 1913, "Mr. Madeley's Speech".

[188] Campbell, John and J. Raeburn Munro, 1913, *The Great Rand Strike: July, 1913*, published by the authors in Johannesburg, printed by E.H. Adlington and Co., 3.

[189] Ernest Gitsham and James F. Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation in South Africa*. Durban: E. and Commercial Printing, 1926, 171; Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 425; Smuts, "Indemnity and Undesirables", column 67; *Int*., 7 April 1916, "Call to the Native Workers"; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 159.

[190] Wilfred Harrison, 1914, "WAR!", issued by War on War League in Cape Town, Simons Papers, Manuscript and Archives section, African Studies Centre, University of Cape Town, fragile papers section.

also provided by the anti-war SA Labour Party activists, like Mason, Andrews, Bunting and Ivon Jones, all radicalised by the 1913–1914 strikes. For Bunting, for instance, the 1913 general strike was the "first act of South Africa's working class revolution, whose end is not yet".[191]

The new ISL soon operated across the country (bar Cape Town, in deference to the SDF), and rapidly established itself as the largest left political group prior to the CPSA. Its weekly paper, *The International,* remains the most impressive of the pre-CPSA periodicals, but was only part of the ISL's large-scale distribution of local and imported papers, tracts and books. The ISL was formed at an auspicious time—just ahead of a huge wave of class struggles starting in 1917. There were 199 officially recorded strikes from 1906 to 1920: 68 took place between 1916 and 1920, with 175,664 workers were on strike from 1916 to 1922; union membership surged from 9,178 in 1914, to 40,000 in 1917, to more than 135,000 in 1920.[192] A particularly important development in this upsurge was the large-scale entry of people of colour into unions outside of the Cape. This was pioneered by bodies like the Industrial Workers of Africa, and exemplified by the dramatic rise of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) in the 1920s.

The ISL is usually presented by the Communist school as fervently Marxist, with its best elements comprising the core of the proto-Bolsheviks;[193] at most, the Communist school suggests, there was a syndicalist *minority* in ISL ranks, successfully opposed by the Marxist leadership.[194] The problem with such views is that even a cursory examination of the sources demonstrates that the ISL was an unambiguously syndicalist formation in the IWW tradition. It resolved at its first congress "That we encourage the organisation of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, colour or creed, as the

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[191] Quoted in Roux, *S.P. Bunting,* 66.

[192] Cope, 200; H.R. Pike, *A History of Communism in South Africa*, second ed. Germiston: Christian Mission International, 1988, 103–105; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 333; Duin, "South Africa", 640 note 39.

[193] For example, Cronin, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", 9; Govan Mbeki, *The Struggle For Liberation in South Africa: a short history*, Cape Town/Bellville: David Philips/Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1992, 27; Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 134; Jeremy Cronin [writing as "South African Communist Party"], *The Red Flag in South Africa: a popular history of the Communist Party*, Johannesburg: Jet Printers, 1991, 6. For an example of how these doubtful claims have been reproduced in more scholarly work, consider Mantzaris, "Radical Community", 161.

[194] Cope, 206; Forman, "Chapters", 74; Harmel, 39; Cronin, *The Red Flag*, 6; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 215, also see 245.

most effective means of providing the necessary force for the emancipation of the workers".[195]

It was the ISL, above all, that developed the vision and practice of the integrated revolutionary One Big Union as the combined weapon for national liberation *and* class struggle. The ISL was scathingly critical of white craft unions (and the SA Labour Party) for their "craft scabbery" against one other, and for their "complete oblivion to the sufferings of the lower paid" and "unemployed white workers, mainly women" and "intolerant" attitude "towards the native wage slave".[196] Betraying workers' solidarity and class struggle, they disgraced themselves with no-strike pledges for modest wages, "scabbing on Judas", who at least "demanded thirty pieces" of silver for his treachery.[197] Theirs was a "scab unionism" that pursued sectional privileges for "labour fakers" (as the ISL called the union leaders) and aspiring "labour aristocrats", at the expense of the larger working class.[198]

The craft unions' disgrace was compounded by their failure to recognise the rise of the giant corporations and trusts, against which they had "no earthly hope" of standing, especially in the face of mechanisation and skill dilution.[199] This new era required industrial unions, united in One Big Union and embracing *all* workers. Racial prejudice was against the interests of the whole working class—whether white, black, skilled, unskilled, employed, or unemployed—and the tool of "imperialist notions and alarums".[200]

The instruments of national oppression were means to strengthen the ruling class, as "cheap, helpless and unorganised" African labour ensured "employers generally and particularly industrial employers, that most coveted plum of modern Imperialism, plentiful cheap labour".[201] The "laws and regulations" which "degrade the native workers to the level of serfs and herded cattle"—including the "denial of civil

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[195] See *Int.*, 7 January 1916, "League Conference"; *Int.*, 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League".

[196] *Int.*, 3 December 1915, "The Wrath to Come".

[197] *Int.*, 22 September 1916, "League Notes"; also see *Int.*, 4 August 1916, "More Craft Scabbery".

[198] See *Int.*, 15 September 1916, "Liberty Sold for 6/3d"; 22 September 1916, "Liberty: Price 6/3"; 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union"; 25 May 1917, "Is the White Miner a Miner?".

[199] *Int.*, 9 August 1918, "Craft Unions Obsolete"; *Int.*, 3 March 1916, "The War After the War".

[200] *Int.*, 22 September 1916, "Disunity of Labour".

[201] *Int.*, 18 February 1916, "Workers of the World Unite".

liberty and political rights"—existed "for the express uses of Capital", as "weapons … to be used against all the workers".[202] Thus, "segregation is a policy of capitalism, not of the labour movement".[203] The policy of White Labourism was foolish as well as immoral, as explained repeatedly to white workers: "Make no mistake, your puny breakwater—the colour bar" cannot hold back the "big coloured Industrial Army coming in on the tide of their evolution … demanding that place in the sun to which every single human on this earth is rightfully entitled".[204]

What was required was a "new movement" that would "recognise no bounds of craft, no exclusions of colour".[205] This would organise amongst the unskilled, especially the Africans, paying heed to "the cries of the most despairing and the claims of the most enslaved" workers.[206]

Among its tasks would be "the abolition of all forms of native indenture, compound and passport systems; and the lifting of the native worker to the political and industrial status of the white":[207] "These tyrant laws must be swept away",[208] the ISL declared in laying out its radical programme. Contrary to the literature's tendency to treat such race radicalism as a minority position in the organisation (supposedly identified with figures like Bunting and Ivon Jones, who had to struggle for the "recognition of the black worker" against the "mass" of ISL members)[209] it formed the very heart of official ISL policy, programme and propaganda.

As for strategy, the ISL championed the view that "the Industrial Union" was "the root of all the activities of Labour, whether political, social or otherwise".[210] Specifically, discriminatory laws had to be

[202] *Int.*, 7 December 1917, "International Socialism and the Native: no labour movement without the black proletariat".
[203] *Int.*, 2 June 1916, "Anti-Segregation".
[204] *Int.*, 16 February 1917, "'The Poor Whites' and a Page From History".
[205] Ibid.
[206] *Int.*, 3 December 1915, "The Wrath to Come".
[207] *Int.*, 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League".
[208] *Int.*, 7 December 1917, "International Socialism and the Native: no labour movement without the black proletariat".
[209] Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 74–77; see also Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 18–19; Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 84, 129–135; Cronin, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", 12.
[210] *Int.*, 5 May 1916, "What's Wrong With Ireland".

"repealed by the strength of Trade Unionism",[211] expressed in its most advanced form, the One Big Union:[212]

> Once organised, these workers can bust-up any tyrannical law. Unorganised, these laws are iron bands. *Organise industrially*, they become worth no more than the paper rags they are written on.

Such positions were hardly the hallmark of an organisation that, as the Communist school claimed, viewed national oppression as "not really very worthy of consideration",[213] let alone of one that purportedly embraced segregation.[214] On the contrary, the ISL waged a continual ideological struggle against racial discrimination, arguing that "The whole of the fight against capitalism is a fight with the prejudices and capitalist-engendered aversions of the workers".[215] It systematically critiqued the doctrines of scientific racism as "pure poppycock", stressing that science showed that "all the fundamental phenomena and capabilities of man are rooted in…humanity which is Black, White and Brown".[216]

The ISL's position was nonetheless very much at odds with the two-stage programme elaborated by the CPSA and SACP from 1928. It doubted, in the first place, that African nationalists had a programme that could genuinely emancipate the black masses. Like 'Proletarian' on the APO,[217] the ISL viewed the SANNC as basically the party of "native attorneys and parsons" and the "native property owner", with interests "completely alien to the great mass of the Native proletariat".[218] Moreover, these "Labour fakirs of Black South Africa" hesitated to "give attention to the one weapon the ruling class fear—the organisation of the native workers".[219] (The APO and SANNC were certainly moderate at this time: supporting the war effort and the repression of

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[211] *Int.*, 7 April 1916, "Call to the Native Workers".
[212] *Int.*, 19 October 1917, "The Pass Laws: organise for their abolition", emphasis added.
[213] Contra. Cronin, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", 12.
[214] Contra. Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 191–192, 210.
[215] *Int.*, 22 September 1916, "Disunity of Labour".
[216] *Int.*, 16 March 1917, "Notes on Natives no. 1"; 23 March 1917, "Notes on Natives no. 2"; also see 2 June 1916, S.G. Rich, "Anti-Segregation"; *Int.*, 9 February 1917, "The Great Unskilled"; also see *Int.*, 23 February 1916, "Race Prejudice".
[217] *VOL.*, 27 October 1911, "The Problem of Coloured Labour".
[218] *Int.*, 5 April 1918; *Int.*, 19 October 1917, "The Pass Laws: organise for their abolition"; *Int.*, 19 October 1917, "'Beware of Labour Cranks'".
[219] *Int.*, 5 April 1918.

white strikers in 1913 and 1914, they occupied themselves largely with sending polite petitions for minor reforms to the British Crown).

Besides, the ISL argued, the national oppression of workers of colour was largely rooted in capitalism, meaning that national liberation under capitalism was unlikely. Moreover, these workers were also oppressed by class, as *workers*, meaning that their full emancipation from poverty and powerlessness would not be achieved even within the best possible non-racial capitalist order; the colour of the capitalists much change, but class exploitation and cheap labour would not.

A two-stage solution was, in short, was neither required nor to be desired: the One Big Union could simultaneously address the national and social questions, and provide the class power at the point of the production that made a thorough, and revolutionary, solution possible.

The ISL and the reform of the existing unions

The ISL aimed to reform the white unions, while taking the lead in organising amongst people of colour, "the great mass of the proletariat", "black, and therefore disenfranchised and socially outcast".[220] At times it ran in elections, usually with abysmal results, seeing the "white political field" as a "fine opportunity of forcing the issue" of "solidarity with the native workers", and "an echo of this propaganda reaches the native workers as well".[221]

ISL union leaders and activists, like Andrews of the ASE, sought to reform the white unions into syndicalist bodies.[222] In mid-1916, several unions formed the BWIU, with a syndicalist-influenced platform: it aimed to organise industrially, and cultivate "sufficient knowledge and power to enable the Union ultimately to control effectively the Building Industry".[223] ISL militant Tyler was its provisional secretary, and subsequently, its secretary-general and organiser.[224] Still, the *International* worried, "at the risk of being thought hypercritics", whether

[220] *Int.*, 2 February 1917, "Those 32 Votes".
[221] David Ivon Jones, "Communism in South Africa", *Searchlight South Africa*, 1: 1, [9 June 1921] 1988, 119–122.
[222] Johns, 64–69.
[223] Quoted in Gitsham and Trembath, 71.
[224] C.B. Tyler, 14 July 1916, "Union of all Building Workers", *Int.*; Walker and Weinbren, 191.

the union would admit "coloured fellow workers"—[225] correctly, as it turned out, for many BWIU locals were segregationist.

In August 1917, the ISL hosted a conference "to discuss ways and means of urging the workers to unite and organise industrially . . . and eventually to take over the control of the industry".[226] It attracted forty-five people—remarkably, including three Africans—and established a multi-racial Manifesto Committee, later renamed the Solidarity Committee.

The Committee's manifesto, distributed at the December 1917 SAIF congress, attacked the existing unions for "their narrow craft vanity, their still narrower colour prejudice, their exclusive benefit funds, their compromising with the robber system, their friendly agreements with their masters to the neglect of the bottom toiler, their scabbery on the unskilled and one another".[227] They were a "delusion and a snare", and served "only the interests of the Capitalists", and had to be superseded by interracial and revolutionary industrial unions, linked up in one National Industrial Union. This "one Industrial Union will become the Parliament of Labour and form an integral part of the International Industrial Republic". Supporters of this project were invited to attend a conference in Easter 1918, but only members of the International Socialist League and the Industrial Workers of Africa (of which, see below) were present at the event.[228]

An alternative means to contest the established unions was suggested by the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement in Britain. This was essentially an independent rank-and-file movement that overlapped with the existing unions, but was willing to defy the union leaders in order to wage militant class struggle: "We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them".[229] It was basically a form of syndicalism, which aimed at "control of the

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[225] *Int.*, 9 June 1916, "Trade Unions Reforming".

[226] This account draws heavily on Johns, 66–68.

[227] *Int.*, 22 February 1918, "Industrial Unionism in South Africa", described as the "manifesto of the Solidarity Committee, reprinted here by order of the I.S.L. Management Committee".

[228] Johns, 67–8.

[229] James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards Movement*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973, 119.

workshop, control of the Industry…and…Industrial Democracy",[230] via one "great Industrial Union of the Working Class".[231] This was also shown by its close ties with the British SLP ad the American IWW, including an arrangement for the interchange of membership cards with the latter.[232]

Andrews, as the ISL's most senior unionist, had been sent abroad in 1917 as delegate to several international socialist and labour conferences. In Britain, he addressed the Clyde Workers Committee, where he "reminded the British workers of the struggle in South Africa, and the task of liberating the Native peoples there and elsewhere in the Empire".[233] Meanwhile, the Committee excited Andrews' "particular admiration", and convinced him of the need to "organise the South African workers on similar lines".[234] Upon his return he was hired by the ISL as a full-time organiser, in part in order to promote a local workers' committee movement.[235] Andrews had some success in Witwatersrand engineering, rail and mines, but disappointingly, many of the local "Works Committees" thus established were not particularly radical. There was one critical exception, the Council of Action based on the mines, of which more below.

The ISL's positions were frankly not very popular amongst white workers at this time. When it ran in elections, it was trounced by the other parties, and always lost its deposit. Its weekly public meetings in Johannesburg—held at the Market Square and at the City Hall steps—faced increasing mob violence from thugs like the Comrades of the Great War, a war veterans' group. ISL activists faced a series of arrests and trials, many of which were overtly aimed at suppressing its propaganda. The white unions distanced themselves from the organisation,

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[230] *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 9 March 1918, "The Workers' Committee", hereafter *WD*. Also see Cope, 191–2; Johns, 68–9.

[231] J.T. Murphy, *The Workers' Committee: an outline of its principles and structure*, Sheffield Workers' Committee, Sheffield, 1918, 4, 15.

[232] Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The IWW: its first seventy years 1905–1975*, Chicago: IWW, 1976, 135.

[233] Cope, 192.

[234] Cope, 191–192; Johns, 68–69.

[235] Johns, 100–101; *Int.*, 28 November 1919; *Int.*, 12 December 1919; 19 November 1920, "S.A. Railways and the Shop Steward Movement"; and Cope, 200; Johns, 69, 100–102; F.A. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: a study of class relations and racial discrimination in South Africa*, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, 114–118; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 99–105; *Int.*, 2 August 1918, "Revolution in Britain"; 23 August 1918, "Our 'Great Push'".

while recruits from the SA Labour Party soon left over the "revolutionary platform regarding the native workers".[236]

In 1917, the ISL was evicted from its offices in Trades Hall, the main union house, after it refused to accept a management order barring Africans from ISL facilities.[237] It moved to Neppe's Buildings in Fox street, owned by a Jewish supporter, where it continued to produce the *International*, sell radical literature, house a radical library, run Socialist Sunday Schools, and hold meetings.

Immigrant Jews like Neppe played an increasingly important role, with a large and active (and fiercely anti-Zionist) "Yiddish-Speaking Branch" of the ISL formed in August 1917. This produced ISL materials in Yiddish, organised meetings in the multi-racial slums of Johannesburg where most of these immigrants lived, and ran a library and reading room in the Palmerston Hotel.[238] It established contacts in South West Africa, raised money for strikes, and played a key role in the acquisition of an ISL printing press in 1919.[239] Perhaps the most famous of the new recruits was Solly Sachs, a first-generation Latvian immigrant who led the Reef Shop Assistants union, and later played a prominent role in the CPSA.[240]

Black revolutionaries in the ISL

By this stage, the ISL had taken a leaf from the SDF book, and was consciously cultivating links with people of colour, reasoning that "an internationalism which does not concede the fullest rights which the native working-class is capable of claiming will be a sham".[241] It established its policy "as one of solidarity with Africans as fellow workers in common struggle".[242] By 1918, had recruited a range of African,

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[236] Jones, "Communism in South Africa", 122.

[237] Johns, 75–76.

[238] Mantzaris, "Radical Community", see also Taffy Adler, "History of the Jewish Workers' Clubs", in *Papers presented at the African Studies Seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, during 1977*, Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, 1977, 7–11, 36.

[239] Adler, 10.

[240] "E.S. Sachs", *Forward*, 11 October 1935, Simons Papers, Manuscript and Archives section, African Studies Centre, University of Cape Town, section 7; Bernard Sachs, *Mist of Memory*, London: Valentine, Mitchell and Co., 1973, 74–5, 126–127, 163.

[241] *Int.*, 1 October 1995, "The Parting of the Ways".

[242] Forman, "Chapters", 56.

Coloured and Indian members, and developed a record of working alongside radicals in the SANNC and APO.

An early recruit was T.W. Thibedi, an African schoolteacher who joined the International Socialist League after hearing a talk by Bunting in Johannesburg.[243] A brilliant man with a "genius at getting people together, whether workers in a particular industry, women, location residents, or whatever was needed at the moment",[244] he had connections with the SANNC and lived in the Johannesburg slums in the 1910s. Thibedi was in later years a leader of the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions in the late 1920s, and a founder of the first African miners' union in the 1930s.

In February 1916, an ISL meeting in Johannesburg protested the discriminatory 1913 Land Act,[245] the "first coming together in the Transvaal of white socialists and the African National Congress".[246] It hosted the SANNC's Robert Grendon at a meeting "with a large number of natives", where (to "boisterous approval") it was declared that the unions' colour bar must go.[247] Another talk condemned the "barbarities to which the Indians in Natal were treated".[248]

In 1917, the ISL held a public protest against the Native Affairs Administration Bill, which subjected Africans to rule by decree of the Governor-General.[249] The meeting was "an historic occasion as socialists demonstrated for the first time on the Rand against racial legislation that did not directly affect whites".[250] Then SANNC speakers shared the platform at the ISL's 1917 May Day event, which was disrupted by white thugs—such attacks on ISL were now becoming a regular event.[251] In 1918, the ISL's May Day celebrations took place in

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[243] On Thibedi, see Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, 72 note 19; Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 108; *Umsebenzi: the voice of the South African Communist Party*, May 1991, "Party Pioneers: T.W. Thibedi: the first African Communist", 7: 2, new series; T.W. Thibedi, 10 August 1932, letter to Leon Trotsky, Trotsky Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, folder 1217.

[244] Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 108.

[245] *Int.*, 18 February 1916, "Workers of the World Unite".

[246] Forman, "Chapters", 54.

[247] *Int.*, 9 June 1916, "Another Blow to Colour Prejudice".

[248] *Int.*, 28 July 1916, "Branch Notes".

[249] *Int.*, 16 March 1917, "Workers of the World Uniting".

[250] Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 198; also see Johns, 71.

[251] *Int.*, 4 May 1917, "Mob Law on Mayday" and "Hooliganism: the Last Ditch".

Ferreirastown, a mainly Coloured area, the first time May Day in the Transvaal was "directed to non-European workers".[252]

Having committed themselves publicly to the formation of unions amongst people of colour, neglected by the existing unions, the ISL launched an Indian Workers' Industrial Union "on the lines of the IWW" in Durban in March 1917.[253] This drew in workers in catering, on the docks and in laundry, printing, and tobacco, and linked up with Indian colliers and farm workers.[254] In conjunction with the local ISL, the union ran study classes—SLP materials featuring prominently—and held open air meetings where the "the Indian Workers Choir entertained the crowds by singing the Red Flag, the International and many IWW songs".[255]

This was one of the very first Indian workers' unions in Durban—possibly the first. It was initiated by Gordon Lee, a veteran white IWW organiser, and later the chair of the Durban ISL.[256] The ISL, however, stressed the importance of the union's members electing a committee from their own ranks, which helped avoid paternalism as well as helped develop cadre amongst people of colour. By August 1917, the union was being run by Sigamoney, R.K. Moodley and one Ramsamy, all of whom had a "good…grip on the class struggle";[257] they were all recruited to the ISL.

Sigamoney was "a committed socialist and a leading member of the ISL, and received fraternal support from trade-unionists and members of the same organisation".[258] Born in Durban, he was a school teacher; he now became the most prominent Indian union leader and anti-capitalist in the city.[259] In October 1917, for example, Sigamoney chaired a public debate on the use of elections, part of an ISL-initiated series

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[252] Forman, "Chapters", 65–66.

[253] *Int.*, 7 April 1916, "Call to the Native Workers"; *Int.*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban".

[254] Gordon Lee, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Waking Up", *Int.*

[255] Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 84.

[256] *Int.*, 10 August 1917, "Durban Notes"; *Int.*, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Union".

[257] *Int.*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban".

[258] Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 84.

[259] On Sigamoney, see Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 84; Ashwin Desai, Vishnu Padayachee, Krish Reddy and Goolam Vahed, *Blacks in Whites: a century of cricket struggles in KwaZulu-Natal*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002, 38, 42, 45–51, 57, 59–61, 69–70.

to draw in local Coloureds and Indians; he was a featured speaker at the ISL's January 1918 annual congress.[260]

A few months later, the ISL called a meeting at Neppe's Buildings to "discuss matters of common interest between white and native workers".[261] This launched a weekly night school for Africans, focussing on political economy and the necessity of the One Big Union, with the classes run by white ISL members. Sessions attracted around thirty regular students, mainly from the downtown Johannesburg slums, as well as the nearby mines of Village Deep and Crown.[262] Bunting, Dunbar and Gibson were prominent lecturers, stressing the ISL wanted to "make the natives who are the working-class of South Africa be organised and have rights as a white man",[263] and desired that "all the workers black and white…come together in a union and be organised together and fight against the capitalists and take them down from their ruling place".

In September 1917, the classes were transformed into the Industrial Workers of Africa, explicitly modelled on the IWW.[264] "If we strike for everything", Dunbar commented, "we can get everything…If we can only spread the matter far and wide amongst the natives, we can easily unite".[265]

As with the Durban initiative, the union was coordinated by a committee elected by the membership, and again, the key figures were recruited into the ISL. Besides Thibedi, African union leaders in the Industrial Workers of Africa included Fred Cetiwe, educated at Qumbu in the Eastern Cape, who worked in Johannesburg as a picture framer's assistant.[266] Cetiwe embraced ISL doctrines, and urged the union to

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[260] *Int.*, 9 November 1917, "A Socialist Conference in Durban"; 11 January 1918, "Our Annual Gathering"; Alex Mouton, "Van Matroos tot Senator: the kleurryke and stormagtige politieke loopbaan van S.M. Pettersen", *Klio* 19, 1987, 32.

[261] Department of Justice, "The ISL and Coloured Workers", JD 3/527/17, National Archives, Pretoria, hereafter Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[262] Membership list in "The ISL and Coloured Workers", Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[263] Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 19 July 1917, Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[264] R. Moroosi, report on meeting of 11 October 1917, in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[265] Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 26 July 1917, in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[266] T.D.M. Skota, *The African Yearly Register: being an illustrated biographical dictionary (who's who) of black folks in Africa*. Johannesburg: R.l. Esson, [?1932] n.d., 137; *Int.*, 13 September 1918.

"preach our gospel": organise and "abolish the Capitalist-System".[267] He worked closely with Hamilton Kraai, an ISL member educated at Peddie in the Eastern Cape, then working in Johannesburg as a foreman and a deliveryman.[268] Union literature in African languages like seSotho and isiZulu circulated across the Witwatersrand, including the compounds, and even moved with migrants to rural Rustenburg, Heilbron, and Cala.[269]

The Industrial Workers of Africa and the ISL also held discussions with the SANNC and APO. Sometimes this had an influence on the nationalists, as when Transvaal APO leader and unionist Talbot Williams wrote an IWW-style pamphlet on *The Burning Question of Labour* for Coloured workers; this was published in APO and ISL editions.[270] Relations with the SANNC in Johannesburg were initially tense, some black syndicalists viewing the moderate nationalist body as representing "the men who organise rich and high people who are the men who suck our blood and sell us".[271]

However, the Transvaal SANNC was undergoing a period of radicalisation at the time, with the emergence of a radical wing opposed to the moderate leadership.[272] This wing was happy to work with—indeed, overlapped with—the Industrial Workers of Africa and ISL, with unionists like Cetiwe and Kraai playing a role in all three bodies. Moderate SANNC leaders therefore deplored the lamentable "spread

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[267] Unlabelled report, May 1918 (full date illegible), in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[268] Skota, 167; *Int.*, 13 September 1918.

[269] Also see Baruch Hirson and Gwyn A. Williams, *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883–1924*, London: Core Publications, 1995, 173; F.A. Johnstone, "The IWA on the Rand: socialist organising amongst black workers on the Rand 1917–18", in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, Townships and Protest*, 1979, 258–260.

[270] Copies may be found on the 1918 microfilm of The International at the Johannesburg Public Library, and in Department of Justice, "International Socialist League, reports on the activities of", JUS 526, 3/527/17, National Archives, Pretoria.

[271] *Int.*, 4 January 1918, "A Unique Meeting"; also see Johnstone, "The IWA on the Rand", 260.

[272] See Philip Bonner, "The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917–1920: the radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand", in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870–1930*, Harlow: Longman, 1982.

among our people of the Johannesburg Socialists' propaganda",[273] and worried that "Socialism of the worst calibre is claiming our people".[274]

The general strike movement of 1918

This was certainly demonstrated by the attempted African general strike of the July 1918. Earlier that year, 152 African municipal workers were sentenced to hard labour for striking, thereby breaching their contracts, which inflamed black Johannesburg. The SANNC, Industrial Workers of Africa and the ISL called a series of mass protests, attracting around a thousand people, sometimes more.[275] A joint action committee of all three bodies was formed, comprising the syndicalists along with sympathetic SANNC activists. After some planning, it proposed, to great acclaim by African crowds, a general strike on the Witwatersrand for the release of the sentenced workers, and a shilling-a-day pay rise for African workers.[276] The resolution was carried despite the opposition of SANNC moderates, who were shouted down by the crowd. The ISL's T.P. Tinker proclaimed: "The strike was not for one shilling a day but for Africa which they deserved".[277]

The strike was cancelled at the last minute, although several thousand African miners came out anyway at three mines.[278] Eight people were then arrested for incitement to public violence.[279] Five were ISL members (Bunting, Cetiwe, H.C. Hanscombe, Kraai and Tinker), and a sixth was a member of both the Industrial Workers of Africa and the SANNC (J.D. Ngojo). The remaining two were the SANNC's Thomas L. Mvabaza and Daniel Letanka, who had promoted the Industrial Workers of Africa and the strike movement in the SANNC paper *Abantu-Batho* ("The People"). The arrestees were, in short, hardly the

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[273] Sol Plaatje, "Letter to the General Secretary, De Beers, 3 August 1918", in Brian Willan (ed.), *Sol Plaatje: selected writings*, Johannesburg/Athens: Witwatersrand University Press/Ohio University Press, [3 August 1918] 1988, 237.

[274] D.D.T. Jabavu, "Native Unrest", in Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, editors, 1972, *From Protest to Challenge: a documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882–1964,* [July 1920] 1972, volume one, 124.

[275] Report on meeting of Transvaal Native Congress and Industrial Workers of Africa, 19 June 1918 by unknown detective, in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[276] Ibid.

[277] *Int.*, 2 August 1918, "The Geweld Case".

[278] See *Int.*, 5 July 1918, "Capital and Labour".

[279] Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 78.

gallery of "Congress leaders" portrayed in some works, since what they shared was a connection with the syndicalist movement.[280]

This was reputedly "the first time in South Africa" that "members of the European and Native races, in common cause united, were arrested and charged together for their political activities".[281] The case collapsed, Cetiwe, Kraai and Hanscombe lost their jobs, and the Industrial Workers of Africa suffered a blow.[282] It was, however, soon reorganised by Thibedi with a "gratifyingly large attendance".[283] Meanwhile, in March 1919, Cetiwe and Kraai played a leading role in a civil disobedience campaign against the pass laws, initiated by SANNC radicals. As Cetiwe said,[284]

> These passes are main chains, enchaining us from all our rights. These passes are the chains chaining us in our employers' yards, so that we cannot go about and see what we can do for ourselves…It is the very same with a dog…

The campaign led to nearly 700 arrests, and Bunting—who was acting on behalf of many defendants—was assaulted by white hooligans near the courthouse.[285]

Syndicalism in the Cape

In 1919, the ISL noted in Kimberley a "great awakening of industrial solidarity among the Coloured workers…a large portion of the com-

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[280] Like, for example, Luli Callinicos, *Working Life: townships and popular culture on the Rand, 1886–1940*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987, 90; Forman, "Chapters", 69; Roux, *S.P. Bunting,* 78; Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress 1912–1952*, London/Berkeley and Los Angeles: C. Hurst Company/University of California Press, 1970, 72.

[281] Skota, 171. There were, in fact, precedents in the 19th century, such as the trial that followed the 1808 anti-slavery rebellion in the Cape: see for example Nicole Ulrich, "'There are no Slaves in their Country and Consequently there Ought to be None Here': the 1808 slave rebellion in the Cape of Good Hope and popular solidarity across the ocean", paper presented at 'Labour Crossings: World, Work and History', University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 5–8 September 2008.

[282] *Int.*, 26 July 1918, "No Socialism for Natives: the case of 'Luke Messina his mark'"; *Int.*, 13 September 1918. It did not 'collapse', as suggested by some sources, like Johns, 76; Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 132; Alex La Guma, *Jimmy La Guma*, edited by Mohamed Adhikari, Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, [1964] 1997, 84.

[283] *Int.*, 13 September 1918; *Int.*, 28 February 1919.

[284] Report on meeting of Transvaal Native Congress and Industrial Workers of Africa, 23 May 1918 by Wilfrid Jali, in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[285] Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 82–83.

munity here", and dispatched an organiser from Johannesburg, the Jewish tailor Sam Barlin.[286] Kimberley, like the Witwatersrand, operated a compound system for African miners, but the major part of its population was Coloured and white. In sharp contrast to the booming gold mining towns and port cities, Kimberley declined rapidly in the new century: in 1911, its population stood at 20,953 whites, and 43,401 people of other races; by 1914, these figures had fallen to 14,888 and 25,755 respectively, and this trend continued into the 1930s.[287]

Barlin set up ISL offices adjacent to those of the SANNC and APO, and helped establish two syndicalist unions. One was the Clothing Workers' Industrial Union, based amongst the several hundred local tailors—mainly Coloureds, with a smattering of Jews and Indians. Once again, the union was run by an elected committee, and once again, the leading figures were recruited to the ISL. Twenty-seven members, all Coloureds, joined the ISL, mostly from the big workshops of Myer Gordon, Reid and Brown. The most important recruit was Gomas, an apprentice tailor at Gordon's, who later also played a key role in the CPSA.[288]

Within a few months, the Clothing Workers' Industrial Union secured shopsteward recognition, the closed shop and wage increases, and spread to Johannesburg, and Durban. It waged, meanwhile, a successful strike to enforce its agreement with employers.[289] Barlin also helped form a Horse Drivers' Union in Kimberley, based amongst the Coloureds who dominated the trade; most worked for the municipality and railways, often in refuse removal. These workers were not included in the recently formed Municipal Employees Association, representing whites. This union also provided ISL recruits, and was headed by local activists K.C. Fredericks and Jan C. Smuts.[290] It struck towards the end of 1919 for a 25 percent wage increase, winning after two tough weeks.[291]

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[286] *Int.*, 20 December 1919, "Kimberley Tailors' Strike"; Doreen Musson, *Johnny Gomas: voice of the working-class: a political biography*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989, 16–17, 21.

[287] Musson, 19.

[288] Ray Simons, "Review: Johnny Gomas as I knew him", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 15: 5, 1991; Musson, 11–16; also see *Grassroots*, September 1982, "Johnny Gomas: a lifetime of struggle".

[289] *Int.*, 20 December 1919, "Kimberley Tailors' Strike"; *Int.*, 27 June 1919; *Int.*, 4 July 1919; also see Johns, 98 and Musson, 17–18.

[290] Musson, 18.

[291] Also see Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 155, see *Int.*, 2 January 1920, "Kimberley Strikes: more white scabbing"; Minutes of the City Council, Kimberley, 9 December

Meanwhile, Cetiwe and Kraai left for the segregated African ghetto, Ndabeni, in Cape Town. They aimed to organise the Industrial Workers of Africa on the docks: these employed the largest single workforce in the city, as well as the majority of Africans. The union's first Cape Town meeting was held on 10th July 1919 in cooperation with the newly formed IndSL, in District Six. It was attended by "200 native and coloured", and the "speeches appeared to be the reverse of pacific".[292] With "fresh members" enrolled, union offices were set up in Francis Street.

The IndSL, for its part, was a syndicalist breakaway from the SDF in May 1918: its members viewed the SDF as "too academic".[293] It was initially driven by younger men, like C. Frank Glass, an English tailor, and A.Z. Berman, a Russian Jew, school teacher and businessman.[294] The IndSL programme was the "abolition of the wage system and the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth based on the principle of self-governing industries, in which the workers will work and control the instruments of production, distribution and exchange for the benefit of the entire community".[295] Its strategy was not "broadly" Marxist,[296] but centred on "building up that efficient organisation commonly known as the One Big Union".[297] Elections were seen as useless, even for propaganda. In any event the "big masses of the proletariat, natives and a big section of coloured have no vote at all".[298]

The IndSL was strongly orientated towards workers of colour, with key militant Manuel Lopes stating bluntly that "propaganda amongst the coloured and native workers is the work that counts".[299] Craft unions and colour bars played into the ruling class' policy of "divide and rule", based on irrational "patriotism, racial pride and nationalism".[300] Real

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1919, 501, 23 December 1919, 511–512, and 1 January 1920, 550–551, 3/KIM 1/1/1/16, Cape Archives.

[292] *Int.*, 25 July 1919; F.V. Pickard, "Report of meeting of Native Workers held at Winter Gardens hall, Ayre Street, Capetown, July 10th, 1919", Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17.

[293] Harrison, *Memoirs*, 64.

[294] Ibid., *Memoirs*, 56–7, 64–70; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 7–10.

[295] *The Bolshevik*, February 1920, "What WE Stand For", hereafter *Bols.*

[296] *Contra*. Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 1–2.

[297] *Bols.*, April 1920, "The War of the Classes".

[298] "Communist", January 1920, "On Political Action", *Bols.; Bols.*, March 1920, "Trades Union Notes"; *Bols.*, March 1920, "The Case Against Parliamentarism".

[299] *WD.*, 7 August 1920, letter from Manuel Lopes.

[300] *Bols.*, January 1920, "The Strongest Weapon of Capitalism I"; also see "Searchlight", November 1919, "Trade Union Notes", *Bols.*; "Searchlight", January 1920, "Trade Union Notes", *Bols.; Bols.*, November 1919, "The Bankruptcy of Trades'

socialism "claims for every man, women or child, white or coloured, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".[301] It advocated the "solidarity of labour irrespective of colour or race".[302] Like the ISL, its initial core consisted of white militants, but this too would change.

Its first headquarters were in Ayre Street, District Six, with a venue that could seat 600.[303] Detectives reported "considerable numbers of coloured and native people" attending its functions, "the movement…growing in numbers and importance".[304] The IndSL was also in regular contact with visiting IWW sailors, who "taught the League to sing".[305]

Later the IndSL moved to better facilities in Plein street in central Cape Town, where its new Socialist Hall was opened in early 1919 to a crowd of "between 300 and 400 persons", despite heavy rain.[306] The audience was "chiefly Russian Jews and coloured"; speakers included the fiery S.H. Davidoff (IndSL), Coloured unionists linked to the IndSL like Brown, M.A. Gamiet and B. Kies, Harrison (SDF) and Boydell (SA Labour Party).[307] Open air events by the SDF and the League often attracted over 400 people at this time,[308] although the SDF was faring badly in the competition with the new body.

Between May 1919 and May 1920, the IndSL held an amazing 135 outdoor meetings and 32 indoor lectures, as well as innumerable "socials, lectures etc.".[309] It was soon able to get "the services of

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Unionism"; *Bols.*, February 1920, "The Strongest Weapon of Capitalism II"; *Bols.*, March 1920, "Trades Union Notes"; Manuel Lopes, April 1920, "Socialism and the Labour Party", *Bols.*

[301] Isaac Vermont, March 1920, "Socialism and the Coloured Folk", *Bols.*

[302] *Bols.*, March 1920, "Trades Union Notes".

[303] *Int.*, 21 December 1918, "Cape Notes".

[304] Commissioner of Police, 29 July 1919, letter to Secretary of Justice, in Justice Department, "Bolshevism in SA, Reports on", volume 267, 3/1064/18, National Archives, Pretoria, 86; the file is hereafter Justice Department, 3/1064/18.

[305] Manuel Lopes, 24 January 1919, "Cape Notes", *Int.*

[306] Manuel Lopes, 24 January 1919, "Cape Notes", *Int.*; also see Harrison, *Memoirs*, 68 and Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 4.

[307] "Secret: Bolshevism", January 1919, in Justice Department, 3/1064/18, 207. Davidoff seems to have previously championed "propaganda by the deed" in Pretoria: see Harrison, *Memoirs*, 38. Gamiet was an IndSL sympathiser, and head of the Tailors' and Tailoress' Union; Brown was an IndSL member: Commissioner of Police, 1 June 1920, "Report on Bolshevism in the Union of South Africa", in Justice Department, 3/1064/18, 104. B. Kies was almost certainly an IndSL member.

[308] Commissioner of Police, 27 August 1920, letter to Secretary of Justice, in Justice Department, 3/1064/18, 73

[309] *Bols.*, February 1920, "League Notes".

a few coloured and Malay comrades in our propaganda".[310] Besides this, the IndSL ran a library, study groups, Socialist Sunday Schools and a Young Socialist Society, and published a monthly called *The Bolshevik*.[311]

In 1918, the Industrial Socialist League formed a syndicalist union amongst the African and Coloured workers of the food processing factories in downtown Cape Town, like Hills factory and Buchanan's.[312] The first meeting was held 10 September at its headquarters, and attended by 30 workers who resolved to "form an Industrial Union" and do "everything in its power to assure its success".[313] Berman was the organising secretary, and Kies the chair, of the new Sweets and Jam Workers' Industrial Union, and the IndSL provided funds.[314]

Many African workers also joined, so the second meeting saw a "Com. Mpanpeni" acting as an interpreter, while "Com. Nodzandza" was elected to the largely Coloured executive.[315] IndSL Meetings in the factory district attracted the ire of employers, with at least one meeting surrounded and stopped by a large police presence.[316] Meanwhile, the IndSL busied itself in the Cape Federation of Labour, where it had radical resolutions—like support for the Soviet Republic, and the "formation of Industrial Unions out of the existing Trade Unions"—passed at the 1920 and 1921 congresses,[317] although these were never implemented.

In December 1919 the IndSL worked closely with the Industrial Workers of Africa, which was embroiled in a major strike on the docks.

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[310] WD., 7 August 1920, letter from Manuel Lopes.

[311] *Bols.*, November 1919; *Bols*., December 1919; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 13.

[312] Manuel Lopes, 27 September 1918, "Cape Notes", *Int.*; Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Industrial Union of the Combined Sweet and Jam Workers Union of the Cape Peninsula, held at the Industrial Socialist League Hall, 3 December 1918, S.A. Rochlin Collection of South African Political and Trade Union Organisations, Concordia University Library Special Collection, B3A F12 I5; also see Johns, 89; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 13.

[313] First meeting, 10 September 1918, in Minutes of the First, Second and Third Meetings of the Industrial Union of the Combined Sweet and Jam Workers, held in the Industrial Socialist League Hall, 1918, S.A. Rochlin Collection, B3A F12 I4.

[314] Manuel Lopes, 27 September 1918, "Cape Notes", *Int.; Int.*, 21 December 1918, "Cape Notes"; also see Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 13.

[315] Second meeting, 17 September 1918, in Minutes of the First, Second and Third Meetings.

[316] L. Turok, 24 January 1919, "Cape Notes", *Int.*

[317] *Bols.*, May 1920, "Trade Union Notes"; Commissioner of Police, 1 June 1920, "Report on Bolshevism in the Union of South Africa", to Secretary for Justice, in Justice Department, 3/1064/18, 103; Mantzaris, *Labour Struggles*, 25, note 106.

The strike followed a joint meeting of the Industrial Workers of Africa, the ICU and the Cape Native Congress in Ndabeni, attended by 800 and chaired by Kraai.[318] It was Cetiwe who proposed the strike, and it was Cetiwe who, in the name of the Industrial Workers of Africa, sent the municipality the ultimatum: 10 shillings a day for unskilled workers, or strike action.[319]

Initially supported by the Cape Federation of Labour and NURHAS, the strike really rested on the Industrial Workers of Africa and the ICU, which held daily mass assemblies on the Grand Parade in the mornings, followed by evening meetings on Adderley Street.[320] Police and soldiers began to evict strikers from the Docks Location, another African ghetto, on Christmas Eve,[321] the unions squabbled, and the strike disintegrated. The two unions later held a joint meeting of 300 on the Grand Parade in March 1920.[322]

Echoes and legacies

Cetiwe and Kraai had tried to push the SANNC towards a policy of militant strike action at its annual congress in 1918, and repeated the performance at the congress of 1920. They were defeated, but the SANNC did resolve to support a general labour conference in Bloemfontein that year. The meeting drew in emerging unions from across the country, including the ICU and Industrial Workers of Africa, which resolved to merge under the ICU banner into "one great union of skilled and unskilled workers of South Africa, south of the Zambesi".[323] Ultimately Clements Kadalie, the leader of the original ICU, established himself as the key ICU leader.

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[318] Peter L. Wickens, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa", Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 1973, 67.

[319] Fred Cetiwe, 21 December 1919, "To the Mayor of the City of Cape Town", in "Strike of Natives in Docks", 3/CT, 4/1/4/286, F31/4, Cape Archives. This was more than double the minimum wage of 4 shillings established the previous year: Barry Kinkead-Weekes, "Africans in Cape Town: the origins and development of state policy and popular resistance to 1936", MA diss., University of Cape Town, 1985, 205. All mention of the Industrial Workers of Africa is absent from Kadalie's autobiography.

[320] Clements Kadalie, 42; Wickens, 69–74.

[321] Kadalie, 43; Wickens, 73–79, 82–83.

[322] Wickens, 84.

[323] Quoted in Wickens, 145–146.

The reference to "one great union" was no mere rhetorical flourish: the ICU repeatedly invoked the vision of "abolishing the capitalist class" through one big strike,[324] devised a constitution based on that of the IWW,[325] and drew the ire of the CPSA for its "pronounced anarcho-syndicalist tendencies".[326] It was far too eclectic, in fact, to be truly called syndicalist—Garveyism was a major influence, for example—but syndicalism was certainly part of its heady ideological mix. In the 1920s, the ICU would explode across the country with over 100,000 members, mainly African, at its height. Moreover, the ICU also spread into neighbouring colonies, spreading elements of syndicalism even further afield.[327]

In the meantime, the ISL, SDF, IndSL and several other smaller groups would come together to launch the CPSA, supplying most of its key leaders; the *International* became the CPSA paper, and the ISL Press the CPSA press. Not surprisingly, even an official Party history concedes, "syndicalist concepts remained within the Communist Party for many years after its foundation; echoes of their approach and phraseology appear in many documents and journals".[328] This lingering syndicalism was largely excised during the New Line period, which marked, in this sense, a major rupture in the party's history.

The third echo of syndicalism in the 1920s was provided by the Council of Action, identified with Percy Fisher, Ernie Shaw and H. Spendiff, "desperate men—men who would stop at nothing".[329] The Council advocated the formation of "revolutionary industrial units" and "a Republic of Industrial Workers",[330] and briefly took control

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[324] For instance, Divisional Criminal Investigations Officer, Witwatersrand Division, 1 May 1926, Confidential Report to Deputy Commissioner, South African Police, Witwatersrand Division, Johannesburg, in Department of Justice file, JUS 915 1/18/26 part 2, Pretoria: National Archives.

[325] Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, "Revised Constitution of the ICU", in Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, [1925] 1972, 325–326.

[326] Alfred Nzula, [1935] 1979, "The Struggles of the Negro Toilers in South Africa", appendix to Alfred Nzula, I.I. Potekhin and A. Zusmanovich, [1933] 1979, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*, Zed Books, London, edited and introduced by Robin Cohen, 206.

[327] See Lucien van der Walt, 2007, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW and the ICU, 1904–1934", *African Studies*, 66: 2/3, 2007, 237–243.

[328] Harmel, 40.

[329] Boydell, "My Luck was In", 196.

[330] F.W. Pate and A. McDermid, 18 February 1922, "Manifesto of the Mineworkers", *WD*.

of the Rand Revolt, opposing racial clashes and challenging the state power. Fisher and Shaw died, apparent suicides, as troops stormed the insurrection's headquarters in downtown Johannesburg.

In conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that anarchism and syndicalism in South Africa consistently sought to address the national question. The anarchist and syndicalist movement was multiracial in composition, as well as internationalist in outlook, and was characterised throughout by a principled and distinctive opposition to racial discrimination and prejudice, with a commitment to interracial labour organising and working class unity. Racial discrimination was lambasted as an outright evil, and racial prejudice as a profound threat to the working class. In its most developed form, the libertarians' approach envisaged One Big Union as the means of constituting a common society based on class solidarity. This would be an Industrial Republic, not a nation-state, and form part of a universal human community, the International Industrial Republic.

This vision has been obscured by the misrepresentations of the pre-CPSA left practiced by the influential Communist school of labour and left history. It is fundamentally at odds with the two-stage strategy identified with the CPSA and SACP from 1928 onwards, which envisages the establishment of an independent, democratic and capitalist republic as a step towards a socialist order. This Communist strategy assumes the necessity and desirability of *delinking* anti-colonial and class struggles, and tends to conflate national liberation with *nationalism*. From this perspective, it is perhaps unthinkable to Communist school writers that the pre-CPSA left may have had a sophisticated, perhaps even a more viable, approach to the national question. If this is conceded, and if nationalism is therefore reduced to but *one current* in national liberation struggles, then much of the rationale for a two-stage theory falls away.

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