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18

"All Workers Regardless of Craft, Race or Colour": The First Wave of IWW Activity and Influence in South Africa

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The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) quickly spread across the globe, its ideas and organizing model having a notable impact in a wide variety of contexts. In South Africa, the IWW had an important influence on sections of the left, labor, and national liberation movements beginning in 1908. By the end of 1910, IWW-style syndicalism was an important influence on local socialist networks, and on the country's main left weekly, the *Voice of Labour*; an active IWW union had waged significant strikes in Johannesburg, and also spread into Durban and Pretoria; and the local IWW and Socialist Labour Party (SLP) actively promoted variants of the IWW approach through written propaganda and public meetings.

By 1913, this early wave of IWW-influenced activity had almost completely faded away. It has since been overshadowed by a second upsurge of syndicalism, starting in 1915, and the founding of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1921. However, it bears closer examination. It helped lay the foundations for later left activism by promoting industrial unionism and syndicalist ideas, pioneering a class-based anti-racist left perspective on South Africa's social and national questions, and forging a layer of militants who would play important roles in subsequent years.

It is also worth revisiting in order to recall, and reflect upon, its limitations. While syndicalist (and communist) organizing from 1915 onward was notable for building a substantial base among black African, Coloured, and Indian workers, the first wave of IWW organizing and influence was

not. Instead, it was marked by an inability to break out of a largely immigrant, white, and English-speaking working-class milieu. The reasons for the contrasting situations—which lie largely at the level of politics—are important to understand, and will be considered in the conclusion.

Context: An African Capitalist Revolution

IWW ideas and models traveled into South Africa along the rivers of human labor that flowed into the territory to work in large-scale capitalist diamond mining, centered on Kimberley, and gold mining in the Witwatersrand. Prior to the late 1800s the territory was marginal to the world economy, mainly comprising non-capitalist agrarian societies. The new mines, however, rapidly attracted massive amounts of Western foreign direct investment, more than the rest of Africa combined.[1] The Kimberley mines were run by a monopoly and used cheap labor, a pattern of centralization reproduced on the Witwatersrand, where the mines—large, dangerous, deep-level operations—were soon controlled by an oligopoly of giant foreign firms. By 1898, the Witwatersrand was producing 27 percent of the world's gold. Mining towns sprang up along the reef, running east to west, the most of important of which was Johannesburg, which exploded from a population of 3,000 in 1886, to 100,000 in 1896, and then 250,000 in 1913.[2]

The mines spurred a massive expansion in infrastructure, a boom in port towns like Cape Town and Durban, agricultural commercialization, the rise of secondary industries, and the emergence of a southern African regional political economy. They developed in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century globalization, based on unprecedented flows of commodities, capital, and labor, and premised on advances in geography, telecommunications, and transportation which enabled, for the first time, a genuinely global economic system.[3]

This was also the era of the Scramble for Africa. In southern Africa, Britain was the dominant power, waging a series of wars from 1879 to 1902 in which all the remaining independent black African kingdoms, Coloured polities, and Afrikaner republics were conquered or subjugated. (The term "Black Africans" refers to the indigenous, agrarian, Bantu-language-speaking peoples. "Coloureds" in southern Africa means the "brown" people, largely of mixed race, Afrikaans-speaking and Christian, many descended from slaves and servants. "Afrikaners" (or "Boers") are a local white group, largely descended from Dutch, French, and German settlers, and distinct from local "English" whites. "Indians" refers to people

of South Asian descent, who lived in South Africa in significant numbers, many arriving as indentured laborers.)

Almost the whole region was carved into British territories, aside from German South West Africa and Portuguese-ruled Angola and Mozambique. The centerpiece was the Union of South Africa, into which the older British Cape and Natal colonies were merged with conquered Afrikaner republics and black African polities by a 1909 Act of the British Parliament. The Union was a racist state: all the formal elements of parliamentary democracy were in place, but almost all voters were white men, no person of color could sit in Parliament, and a battery of laws enforced racial discrimination and subjugation. The Union's total population in 1911 was just short of 6 million: 4 million black Africans (67 percent), 1,276,000 whites (21 percent), 525,000 Coloureds (9 percent), and 150,000 Indians (2.5 percent). The majority of parliamentarians represented Afrikaner landed interests, British and South African "English" capital, and powerful interests like the military. Black Africans were largely governed as subjects, through a system of indirect rule administered by black chiefs in the 10 percent of land set aside as "native reserves."[4]

Subordinate to Britain economically and politically, South Africa had dominion status like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, entailing substantial autonomy within the imperial framework. Force was central to the formation and consolidation of the new South African state, and every prime minister before the apartheid Parliament of 1948 was a former general. Mining, farming, and manufacturing were largely in (white) private hands, but the state soon dominated communications and transportation, including rail, and played a growing role in electricity, heavy industry, and forestry.

The Working Class: White, Black, and Red

The working class in South Africa was drawn from across the world. White immigration boomed: the white population in the Transvaal republic (later province), site of the gold mines, grew eightfold in this period. White immigrants were largely working class, many (but by no means all) skilled, and came mainly from Britain and Australia. In 1905, 85 percent of white underground gold miners were British-born; in 1921, 59.8 percent of typesetters, 55.8 percent of fitters, and 48.3 percent of carpenters were foreign-born. Large numbers of landless Afrikaners also entered wage labor: often unskilled, they were employed in mines, state industries, and manufacturing, and formed the core of the pool of poor whites.[5]

But cheap Coloured, Indian, and above all black African labor comprised the bulk of the workforce and the bedrock of capitalism. Coloureds, centered in the Cape, were the largest part of Cape Town's proletariat, and included many artisans; they were also important on the Witwatersrand. Indians, concentrated in Natal, were increasingly urbanized, and integral to the Durban economy. A growing population of urbanized and proletarianized black Africans was important across the country.

The biggest battalions of labor were black African migrant men, concentrated in mining, heavy industry, and the docks, in both the private and state sectors. They were cheap and unfree labor, and employed on terms amounting to indenture which made strike action and quitting criminal offences. Subject to an internal passport system (the pass laws), and housed in closed compounds, they returned periodically to rural homesteads, where their families resided, and to which they retired. Imperial war, land dispossession, and colonial taxation generated migrant labor across the region. In 1920, for example, only 51 percent of African miners working in South Africa were locals; the rest were from either Mozambique or British colonies. As in other sectors, divisions between blacks were fostered in the mines, with compounds divided by ethnic group and country of origin, and elements of an ethnic division of labor in place.[6]

The working class in South Africa was, in short, a stratified one, fractured by skill, ethnicity, race, and place of origin, as well as urban versus migrant divisions. Tensions festered within the multi-racial slums that could be found in all the big cities (despite state efforts at creating segregated townships), sometimes flaring into race riots, while ethnic clashes were a recurrent feature of the mines.

The Rise of (White) Labor

By 1913, the Witwatersrand economy employed 195,000 black Africans in mining, 37,000 in domestic service, and 6,000 in factories, workshops, and warehouses; plus 22,000 whites on the mines, 12,000 in industries like building, tramways, printing, and electricity, and 4,500 in rail. Whites, concentrated in urban areas, sometimes reached half of the population of the bigger cities and towns: in 1904, for example, Johannesburg had 155,462 residents, 82,000 of them white.[7]

The urban white working class, concentrated in working-class districts, dominating the skilled trades in the mines, and central to manufacturing and transport, was a potent force. It is hardly surprising, given its large immigrant component, that its politics and traditions were deeply

affected by international trends. White workers founded labor unionism in southern Africa. The first two successful unions were formed in 1881 in Cape Town on the British craft model; one, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, was actually a branch of a British union. American influences were also not unknown—there was, for example, a short-lived effort to form a Knights of Labor branch in Kimberley around 1890—and Australian labor was another important reference.

By the start of the twentieth century, the labor movement's center of gravity had shifted to the Witwatersrand, where the Transvaal Miners' Association (TMA) and the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) were formed in 1902. White miners led largely unsuccessful general strikes in 1907, 1913, 1914, and 1922, centered on winning union rights, job security, and wage, health, and other concessions. Steeped in racial prejudice, and fearing replacement by "cheap docile labour," the white unions were isolated from the mass of black workers. There were, however, some efforts to organize the unemployed across racial lines, notably in Cape Town in 1906.[8]

Union weakness, the rise of labor parties in Australia and Britain, and the opening of the electoral road with grants of responsible government and then dominion status to whites, all fostered a turn towards electoral politics. Union-backed candidates ran for office in Johannesburg in 1903 and 1904 and in Cape Town in 1905, and three labor-backed men were elected to the Transvaal parliament in 1907. In October 1909, the South African Labour Party was formed with union backing, winning four seats in the September 1910 South African general elections and capturing the Transvaal provincial government in 1914. It was heavily influenced by the "White Australia" policy, and its program combined social-democratic reforms with demands for race-based job reservation, residential segregation, and Indian repatriation. This "White Labourism" was the main current in South Africa's organized labor movement.

Thunder on the Left

But running against this tide, especially in Cape Town and Johannesburg, was an alternative, revolutionary, socialist current in the white working class. This too was deeply influenced by movements abroad; its founders were mainly Scottish and English immigrants. A notable example was Glasgow-born fitter Archie Crawford, a former British soldier, fired from Pretoria's state-run railway works in 1906 for agitation, central to a 1907 unemployed movement in Johannesburg, and elected to the Johannesburg municipality on a pro-labor ticket, he launched a General

Workers Union (GWU) in 1908.[9] Moving steadily leftwards, Crawford formed the Johannesburg Socialist Society with comrades like Irish-born Mary Fitzgerald of the TMA. The Society campaigned unsuccessfully for the Labour Party to adopt a clear socialist goal, and stress class, not color. Crawford was one of two unsuccessful Socialist Society candidates in the 1910 general elections. His dismal performance (eight votes) was at least partly because of his racial politics. Rather than avoid the color issue, as some historians have charged, he was notorious for opposing segregation in his campaign: "more than one time it looked like he would be torn to pieces by an ignorant mob."[10]

Crawford and Fitzgerald produced the *Voice of Labour* beginning in 1908. Initially a free bulletin for the GWU, it survived that union's 1909 collapse, and was relaunched as a "weekly journal of socialism, trade unionism and politics." Claiming a circulation of 2,000, it reached "the leading Socialists of Durban, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, Cape Town and Johannesburg." The first sustained local socialist paper, it provided a forum for activists dissatisfied with craft unions and the Labour Party.[11]

The content was eclectic, with articles on everything from "Good government: a noble legacy," to pieces by local anarchists such as Henry Glasse and Wilfred Harrison. Correspondents like Glasse promoted syndicalism and "direct action … over politics—I mean of course Parliamentary politics." The paper carried extracts from publications such as the *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*. Daniel De Leon and the syndicalism of the American SLP, which had local supporters, was also prominent, articulated by figures like Philip Roux, an unorthodox Afrikaner chemist who fought for the British in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Roux saw One Big Union as the alternative to craft divisions, colonialism, and militarism. He was close to Jock Campbell, a "Clydeside Irishman, a self-educated working man," who "had long ceased to work at his trade and now lived for and on the movement," and who was reputedly the "first socialist to make propaganda amongst the African workers."[12]

Hostility to craft unionism, the Labour Party, and White Labourism became defining features of the left network that emerged around the *Voice*, and these traits would be integral to the syndicalist current that emerged within it. Crawford, for example, insisted socialist ethics recognized no color bar, and called segregation "foolish in the extreme." "It is useless for the white worker to kick his coloured brother slave." Segregation schemes could never halt the capitalist drive for cheap labor. Glasse similarly argued that white workers, in fighting class battles "independent of the coloured wage slaves—the vast majority," exhibited "idiocy."[13]

Andrew Dunbar, blacksmithing at 80 years of age, in 1960. From Ivan L. Walker and Ben Weinbren, *2000 Casualties: A History of the Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa* (Johannesburg, South Africa: South African Trade Union Council, 1961).

In 1910, South Africa experienced a rise of syndicalist and IWW ideas and a "vigorous reaction" against "parliamentary reform." One spur was British syndicalist Tom Mann's February–March tour of Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. Besides promoting syndicalism, Mann publicly insisted that black and Coloured workers be included in unions, contrary to claims by later writers.[14]

Mann also persuaded the WTLC to set up an Industrial Workers' Union (IWU) in March 1910, for workers outside existing unions. It attracted a few small organizations of bootmakers, bakers, confectioners, and tailors, and held Sunday night meetings at Johannesburg's Market Square. In June,

IWW enthusiasts associated with the *Voice* network "captured the organisation and put it on a proper basis." Tom Glynn, an Irishman and ex-soldier who worked on the Johannesburg tramways, played a key role. An ardent Wobbly who first encountered the IWW in New Zealand, he became IWU general secretary. Glynn worked closely with Andrew Dunbar, a Scottish-born blacksmith who led a large strike on the Natal railways in 1909 before moving to Johannesburg, where he worked at the tramways and joined the Socialist Society.[15]

Glynn and Dunbar helped reposition the IWU as a "class-conscious revolutionary organisation embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour," renaming it the Industrial Workers of the World (South African Section). The IWW-SA identified itself with the Chicago wing of the American IWW, but it is not clear when this affiliation was formally recognized on the American end. While some unions like the bootmakers left over these changes, the local IWW-SA union made rapid gains at Johannesburg's City and Suburban Tramways Company.[16]

The tramways had been taken over by the municipality in June 1904, and electrified beginning in February 1906. Trams were housed and repaired adjacent to the main municipal power station in Newtown. By 1914, they carried 30 million passengers. Like other state operations, trams were segregated. The lines were concentrated in white working-class areas and the multiracial slums of western and central Johannesburg; the tram-yards and adjacent President Street power station were located in the central slums. In January 1911, the trams had 351 white workers: 1 waiting room attendant, 5 pointsmen, 11 inspectors, 150 drivers, and 153 conductors, not counting the workers doing maintenance at the yards, or the employees at the power station, which also employed black migrants.[17]

Meanwhile, the SLP formed in Johannesburg in March 1910. Vaguely described in the historical literature as "Marxist," it was actually a De Leonist grouping, and maintained especially close links to the SLP in Scotland. It ran meetings at Market Square on Sunday mornings, selling a "steady stream of journals and pamphlets" from Glasgow and Chicago, including the *Socialist* (also sold through shops) and the American *Weekly People*. Besides Roux and Jock Campbell, key figures included John Campbell (a Scot), Charlie Tyler (an English immigrant and unionist), and Israel Israelstam (a Lithuanian immigrant with ties to the local General Jewish Labor Bund).[18]

Changes, meanwhile, were afoot at the *Voice*. Crawford left South Africa in late 1910 for a 13-month trip around the world, and was replaced as editor by an unidentified Capetonian syndicate called "Proletarian."

"Proletarian" advocated "an organisation of wage-workers, black and white, male and female, young and old," along with "a universal general strike preparatory to seizing and running the interests of South Africa." Under his editorship, the *Voice* carried extensive IWW material, weekly "IWW notes" by Dunbar and Glynn, and regular SLP contributions. Gone were the pieces on "Good government." Instead, the *Voice* commissioned a series on IWW history, "specially written for *The Voice*" by Chicago IWW general secretary Vincent St John. The Chicago IWW, in turn, carried reports on the IWW-SA, often sourced from the *Voice*, in its *Industrial Solidarity* and *Industrial Worker*. The *Voice* never lost its open character, but its emphasis shifted, as contemporaries noted, "From Trades Unionism and Politics … to Industrial Unionism and Direct Action."[19]

International divisions between the rival IWW trends represented by St John's "Chicago IWW" and De Leon's "Detroit IWW" played out locally, between local militants embedded in different international networks—the IWW-SA, connected to the Chicago IWW, and the South African SLP, connected to the Glasgow SLP. Criticizing the IWW-SA for "physical force" politics and "Anarchism," SLP members would arrive at the IWW-SA's Sunday night meetings at Market Square armed with party literature and claiming to represent the "true" IWW. Heated exchanges took place, and Dunbar complained that the SLP members, not the employers, had proved the union's "most bitter opponents." However, the divide was not absolute: some SLP members also belonged to the IWW-SA.[20]

On the Left Track: Strikes in Johannesburg

While both the SLP and IWW-SA invested much energy in propaganda, the IWW-SA was qualitatively different from other small leftist groups such as the SLP and the Socialist Society—it was also a functioning union. For Glynn, the "other socialisms" confined their activities to propaganda or elections, but the IWW aimed, "here and now," to forge "the structure of the new society within the shell of the old" through revolutionary unions. Ruling-class power did not lie in the control of ideas or parliament, but in control of capital. Thus, revolution required workplace organizing. "Proletarian" agreed: the "parliamentary gas-house" was the "biggest farce imaginable." This outlook helps explain why a May 1911 effort to unite the IWW-SA, SLP, Socialist Society, and groups in Cape Town and Durban into an "Industrial Freedom League" lasted only a few weeks.[21]

The IWW-SA did not care much about that debacle, as it was preoccupied with the tramways. Workers' earlier efforts to organize had failed. However,

they made a breakthrough with the IWW-SA. Authoritarian management was a major grievance, and the spark was resentment at the impending return of an unpopular inspector, J. E. Peach. On Monday January 16, 174 conductors and drivers signed a letter of objection: this was rejected by management in a notice on Thursday January 19, stating that Peach was resuming duties immediately. Glynn organized a meeting that day, which sent another protest letter. Then, at a further meeting at 1 a.m. on Saturday, he successfully proposed a strike, despite opposition by Labour Party supporters.[22] When the morning shift started, strikers rallied at the yards, wearing "bits of red ribbon" and listening to speakers standing on a repairing car. The trams sat idle as strikers' representatives negotiated with "emissaries of the municipal authorities" in an empty tram and police watched the scene of "perfect peace." Glynn and others also approached the power station workers, who agreed to shut down the plant in solidarity at 1 p.m.[23]

Management initially promised a commission to look into the complaints, then when this failed, threatened arrests using the 1909 Industrial Disputes Prevention Act, which forbade lockouts and strikes without 30 days' notice and imposed a lengthy conciliation process. Glynn, in typical Wobbly style, retorted: "You can start with me and my place will be filled in regular order until we are all in jail, and who then will run your cars?" And to his fellow strikers, he enthusiastically declared: "For every leader seized there are half a dozen here to take his place."[24]

His confidence was well founded: employers were not obliged to recognize unions, but workers in strategic positions in industries such as transport, mining, and power could defy the law. At eight minutes to 1 pm, the municipality capitulated: the power station was then the only functioning municipal power and gas supplier.

The mayor appeared in person, promised a commission of enquiry, and also that Peach would not be an inspector. Excited workers drove the tramway cars out in a long "triumphant procession," to "a cheering and sympathetic populace." Almost the entire tramway workforce then enrolled in the IWW-SA, forming a Municipal Industrial Union presided over by Glynn. Crawford exaggerated slightly by claiming IWW-SA membership began to "exceed that of any other working class organisation," but it compared favorably with the 800 members reported by the TMA in 1909.[25]

May 1911 saw a second tramway strike, centered on the terms and composition of the municipal commission. Wobblies Glynn and W. P. Glendon organized a boycott of the hearings at the City Hall, fearful of a biased inquiry. The first hearing on April 25 was blockaded by IWW-SA pickets, and an employee who arrived to give evidence was assaulted. The inquiry

exonerated Peach, but Glynn and Glendon were subsequently summoned by the tramways management and dismissed for their role in the strike and assault.[26]

The night of Thursday May 11 witnessed "reckless speeches" at the tramway sheds. A strike resolution was again passed. Glynn declared that the IWW-SA "recognised no Industrial Disputes Act," but "claimed the right to cease work when they wanted." The dismissals were an attack on "the cause of the working class." The crowd, growing to 500, proceeded to Market Square, where Dunbar stated they must all be willing to go to jail. The SLP's John Campbell also spoke, stressing that "any little differences between the labour organisations" must be "brushed on one side in times of trouble."[27]

At 5 a.m. Friday morning, the IWW-SA struck, demanding that no January strikers be penalized, and that Glynn and Glendon be reinstated. This time, however, the municipality was well prepared: police surrounded the power station, patrolled the streets, and protected scabs. They also arrested Glynn and Glendon. Fitzgerald led a contingent of women with red banners through police lines to physically block the trams, and workers erected barricades in Market Square. On Saturday, the municipality invoked an archaic 1894 Transvaal proclamation banning public meetings of six or more, and mounted police started to clear the Square. Police clashed with demonstrators and arrested speakers, one after the other, including Dunbar, John Campbell, and Glynn (who had just been released on bail).[28]

Public sympathy was high: even the Labour Party rallied behind the strikers. On Sunday, mounted police charged protestors, leading to more injuries and arrests. The police also arrested two IWW-SA members, William Whittaker and T. Morant, for allegedly placing dynamite on the lines. The dynamite story, plus the ongoing disruptions in transport, helped shift public feeling. Within the week, the trams were running. Seventy workers were fired. Glynn got three months hard labor. Blacklisted, he left South Africa in late 1911 and became a leading figure in the Australian IWW.[29]

The IWW-SA remained active, holding successful meetings at Market Square. It gained new notoriety in October 1911 and January 1912 when Dunbar, Glynn, Fitzgerald, Morant, and others formed a "Pickhandle Brigade" which broke up election meetings for councilors blamed for smashing the May strike. The *Voice* and the IWW meanwhile organized a solidarity campaign for Whittaker and Morant, whose trial dragged on into 1912. The case collapsed when it emerged that a government agent, John Sherman, had laid the dynamite. Whittaker successfully sued for damages. A Whittaker-Morant Fund operated into June 1912 to aid the men.[30]

When the Pretoria railways hired Sherman in late 1911, the IWW organized protest meetings at Pretoria's railway works, addressed by Crawford, Dunbar, Fitzgerald, Glynn, and others, with some support from the Amalgamated Society of Railway and Harbour Servants. An IWW-SA "Pretoria Local" attracted workers, including "some of the Railway Servants Association," and government fears that the tramway strikers' open defiance of labor law might spread onto the railways seemed likely to be confirmed. The IWW also spread to Durban, the country's principal port, where "comrade Webber" from Johannesburg played an active role. A "very forceful and fluent" speaker, specializing in "blood-curdling class war propaganda," he spoke on "Syndicalism versus socialism" at the Town Gardens, championing direct action and presenting the Labour Party as class traitors.[31]

A Party Affair

But the "revolutionary methods" of the Pickhandle Brigade did little to advance on-the-job organizing. The shattered Municipal Industrial Union collapsed by early 1912. A further blow to the IWW-SA came from Crawford. He returned in November 1912, took control of the *Voice*, ousted "Proletarian," and campaigned for a united socialist party. He had long advocated a socialist party for "political action," and its "absolute corollary," parliamentary action, and clearly envisaged the IWW-SA as the proposed party's union wing. An admirer of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), he insisted it was closely allied to the IWW, and that the IWW, in turn, supported parliamentary action. St John fired off an angry letter repudiating Crawford's misrepresentations, but it only appeared in the *Voice* in mid-1912.[32]

Texts favoring elections and party-building flooded the *Voice*. In January 1912, Crawford announced a socialist unity conference set for Easter. The SLP, seeing an opportunity to promote its positions, cautiously expressed support. Dunbar, Morant, and "Proletarian" remained resolutely hostile to elections and parties. But Crawford had supporters in the now-smaller IWW-SA. In September 1911, Dunbar managed to defeat "a certain few" in their "attempt … to take the IWW management." In early 1912, the union seemed on the verge of splitting. The Crawford faction secured a resolution that "the IWW instruct its speakers not to attack the Socialist Party." It triumphed at the February 7 IWW-SA conference. Dunbar, the best remaining organizer, was expelled for his anti-party positions, and a newly elected committee, headed by Fitzgerald, took over. On April 7, Easter Sunday, the

United Socialist Party (USP) was founded. The IWW-SA attended, but made no substantive contribution. The USP identified with the Socialist Second International, and its rules were "modelled after … the American S.P."[33]

The short-lived USP was not a success. Webber clashed with others in the USP in Durban. SLP members tried to win over the USP and, failing, withdrew to work within the Labour Party. USP affiliates ignored party work and directives. IWW-SA organizing, beyond Whittaker-Morant solidarity, died off. The USP focused instead on lectures, elections, and international solidarity campaigns. Articles in the *Voice* complained of apathy in the USP and its slow growth, and of growing problems in financing the *Voice*. By the time of the great 1913 general strike on the Witwatersrand, the IWW-SA, the USP, and the *Voice* were dead.[34]

Conclusion

The great majority of local Wobblies and syndicalists before 1915 were radical, English-speaking white immigrants, mostly from Britain. Immigrant radicals like Dunbar, Glasse, Harrison, Israelstam, and John Campbell played a pivotal role in promoting syndicalism locally. Local radical circles were linked into transnational radical networks through the movement of people and the international circulation of the radical press, and developments like the 1908 IWW split into "Chicago" and "Detroit" sections had an important local impact.

This is not to say that developments abroad were simply copied locally. Radicals in South Africa had to grapple with the challenges of a social order substantively different from that of, for example, Australia, Britain, or the United States. They developed innovative tactics, such as the women's contingent in the May 1911 strike, and the subsequent Pickhandle Brigade, as well as innovative analyses, crucially through the critique of White Labourism.

Noting a growing number of strikes by black workers with approval, local Wobblies and syndicalists condemned the "idiocy" of restricting the labor movement to a minority of workers, all white and most of them artisans. The "'aristocrats' of labour" "attitude of superiority" was damned as "grotesque." All workers, the radicals insisted, had a common interest in the abolition of the cheap labor system, its cause, capitalism, and its defender, the state. Either workers of color would secure the same rights and wages as the whites, or the "stress of industrial competition" would compel the whites to "accept the same conditions of labour as their black brethren." Meanwhile, nationalism was rejected as the politics of "small capitalists."[35]

There is certainly no evidence for later claims, pioneered by Communist Party writers but repeated by scholars, that groups like the IWW-SA or SLP capitulated to white racism. What set these radicals apart from the mainstream labor movement was precisely their principled commitment to the formation of an inter-racial labor movement.[36]

This position alienated the majority of the white working class, yet the radicals also proved unable to build a base amongst black African, Coloured, and Indian workers. The obstacles to organizing these workers were, of course, substantial, including racial divisions, language barriers, repressive labor laws, restrictions on free movement, and the closed compound system. But the obstacles were not insurmountable: several craft and general unions in Cape Town had organized skilled Coloured workers by 1910, and in 1917, syndicalists formed the first unions among Indians in Durban (the Indian Workers' Industrial Union) and black Africans in Johannesburg (the Industrial Workers of Africa).

The radicals' failure was a political one, a failure to translate *principled* opposition to racism and national oppression into *mobilizing* African, Coloured, and Indian workers around class *and* national *and* racial demands. Condemning White Labourism and advocating One Big Union across racial barriers were essential, but inadequate, steps. They had to be turned into a specific *strategy* to organize workers of color, who were obviously not being drawn in by the *Voice* or through Sunday meetings on the Market Square, or through speeches at the tramyards or railway works. And organizing had to involve more than abstract denunciations of capitalism: it had to involve addressing the reality of national and racial oppression and grievances, by fighting against racist laws like the pass system, through the One Big Union.

The big syndicalist breakthroughs from 1915 onward happened when organizations like the International Socialist League and the Industrial Workers of Africa built a large base of black, Coloured, and Indian support through precisely these methods. However, the ideas of the *Voice*, IWW, and SLP helped lay the ideological basis for this breakthrough—and veterans like John Campbell, Dunbar, and Tyler all became central players in that second syndicalist wave.[37]

Notes

1 Nancy Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 3rd edn. (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 14.

2 Riva Krut, "The making of a South African Jewish community," in Belinda Boz-

zoli (ed.), C*lass, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Ravan, 1988), pp. 135–7.

3 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), p. 66 *et seq*.

4 The Cape retained a qualified franchise system, allowing a minority of black African and Coloured men to vote, while excluding poor whites. Natal had a similar but far more restrictive system. Population data is from Pieter van Duin, "South Africa," in Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870–1914* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1990), p. 640 n. 38.

5 Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, p. 14; Bill Freund, "The social character of secondary industry in South Africa, 1915–1945," in Alan Mabin (ed.), *Organisation and Economic Change* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Ravan, 1989), p. 85; Elaine Katz, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886–1910* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), p. 65; David Ticktin, "The origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888–1910," PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973, pp. 259–60; Wessel Visser, "Die Geskiedenis en Rol van Persorgane in the Politieke en Ekonomiese Mobilisasie van die Georganiseerde Arbeiderbeweging in Suid-Afrika, 1908–1924," PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2001, p. 2.

6 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.

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