SOUTH AFRICA'S BLACK UNIONS**

1. BLACK TRADE UNIONS SINCE THE DURBAN STRIKES


In 1979, the South African government passed the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act to change, among other concerns, the status of the African worker in the country's labor force. A crucial part of the Act was the government's decision to permit the registration of African trade unions and reduce their opposition to the right of African workers to negotiate with management for better wages and working conditions. In this essay Bonner reviews African trade union history in South Africa between World War II and the publication of the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Labor Legislation (the Wiehahn Commission) in 1979. See also "Current Labor Issues in South Africa" by F. Wilson (The Apartheid Regime: Political Power and Racial Domination, pages 152-173).


Many experts view African labor power in South Africa as an agent of either evolutionary or revolutionary change in dismantling the apartheid system. The authors of this essay present a series of case studies to illustrate the potential role of African workers and to forecast an incline in trade union actions as the 1970s moved on. See also Robert Davies' "Capital Restructuring and Modification of the Racial Division of Labour in South Africa" (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers #26. The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 10. 1981).

Institute for Industrial Relations. *The Durban strikes 1973: "human beings...

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** Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.

Between January and March, 1973 African workers participated in a series of strikes in Durban, South Africa, that have come to symbolize a turning point in African labor relations history in that country. The Durban strikes gave considerable momentum to the African trade union movement and brought the attention of labor organizations, investors, and human rights groups from abroad. The Institute for Industrial Education assessed the strikes as they happened, interviewing representatives from all parties involved, and produced one of the few book-length accounts of the significance of the events. In their study, they noted that Durban, unlike earlier labor, was more successful because it won an increase in wages and the attention of the South African government, company management, and the international community. Another account of the Durban Strikes is “The Durban Strikes” (Africa Report, 18/2. March-April, 1973. Pages 25-6), by Benjamin Pogrund. Brigitte Lachartre also discusses African labor strikes in Luttes Ouvrières et Libération en Afrique du Sud (Paris: Syros, 1977).


Gains made by black trade unions in industry have eroded some of the resistance of government, management, and white unions in South Africa to the rights of the black unionists to bargaining power. The author highlights recent events in independent black trade union history, including analyses of black worker membership, the effects of the recent strikes, and government-management response, and concludes with a discussion of politics and black trade union activism.


The rapid growth of African trade unions and union membership in the past three years is, as the author suggests, an expression of discontent not only over wages and working conditions but of the rights of South Africa’s black population under apartheid. The African trade union movement, though making considerable ground of late, remains vulnerable despite government legislation that claims to give support and recognition for African workers to organize and negotiate with company management. Included in this article are profiles of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Confederation of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), two leading African union organizations, and discussions on the unaffiliated or unregistered African unions and the parallel unions, those with membership in white-dominated union organizations such as the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUSCA). See also “Black Workers Confront the State,” in Southern Africa (198 Broadway, New York), 15/4, November 1982, pages 7-11.


Challenged by the mounting influence on unregistered African trade unions, the South African government established the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry in 1977 to reassess industrial relations in that country. The Commission's recommendations regarding the African worker fell into two broad categories: that African workers be considered as "employees" under the Industrial Conciliation Act, therefore extending the right to register and negotiate to the African trade unions and as a result incorporating them into the industrial system, and that changes should be made in the racial allocation of jobs, that is the government should take steps to reduce racial barriers in employment and allow African workers to be trained under the country's apprenticeship law. The Commission's report led to passage of the 1979 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, in which many of the recommendations were incorporated with modification. Both the Commission's report and the amendment act have been critiqued by labor and political analysts inside and out of South Africa. The South African Journal of Labour Relations devoted an entire issue (3/2 June, 1979) to an analysis of the Commission's first report and the government's White Paper on its recommendations. See also "Capital and Labor in South Africa; preliminary remarks on the Wiehahn Commission Report," by Moeletsiki Mbeki (Monthly Review. 31/10. March, 1980. Pages 10-19).


A special issue devoted to the "sensitive subject of the interaction between the political and industrial relations aspects of the changing South African environment." Varying opinions on labor organization, negotiation, and political influence of black workers are offered by a group of South Africans that includes Stephanus Botha, Minister of Manpower, labor leader Lucy Mvubelo, and Nic Wiehahn.

2. AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS AND THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS


Today's African trade unions in South Africa can be divided into two types: parallel unions, or those affiliated with predominately white union organizations, and independent or nonaffiliated unions. David Hauck's study for the IRRC describes the union, their history, their rights under the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979, and the future of their relationship with management. The study is based on interviews and information obtained from trade union literature.


Black worker militancy in South Africa presents one of the most formidable
challenges to multinationals in the country during the 1980s. Kane-Berman recommends that foreign investors must not ignore the independent unions (those choosing not to affiliate with the Trade Union Council for South Africa [TUSCA] and generally founded after Durban) when negotiating with the African parallel unions who have chosen TUCSA membership. The non-affiliated unions continue to have clout with many African workers.


Over half of the Fortune 500 companies have South African subsidiaries, employing some 70,000 African workers. These companies have been placed under pressure from organizations and interest groups to either divest or force changes in the South African workplace. Myers discusses US business involvement in South Africa and the impact of apartheid and changes in labor laws on management-Africa worker relations. Particular attention has been given here to the effects of the Sullivan Principles, a plan drawn up by civil rights leader and General Motors board member the Rev. Leon Sullivan that was designed to encourage American companies to make changes voluntarily in the African wage scale and in the workplace in South Africa. Myers also analyzes four strategic sectors of the South African economy—oil, computers and electronics, motor vehicles, and minerals—as case studies. The Sullivan Principles and other relevant documentation has been reprinted in the book’s appendix. See also two other studies by Myers: *Business and Labor Practices in South Africa*. (Washington, DC: IRRC, 1979) and *Labor Practices of U.S. Corporations in South Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1977).


In 1977 the European Economic Community issued its “Code of Conduct for Companies with Subsidiaries, Branches, or Representation in South Africa.” The document was a European equivalent to the Sullivan Principles, calling for voluntary changes in Africa labor relations with European companies operating in South Africa. The Stares study looks at the growing influence of then unregistered African trade unions on African workers during the 1970s and the need for British firms to “respond in a constructive way to the challenge they represent” (preface). He then evaluates the EEC Code and offers recommendations to British firms on their implementation.