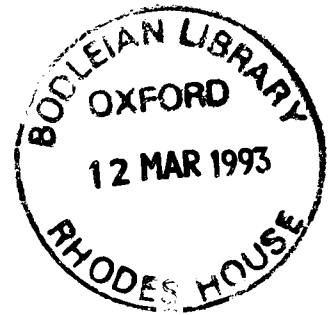
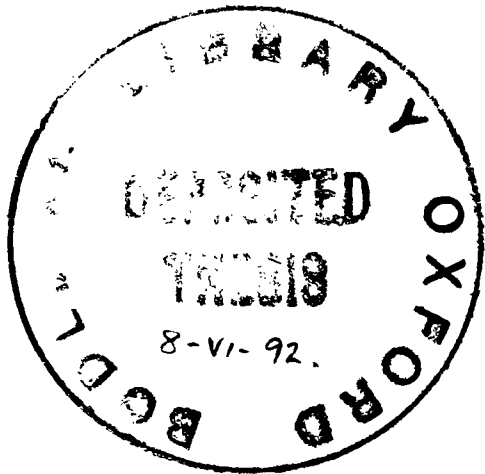


**CLASS, RACE AND NATION:
AFRICAN POLITICS IN DURBAN, 1929-1949**



by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Modern History,
University of Oxford, for the degree of
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SHORT ABSTRACT

CLASS, RACE AND NATION: AFRICAN POLITICS IN DURBAN, 1929-1949

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The 1930s and 1940s in Durban have been relatively under-researched, and yet these two decades constituted a crucial phase in the city's growth. This thesis concentrates on the political experiences of Africans during the period.

The beer hall riots of 1929 and the 'African-Indian' riots of 1949 serve as significant points at which to start and end the thesis. These two flashpoints were very different in nature, and their differences signalled the changes that took place in Durban between the late 1920s and the late 1940s. Yet the riots can also be linked: they both reflected extreme frustration amongst Africans at their exclusion from the resources of the city. The two riots illuminate key issues in African politics, in municipal and state policy, and in the changing structures of Durban society.

These comparative findings are based on a detailed study of the period between the two riots. A wide variety of African political experiences in Durban is examined. These fall into four broad categories of political ideology and practice: populism, nationalism, ethnicity and 'workerism'. The narrative begins with the radical anti-municipal populism of 1929-30 and then attempts to explain the politically 'quiet' 1930s. The Second World War brought significant changes, giving rise to a range of important new ideologies and political strategies. The most important developments were in worker organisation and nationalist politics. The struggle for the city was heightened even

further in the post-war period. Wide-ranging expressions of urban populism and racial ethnicity set the scene for the 1949 riots.

Due to the nature of the evidence collected, much of the thesis concentrates on the roles played by the (largely middle class) political leadership. The analysis portrays African politics as a complex process of 'negotiation', and the historical narrative is informed by theoretical perspectives which integrate 'class' and 'race'.

LONG ABSTRACT**(WRITTEN ACCORDING TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FACULTY OF MODERN HISTORY)****CLASS, RACE AND NATION: AFRICAN POLITICS IN DURBAN, 1929-1949**

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Submitted for the degree of D.Phil.
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This thesis joins a growing number of urban studies in South African historiography. The contemporary significance of urban politics has generated a good deal of lively historical research. The cities of the Transvaal and the western Cape have received the most attention. During the early to mid 1980s, in an attempt to redress this regional imbalance, a group of historians at the University of Natal began a series of research projects on Durban history. By far the largest city in twentieth century Natal, Durban was the obvious place to start. Both in the past and the present the sheer size and economic significance of Durban gives it a political prominence which overshadows Natal's administrative capital, Pietermaritzburg.

I was attracted to my topic by the work already begun at the University of Natal in Durban. In Natal's relatively undeveloped urban historiography, the emerging literature on Durban provided a useful frame of reference for a doctoral project. The Durban research programme concentrated on the history of Africans in particular, and this also helped me to decide on my topic. Africans in general have been the most oppressed group in Durban's racially organised society, and their history has been the most easily suppressed or forgotten. By concentrating on different subjects, previous generations of academic historians have assisted the process of forgetting. The political

developments of the 1970s and 1980s, most particularly the dramatic intensification of urban conflict, have made it imperative to insert Africans ever more centrally into Durban's recorded past. Ideally this should be done in a holistic way, incorporating the history of Durban's whites and Indians. This would enable us to move beyond racially bounded histories which, in part, have reflected racially differential experiences of the city. But Durban's historiography is not yet developed enough to achieve such a synthesis. This thesis takes us a few steps closer to that goal, by strengthening the reconstruction of an 'African' past, and by making African-Indian relations a central theme of the last two chapters.

The research programme at the University of Natal also helped to define the chronological parameters of my thesis. The 1930s and 1940s were relatively neglected and I decided to fill this gap. The political flashpoints of 1929 and 1949 provide obvious and challenging places at which to begin and end my study. Africans were the central actors in both these conflicts. In the first instance, they deployed direct action against municipal policies, and in the second - a highly complex urban revolt - they targeted Indians. The riots of 1929 and 1949 raise important questions about the eruption of public violence, an important feature of Durban's past and present. The events of 1929 were very different in nature from those of 1949. Comparing them illustrates the changing nature of Durban society and of African politics between the late 1920s and the late 1940s. Yet 1929 and 1949 can also be linked. They both reflected widespread African frustration at being excluded from the resources of the city. Through various twists and turns, the failure to achieve deep-seated demands in 1929 found a tragic outlet in 1949.

To understand this connection between 1929 and 1949 we need to examine

developments in the interim. This thesis creates a bridge between these two major events. In doing so, it recounts and analyses a wide range of African political experiences, from the turbulent 1920s through the depressed 1930s to the ebullient 1940s. The nature of the evidence collected has shaped my approach. Drawing on relatively accessible archival material - most of it in English - my analysis concentrates on the ideologies, strategies and tactics of African political leaders. The motives and consciousness of their followers (or potential followers) have been far more difficult to plumb, although on occasions this has been possible. Popular political culture, and the nature of pressure 'from below' on the African leadership, await further exploration.

It would be insufficient merely to examine the internal dynamics of organised African politics in Durban between the late 1920s and the late 1940s. African politics needs to be situated in the context of the socio-political transformation of Durban and the evolution of municipal policies. This period was a crucial phase of the city's early industrialisation and it saw important policy developments. With a few exceptions, the agenda of African politics was created by the initiatives of white politicians, administrators and capitalists. African politicians spent most of their energy responding to or probing segregationist municipal and government policies. This reflected the essential weakness of their position. The embodiments of white power - state and capital - were themselves continually having to react to the pressures and changes of urbanisation and industrialisation. These responses, in turn, created new forces in African politics. A nuanced historical narrative is required to understand these developments. A theoretical approach which integrates social structure and human agency is also needed.

African political developments are best understood as a multiple process of 'negotiation'. The main sites of negotiation were between the political leaders and white power, and between those leaders and the African masses. This was the classic ideological, strategic and tactical terrain of oppositionist politics in a 'colonial' milieu. By virtue of their mission school education, and their connections through a network of 'improving' families, members of the African middle class dominated the roles of political leadership in a largely illiterate society. Their whole socialisation was towards integration into the upper levels of South African society, as members of an urban middle class or as rural landowners. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the gathering policies of segregation closed the door on integration, but offered new openings through 'advisory' politics and retribalisation. At the same time, changing class identities amongst Africans, especially the growth of an urbanised proletariat and lumpen proletariat, put new and potentially radical pressures on African politics. The African middle class itself became more divided socially, between more desperate lower ranks and more established upper strata. In response to these multiple developments, the middle class politicians developed an increasingly complex set of ideologies and tactics. It was not simply a choice between elitist petitioning and popular confrontation, although specific groups within the African middle class tended towards these two particular poles. The growing variety of middle class political practices reflected complementary strategies which sought to monopolise the roles of 'negotiation' between the masses and the state. At moments of acute social crisis the claims to leadership by the African middle class were challenged by more marginal groups in African society, but these challenges were not easily sustainable. The precise nature of the 'negotiation' process depended on particular social forces and power relations which existed at

specific historical conjunctures.

Any account of African politics in Durban between 1929 and 1949 has to grapple with the interaction of 'class' and 'race'. Durban developed as a distinctly racial society, yet it was also a society undergoing industrialisation, where conflicting property relations and unequal access to resources gave rise to class struggles. Parkin's neo-Weberian model of class conflict integrates 'race' as an instrument of domination and resistance.¹ This model defines 'class' primarily through political strategies of 'closure', which seek either to secure domination through 'exclusion' or to contest domination through 'usurpation'. I have found this approach most convincing in explaining African politics in Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. Through it we can understand middle class elitism, and the whole range of mobilising ideologies from populism to nationalism to ethnicity. Each of these ideologies, and their accompanying political practices, expressed the various ambitions and frustrations of the 'nation'. This over-arching and inclusive concept was a meaningful but often ambiguous reference point in African political language during the period. The term 'nation' was used by populists in bread-and-butter struggles against the Durban municipality, by nationalists in countrywide mobilisation against the South African state, and by ethnic politicians seeking to build regional identities. The greatest challenge to the various understandings of 'nation' came from the mobilisation and organisation of African workers in trade unions. But it was a challenge which did not develop much momentum, and which tended to be absorbed into the broader thrusts of community politics.

As this is a history thesis, these theoretical insights are expressed through the narrative itself. After outlining the position of Africans in Durban society and politics

1. F. Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique (London, Tavistock, 1979), pp.44-47, chs.4-6.

during the 1920s, the historical account begins with the radical anti-municipal populism of 1929-30. This politics of confrontation was led by the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, and was informed by militant strands of Zulu ethnicity and communist ideology. The central events were the beer hall riots and boycott, and the campaign to burn passes. State repression and reform, the onset of the Great Depression, and the rickety nature of the populist alliance, all helped to end this 'moment' of mass conflict between Durban's Africans and the municipality. The events of the late 1920s provide important insights into Durban society and African politics. The thesis proceeds from this set of reference points.

In the bleak political conditions of the 1930s radical populism was superseded by conservative forms of regional Zulu ethnicity, rooted in a defensive reaction to the radicalism of the 1920s. Durban was only marginally involved with the state's retribalisation policies, which were largely directed towards shoring up rural society. But because of the large number of migrant labourers in Durban it was not surprising that local politicians tried to exploit the new terrain of state-sanctioned ethnicity. Alongside various kinds of ethnic mobilisation an explicitly elitist urban agenda dominated the politics of the African middle class during the 1930s. Except for sporadic instances of radicalism, there was remarkably little pressure on these leaders 'from below'. As a result, the 1930s were 'quiet' years for organised African politics.

The Second World War brought drastic changes, accelerating the social transformation of the city and providing new international political influences. The ethnic politics of the 1930s quickly became outdated. War-time strikes and trade union organisation amongst African workers marked a significant new development, building on the pioneering worker struggles of the late 1930s. Neither strikes nor unions had yet

been seen on any significant scale in Durban's history. The paucity of organised worker action was a consequence of migrant labour and the concentration of African workers in the vulnerable margins of a racially-structured labour market. Strikes among structurally weak and disorganised workers were short-term phenomena, but the more resilient unions promised to exert a longer-lasting influence, both politically and in the workplace. An incipient multi-racial populism, espoused by the Communist Party, was another development during the war. Communist slogans and speeches spoke not only of a faraway war, but of democratic and socialist demands for all South Africans. This message briefly mobilised significant numbers of Indians, Africans and even whites in united campaigns. As conditions changed after 1942, this multi-racial populism was overshadowed in African politics by new nationalist, populist and ethnic voices.

Coherent ideologies of African nationalism only developed significant momentum in Durban during the early 1940s. A new, upwardly-mobile generation of middle class activists urged confrontation between an increasingly urbanised and materially desperate 'African nation' and the segregationist state. African nationalism had an important ideological impact; but its practical effect on Durban's politics was limited to livening up the internal organisation of the African National Congress. In spite of this, African politics remained weakly organised and poorly followed. African nationalism spanned an ideological range from multi-racial humanism to parochial Africanism. The latter merged into the racial ethnicity of anti-Indianism. Within an increasingly complex urban landscape, anti-Indianism became ever more central to African political culture during the late 1940s. Alongside this, the post-war period saw the growth of a diffuse populist politics targeted against municipal power and state authority. The state's new racial zoning plans, which were a response to the gathering urban crisis, embodied a

far-reaching threat to the stake of Africans in the city. But African society at the time was too fluid, disorganised and divided to be mobilised behind a coherent mass movement of resistance.

The 1949 riots, at one level, were an anti-Indian pogrom carried out by certain groups of Africans. This was a particularly violent explosion of racial ethnicity, indicating its pervasive appeal. In the struggle for the city, Indians were singled out as a politically vulnerable but economically influential group. The riots developed through three phases and threatened ultimately to become a city-wide revolt. In suppressing this challenge with armed force, the state authorities were now more convinced that Durban had to undergo major restructuring if the political and economic interests of whites were to be secured and entrenched. The city had imploded and the implications were alarming for white power holders and property owners. For African politics the riots were also a watershed, both for those who took advantage of the conflict and for those who grappled with the consequences for multi-racial mass campaigns against apartheid.

The thesis ends at this dramatic and significant moment. The 1949 riots raised stark questions about leadership, ideology, strategy and organisation in African politics. The riots also highlighted the nature of Durban society. Similar questions were posed by the 1929 riots, although the nature of the earlier conflict was different. This thesis sets out to provide answers to these questions, both for these events and for less spectacular but important happenings in between. In doing so, it seeks to fill a significant gap in Durban's history. It offers new insights into the race-class debate; and it explores the complex inter-relation between populist, nationalist, ethnic and 'workerist' mobilisation in African politics.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT AND FOOTNOTES

ABCIU	African Bakers' and Confectioners' Industrial Union
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ACDWU	African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union
ANC	African National Congress
ASAPS	Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society
BSC	Bantu Social Centre
CAD	Central Archives Depot, Pretoria
CAU	Catholic African Union
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
CYL	Congress Youth League
DCC	Durban City Corporation
DMC	Durban Magistrate, Correspondence
IEA	Industrial Employers' Association, Natal
IC	Industrial Conciliation
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
JSAS	Journal of Southern African Studies
KC	Killie Campbell Library, Durban
KCAV	Killie Campbell Library, Durban: Audio-Visual
KCM	T. Karis and G. Carter, 'South African Political Materials Microfilm'.
LCTEU	Liquor and Catering Trades Employees' Union

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT AND FOOTNOTES (Cont.)

LGAA	London Group on African Affairs.
MOH	Medical Officer of Health, Durban
NA	Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg
NAC	Natal African Congress
NAB	Native Advisory Board
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAGLU	Natal African General Labourers' Union
NAISWU	Natal African Iron and Steel Workers' Union
NATPA	Natal African Tenants and Peasants Association
NC	Native Commissioner, Durban
NEUF	Non-European United Front
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NIO	Natal Indian Organisation
NISWU	Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union
NLAB	Native Locations Advisory Board
NNC	Natal Native Congress
NRC	Natives Representative Council
NRWIU	Natal Rubber Workers' Industrial Union
NTS	Naturellesake (Native Affairs Department), Pretoria
NUAY	National Union of African Youth
NWO	Native Welfare Officer
NZNWU	Natal Zulu National Workers Union
RH	Rhodes House Library, Oxford

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT AND FOOTNOTES (Cont.)

SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SAP	South African Police
SAR	South African Railways
SARHWU-NE	South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (Non-European)
SNA	Secretary for Native Affairs
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies, London
TC	Town Clerk, Durban
TLC	Trades and Labour Council, Durban
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa
UW DHP	University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Historical Papers

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late nineteenth century Durban has been Natal's largest urban centre, mushrooming from its small beginnings as a coastal port. Politically, economically and demographically it has since then towered over the Natal hinterland. Durban grew initially as the port closest to the mineral revolution on the Witwatersrand. From the 1910s it serviced the industrial transformation of the southern Transvaal, and by the 1950s it had become a significant manufacturing centre itself. Today it is a sprawling metropolis of three to four million people.

Natal's urban history is relatively undeveloped, and Durban is the obvious place to start. Durban's past illuminates both urban and regional history, providing an important reference point for future studies of Natal's smaller cities and towns. I was initially drawn to my thesis topic by a research programme on Africans in Durban coordinated by Paul Maylam and others at the University of Natal during the early to mid 1980s.¹ This programme built on the pioneering local and regional studies of Kuper, Swanson, Marks and Hemson.² Various research projects were beginning to piece together the history of Durban's Africans since the late nineteenth century. Essentially this work addressed the interactions between 'native' policy, social change and African politics. The research of la Hausse and Edwards, in particular, has provided a framework for my dissertation. La Hausse examined municipal policy, African popular

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1. The first structured presentation of this research occurred at a Workshop on African Urban Life in Durban in the Twentieth Century, held at University of Natal, Durban, in 1983.
 2. L. Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965); M.W. Swanson, 'The Rise of Multi-Racial Durban: Urban History and Race Policy in South Africa, 1830-1930', PhD thesis, University of Harvard, 1965; S. Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L Dube of Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, 2 (1975), pp.162-180; S. Marks, 'Natal, the Zulu Royal Family and the Ideology of Segregation', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4, 2 (1978), pp.172-194; D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban', PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1979.

culture, and politics in Durban between the early 1900s and the early 1930s.¹ Edwards' doctoral research looked at similar themes from the late 1940s until 1960.² African politics during the 1930s and 1940s needed closer examination.

My thesis concentrates on the political experiences of Africans during a crucial phase of the city's early industrialisation, between the 1920s and the 1950s. In this period Durban was transformed from a medium-sized commercial centre into a large industrial city. Between 1921 and 1951, Durban's population increased from 169,000 to 480,000.³ The social profile of the city's Africans changed from being a largely migrant workforce and a tiny middle class to a more urbanised proletariat and a growing middle class.

The dissertation's focus on Africans reflects the influence of Durban's historiography which, in turn, has been shaped by the racial structures of Durban society. Histories of Durban have tended to limit themselves to 'white', 'Indian' or 'African' studies. We are still a long way from a holistic portrayal of Durban, reflecting the integration of all the city's residents into a single political economy. This thesis, drawing on work already done, hopes to move Durban's historiography nearer that goal. Africans have had a distinctive past as the most exploited and oppressed segment of Durban society, but they were not a watertight racial group. My study highlights the complex interaction of class and race in Durban's past. Between the

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1. P. la Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902-36', MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984. Subsequent work drawing on the thesis includes: 'The Dispersal of the Regiments: African Popular Protest in Durban, 1930', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 10, 1987, pp.77-102; 'The Message of the Warriors: The ICU, the Labouring Poor and the Making of a Popular Political Culture in Durban, 1925-30', in P Bonner et al. (eds.), *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press and Ravan, 1989), pp.19-58.
 2. I.L. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane Our Home: A History of African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-1960', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989.
 3. J.R. Burrows, *The Population and Labour Resources of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1959), pp.24-5.

1920s and the 1950s the proportion of Africans, whites and Indians was roughly similar, giving Durban - South Africa's third largest city - a unique racial character.

At the risk of treading on the toes of fellow researchers, I identified 1929-30 and 1949 as key moments in Durban's history, and as meaningful boundaries for my thesis topic.¹ The years 1929-30 saw a significant peak in African militancy, reflected particularly in beer hall riots and a campaign against passes. Urban revolt on this scale had not yet occurred amongst Africans in the city's history. The target of resistance was the repressive set of municipal 'native' policies known as the 'Durban System'. Large numbers of Africans were mobilised against the municipality through a radical populist politics. The authorities met this with a potent dose of repression and reform which, together with the Great Depression, neutralised the militancy of the previous few years. The conflicts of 1929-30 laid bare the nature of Durban society and highlighted key dynamics in African politics. These events provide a good starting point for the thesis.

The 1930s were politically 'quiet', and this has to be explained. During the early to mid 1930s, the political centre-stage belonged to middle class African politicians who busied themselves with conservative class and ethnic politics during the high tide of segregation. It was an elitist politics, relying on the passive involvement of the masses. Militancy flared sporadically, under highly unfavourable circumstances.

From the late 1930s, however, African politics began to become more turbulent again. The most important indicator of this was the series of strikes in 1937. For the first time, Durban's African workers were mobilised in significant numbers around

1. This periodisation is also hinted at in S. Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness', in L. Vail (ed.), The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa (London, James Currey, 1989), p.218.

wage demands. Worker struggles developed further during World War Two, particularly through the pioneering unionisation of African workers. The war was a turning point in Durban's history, when structural and social change accelerated. In the process, new leaders, organisations, ideas and struggles developed. The ethnic politics of the 1930s was overshadowed. By the mid 1940s a heightened tempo of African politics, focused around demands for urban 'citizenship', had begun to challenge the municipality and local capital in new ways. There were still many weaknesses in this challenge, but urban crisis, worker organisation, African nationalism and populism created a volatile mixture in the post-war period. This manifested itself in a variety of ways, but was poorly organised. There was no clearly dominant African political leadership. If there was a common thread, it was one of heightened struggle for resources and power in a racially ordered city undergoing rapid transformation. There were a multitude of potential targets and axes of mobilisation.

At the end of the 1940s there were growing signs of a possible conflagration in Durban, but the 1949 riots, and the form they took, were not inevitable. The underlying issues of this conflict were similar to those of 1929: Africans were demanding a greater share of a city that excluded them on many counts. In 1929, Africans had directed their frustration and anger against key aspects of municipal policy. In 1949 a different target caught the popular imagination: Durban's Indians. The 1949 riots were, in effect, a collective assault by certain African groups on those Indians who were generally perceived to constitute a politically vulnerable 'racial' barrier to the achievement of urban African demands. The riots are not only important events in themselves; they offer a prism through which to look back at the social and political developments of the 1940s and perhaps earlier. Increasingly, from the late

1930s, the position of Indians in Durban's political economy had become an issue of mobilisation in African politics. This growth of racial ethnicity reflected the impact of state policy, the racially differential structures of Durban society, and trends in Indian politics. Africans in Durban - middle class and workers - increasingly had to fit themselves into an urban environment where Indians were generally ahead of them in the queue. This reality confronted any attempt to mobilise Africans and Indians jointly as racially and economically oppressed groups, whether in the workplace or the community. The 1949 riots highlighted the simmering tensions of African-Indian relations. The riots were a milestone both in black politics and in urban policy. Afterwards, nothing would be quite the same. The 1949 conflict marks a significant moment with which to end the thesis.

African communal mobilisation and worker organisation revealed a continuous process of 'negotiation' which the African leadership undertook with state and capital, on the one hand, and with the masses, on the other. Between the late 1920s and the late 1940s, the negotiating power of African leaders was generally weak. Whatever strategy they chose, their bargaining power was directly related to their ability to sustain and monopolise populist, nationalist, ethnic, and worker followings. To achieve this, opposing claimants to African leadership had to be co-opted or excluded. New issues and circumstances were continually moving the political goal posts. To be seen to be currying influence with state officials or employers, and not producing concrete benefits for followers, soon resulted in unpopularity and even illegitimacy for political leaders. On the other hand, democratic organisation was generally absent, and political consciousness amongst Durban's Africans was fractured and undeveloped. Limited accountability on the part of leaders was matched by shallow commitment from

followers. To curry the favour of the masses by mobilising around popular demands held out possibilities of being pushed into militant tactics. The danger of this for middle class leaders was that their relatively privileged position might be threatened by the aspirations and tactics of groups lower down the hierarchy. Furthermore, militant leaders faced state suppression. On the other hand, there were perils for middle class leaders if they did not tap into or initiate mass militancy. Worker or lumpen leaders could rise to fill the gap, to the exclusion of the middle class.

The great bulk of leadership in organised African politics was drawn from the artisans, traders, journalists, clerics, teachers and clerks of the African middle class. Members of this social group were excluded from the dominant class by racist state policies, but their social practices, skills and aspirations set them apart from the mass of Africans.¹ The African middle class was, to use Kuper's phrase, at the 'apex of subordination'.² This group occupied an intermediate position between an almost exclusively white dominant class and a largely black subordinate class. In Marxist theory, this position is the contradictory class location of the petty bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy, who are neither fully bourgeois nor fully proletarian.³ Socially, politically and economically they are pulled in opposing directions in the class war. Consequently, their politics tends to manoeuvre between elitism and mass mobilisation. This 'betting both ways' might appear contradictory at an abstract theoretical level, but it is better seen as a maximizing strategy for human actors in concrete situations. Marks

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1. For an important broader discussion, see B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), chap.7.
 2. Kuper, Bourgeoisie, p.7.
 3. For an important application of this theory, P.L. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: The Radicalisation of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa (London, Longman, 1982), pp.270-313.

uses the notion of 'ambiguity' to characterise such strategies.¹ Work by Cobley, Couzens, and Bradford, among others, has paved the way for more nuanced analyses of the politics of the African middle class, subject to the particular constraints and opportunities of a given moment.²

Having outlined the basic chronology, and the historical problem which is to be tackled, it is necessary to comment on the nature of the evidence I have used, and then to introduce briefly the major concepts and theories which inform my analysis. I have relied heavily on the state archives, English-language newspapers, and various collections of oral material and private papers. These sources have yielded much information on middle class African political leaders, but less on their followers. A good deal of my analysis therefore focuses on the nature of political leadership. Followers feature prominently only at certain moments when the evidence allows it or when the theme demands it. A systematic and critical use of relatively accessible evidence has enabled me to address a number of important themes in the history of Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. In doing so, I have drawn on the sizeable literature dealing with black political leadership, organisation and mobilisation in twentieth century South Africa.³

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1. S. Marks, The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth Century Natal (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1986).
 2. A. G. Cobley, "'On the shoulders of the giants': the black petty bourgeoisie in politics and society in South Africa, 1924-1950", PhD, University of London, 1986; T. Couzens, The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985); H. Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-30 (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1988), chap.3.
 3. A short-list of publications that have shaped my ideas includes the following (arranged in order of publication): E. Roux, Time Longer Than Rope (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1964) (first published in 1948); J. and R. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950 (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1983) (first published in 1969); P. Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress, 1912-1952 (London, Hurst, 1970); T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, vols.2-3 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1972-77); S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness (London, Longman, 1982); T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (London, Longman, 1983); A. Odendaal, Vukani Bantu: The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984); B. Willan, Sol Plaatje: South

If chronology and evidence shape historical writing, so does theory. Good history, as I see it, informs theory with narrative, and seeks, through a sense of change over time, to inter-relate social structures and human agency. As a study in urban history, this dissertation portrays 'the city' as a focal point of capital accumulation and social reproduction, where conflict and displays of power are intensified through spatial density.¹ My understanding of politics has been strongly influenced by the more nuanced versions of South African radical historiography.² For the particular tasks of this dissertation, I have found the neo-Weberian ideas of Parkin most helpful in providing an analytical framework.³ Like Marxists, Parkin is centrally concerned with 'class'; and he sees this as a relational concept, defined in conflict and struggle. However, Parkin parts company with Marxism through a causal schema that begins with collective action rather than material forces. His model incorporates the latter, but class is perceived first and foremost as a political and situational phenomenon. In this view, social closure - the construction of 'insider' and 'outsider' group allegiances - is the basic weapon of class identity and conflict. Fundamental social conflict arises from competing strategies of exclusion (defining the dominant class) and 'usurpation' (defining the subordinate class). Alongside this basic cleavage there are many sub-

African Nationalist, 1876-1932 (London, Heinemann, 1984); B. Bozzoli (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1987); S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa (London, Longman, 1987); W. Beinart and C. Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1987); M. van Diepen (ed.), The National Question in South Africa (London, Zed, 1988); LACOM, Freedom From Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa (Braamfontein, Skotaville, 1989); Bonner et. al. (eds.), Holding Their Ground; B. Hirson, Yours For the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa (London, Zed, 1990).

1. B. Magubane, 'The City in Africa: Some Theoretical Issues', in R.A. Obudho and S. El-Shakhs (eds.), Development of Urban Systems in Africa (Praeger, New York, 1979), pp.33-36; F. Cooper, 'Urban Space, Industrial Time and Wage Labour in Africa', in F. Cooper (ed.), Struggle for the City: Migrant Labour, Capital and the State in Urban Africa (Beverly Hills, Sage, 1983), pp.23-37.
2. B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', Radical History Review 46/7 (1990), pp.13-45.
3. F. Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique (London, Tavistock, 1979), pp.44-47, chs.4-6.

agendas of social closure through which a diverse range of groups battle for power and resources. Parkin's ideas can be extended by applying the notion of political and ideological 'incorporation' to instances where the dominant class blunts usurpationary challenges 'from below'.¹ A major appeal of Parkin's closure model is that it can embrace a wide variety of social formations, whether they are defined economically, racially, culturally or politically.

Informed by the above perspectives, this dissertation explores a range of political practices amongst Durban's Africans, from middle class elitism to mobilisation around populist, nationalist and ethnic symbols and identities. The distinguishing features of these strategies and ideologies are best introduced by comparing their perceptions of political targets and goals. This comparison entails examining their respective parameters of social closure and group definition in the struggles of the period. At one end of the political spectrum, members of the African middle class distinguished themselves socially and politically from the African masses, and bargained with white power for special dispensation as an elite. By definition, there was little scope for militancy in this strategy and the goals of political action were limited. Yet segregation narrowed the options for elitism as an effective strategy, pushing the African middle class to look to broader mobilising strategies. At the same time, through industrialisation and urbanisation, new pressures 'from below' exerted themselves on the political leadership. The growing numbers of workers, squatters and lumpen proletarians in Durban made their demands and aspirations felt. It was a sign of how pervasive 'race' was in the structuring of Durban society that the popularisation of politics was largely confined within racial groups. 'African' politics drew on

1. E. Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (London, NLB, 1977), p.161.

specifically 'African' social experiences, giving shape to sometimes overlapping manifestations of populism, nationalism and ethnicity.

Populism was the broadest of the three ideologies, but its bread-and-butter political targets were often the most specific. Populist politics represented the diffuse politics of the 'the people' struggling against various forms of exclusion, domination and exploitation. Populist leaders tried to mould social alliances around a wide range of popular experiences of marginalisation in the city. They did so through a fiery militancy, directed against easily identifiable grievances and offering apparently simple solutions to oppression. Municipal policies were the most common and tangible targets of populist politics.

Conceptually, nationalism was narrower than populism, but its political targets were broader. Nationalism was distinctly 'cultural' in tone, drawing inspiration from 'being African' in a segregationist society. There was a ready-made niche here for the imaginings and constructions of members of the local African intelligentsia, who sought to connect with their counterparts elsewhere in the country, and to portray themselves as the obvious leaders of the African masses. In this view, South African society constituted various competing 'nations', with the African middle class the key broker and definer of 'the African nation'. Unlike the narrower targets of populist politics, nationalist strategies were directed primarily against the central government. Nationalist politics had South African rather than local, municipal parameters. The challenge was how to give nationalist ideas political clout and how to create mass followings.

While African nationalism was developing into an ideological rejection of the segregationist state, ethnicity became increasingly significant as a product of segregation. Ethnic ideologies conceived not of 'an African nation' struggling against

white domination, but of various regionally distinct African ethnic entities, each seeking to consolidate themselves in the turbulent context of rapid social change. As a phenomenon, ethnicity pre-dated twentieth century segregation, but Natal's 'native' policies during the 1920s and 1930s created a favourable climate for African politicians to mobilise around regional cultural solidarities. These communal identities were based on common language, social norms, and shared historical origins.¹ Ethnic politics tended to be conservative. Its leaders aimed not to radically alter segregation, but to build an ethnic political base from which to push for gradualist changes. Anti-Indianism amongst Durban's Africans can be included as a particular manifestation of local, racial ethnicity.

Reflecting the influences of international and anti-colonial politics, the language of 'the nation' dominated the vocabulary of African politicians in Durban between the 1920s and the 1950s. This did not mean that all the politicians were nationalists. 'The nation' was sufficiently elastic and legitimate in the discourses of the time to embrace the full range from populist to ethnic politics. It was in worker mobilisation that the greatest potential lay for alternative conceptions of politics. These are issues as relevant to the early 1990s as they were to African politics in Durban between 1929 and 1949. We need to begin by examining what kind of a city Durban was during the 1920s.

1. M.C. Young, 'Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class in Africa: A Retrospective', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 103, 26-3 (1986), p.449; L. Vail, 'Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History', in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London, James Currey, 1989), pp.1-19.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE IZINYATHI TO THE IZEMTITI: AFRICAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS UNDER THE DURBAN SYSTEM DURING THE 1920s

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. It introduces Durban, and African experiences of that city, during the decade after World War I. This provides a departure point for the thesis, against which the continuities and discontinuities of the succeeding two decades can be assessed. Secondly, and more specifically, the chapter sketches in the social, economic and political background to the African militancy of 1929-30.

1.1. CLASS, RACE AND URBAN SPACE

The concentration of people and the visibly unequal distribution of resources gives a special intensity to urban social relations.¹ Of the many potential battle lines of the city, the struggles for living space are among the most significant. The privileged classes deploy political power and market logic to define a hierarchy of space, which determines unequal access to land and urban services. Spatial boundaries seek to contain the social presence of the urban poor and the ‘dangerous classes’.

The nature of social relations in Durban in the 1920s was a consequence of the city’s history, economy and topography. Durban began as a harbour and colonial enclave during the mid 19th century, linking the interior to the sea route between the East and Europe. Durban grew into the largest port in south eastern Africa and, from

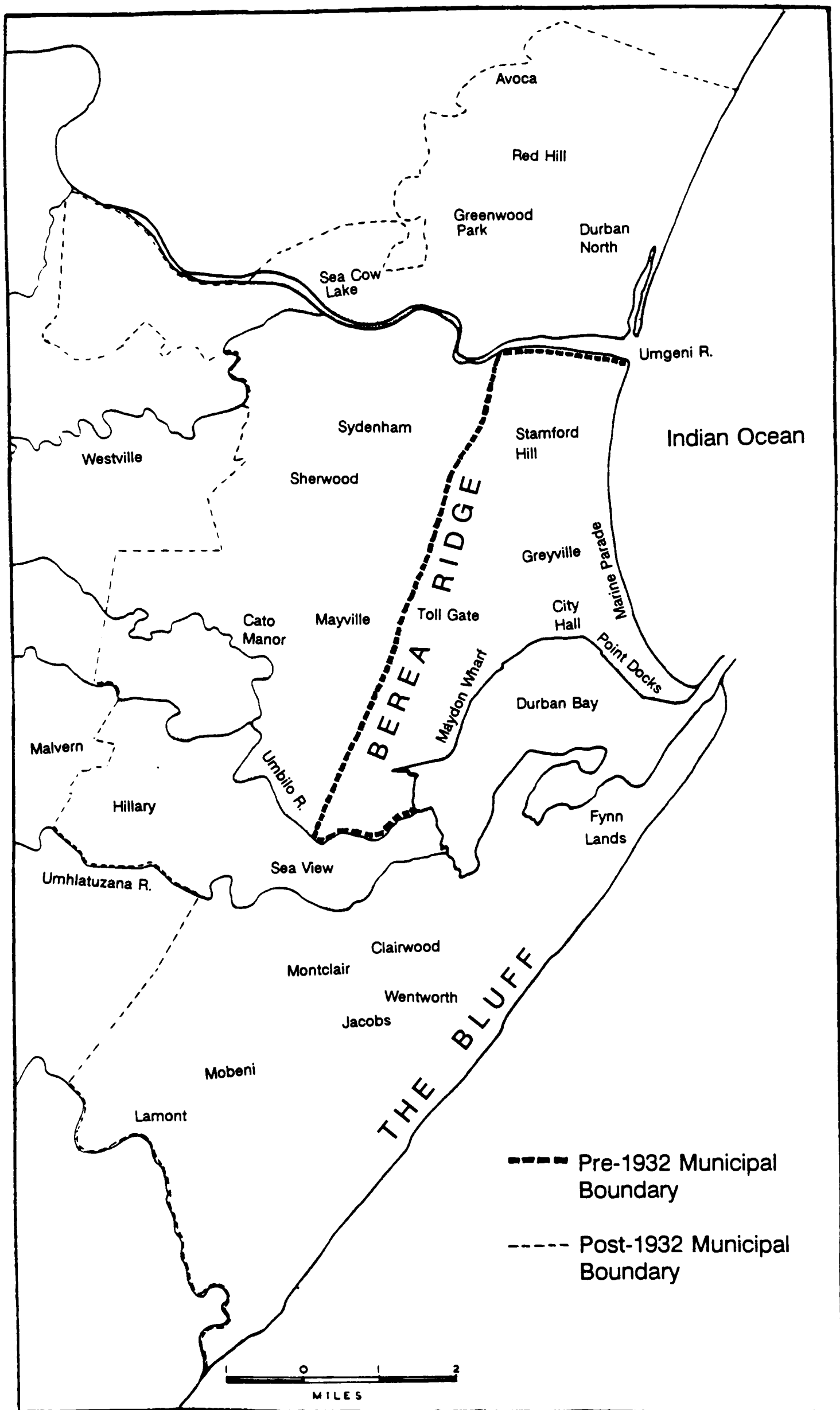
1. Cooper, ‘Urban Space’, pp.23-37.

the 1890s, offered the shortest rail link between the coast and the Witwatersrand's mineral revolution. As a consequence of this booming trade, the city's population began to grow rapidly. Pioneering service industries were established in the vicinity of the port. Local industrialisation was further stimulated by shortages of imports during World War I. But by the mid 1920s, Durban was still overwhelmingly a commercial city, processing the import-export trade of Natal and the Transvaal. It had also become a major tourist centre, its beaches and tropical climate attracting increasing crowds of white South Africans and visitors from Europe.¹

A striking feature of Durban during the 1920s, compared to today's sprawling metropolis of three to four million people, was its spatial concentration. By 1929 the total population of the Durban municipality and its immediate environs was roughly 185,000. By far the majority of the city's residents, black and white, lived within or just beyond the small municipal area of 12.5 square miles. This area was a narrow strip, bounded in the east by the Indian ocean, in the south by the harbour and the Umbilo River, in the west by the Berea ridge, and in the north by the Umgeni river (see Maps 1 and 2). The residential density of Durban gave an immediacy and fervour to its politics. Both the riots of 1929 and 1949, for example, were played out within a few miles of Durban's symbol of white authority, the city hall. This contrasts markedly with contemporary South Africa where social turbulence has by and large been contained within far-flung African townships and peri-urban areas.

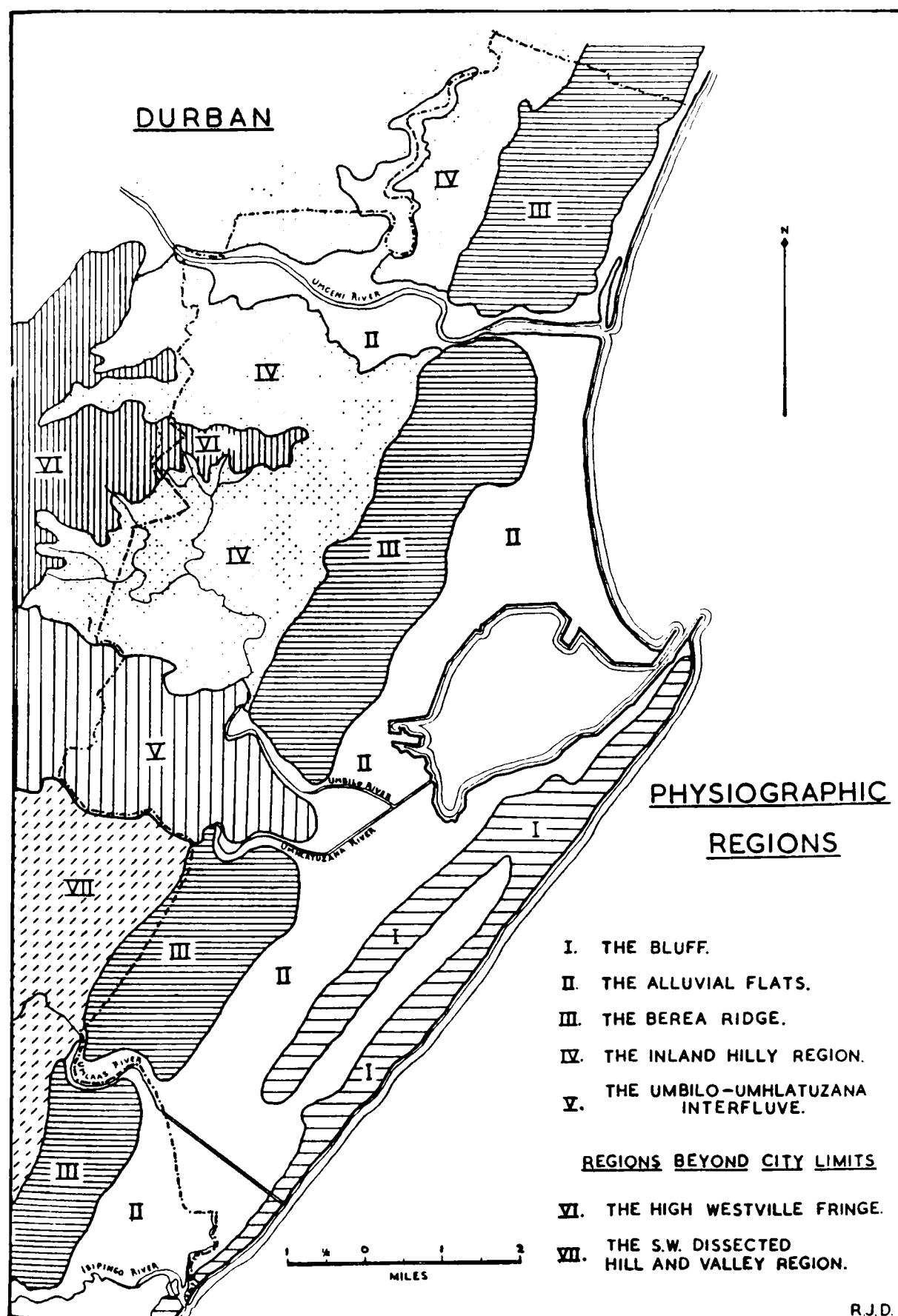
In 1929 the population of Durban and districts consisted of approximately 55,000

1. Burrows, *Population*, pp.176-77; M. Katzen, *Industry in Greater Durban, Part I: Its Growth and Structure* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1961), pp.1, 131; R.H. Smith, 'The Labour Resources of Natal: A Study of Population and Development', M.Comm thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1945, pp.529-531.



Adapted from: University of Natal, *The Durban Housing Survey* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1952), Map no.1.

Map 2. Durban, Physiographic Regions



Source: L. Kuper, H. Watts, and R. Davies, Durban: A Study In Racial Ecology (London, Jonathan Cape, 1958), p.97.

Africans, 65,000 whites, 60,000 Indians and 5,000 coloureds.¹ This group classification has been deliberate, for access to urban space and resources was racially skewed. Durban was unmistakably a city with a colonial heritage, shaped by the differential incorporation of racial groups into the urban political economy. This can be illustrated by looking very briefly at whites and Indians, and then in more detail at the experiences of Africans.

Differential incorporation: whites and Indians

Durban's whites consisted largely of skilled and white collar workers, a trading, clerical and educational petit-bourgeoisie, and a commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. These various strata formed a self-consciously urban, mostly English-speaking, dominant class. This is not to say that there was not conflict within this class. Early twentieth century Durban, for example, had experienced white worker militancy, including the brief seizure of the city hall in 1920 by a workers' soviet.² But this militancy was really about the terms of incorporation of white workers into a privileged class. Whites showed little concrete concern for the claims of Indian and African workers, who embodied the threat of cheap labour and were never seriously considered as comrades in struggle. Like better-off white groups, white workers arrived in Durban equipped with all the cultural baggage of colonialism. They immigrated not from the South African countryside, but from the towns of the Cape and the Transvaal and from the cities of Britain.³ Bolstered by their electoral power, their skills, and their culture of superiority, Durban's whites secured most of the best land and jobs. The wealthiest

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1. Population estimates vary. See University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1952), pp.17-19, 31, 33-35; Burrows, Population, pp.24-25.
 2. B.L. Reid, 'Organized Labour in Natal, 1918-1924', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1975, pp.68-87.
 3. Burrows, Population, pp.35-40.

colonised the upper reaches of the Berea ridge. The middle class, and better-off workers, bought houses and flats on the lower reaches of the ridge, or flats on the beachfront. The poorer white workers rented flats in the central city's harbour district.¹

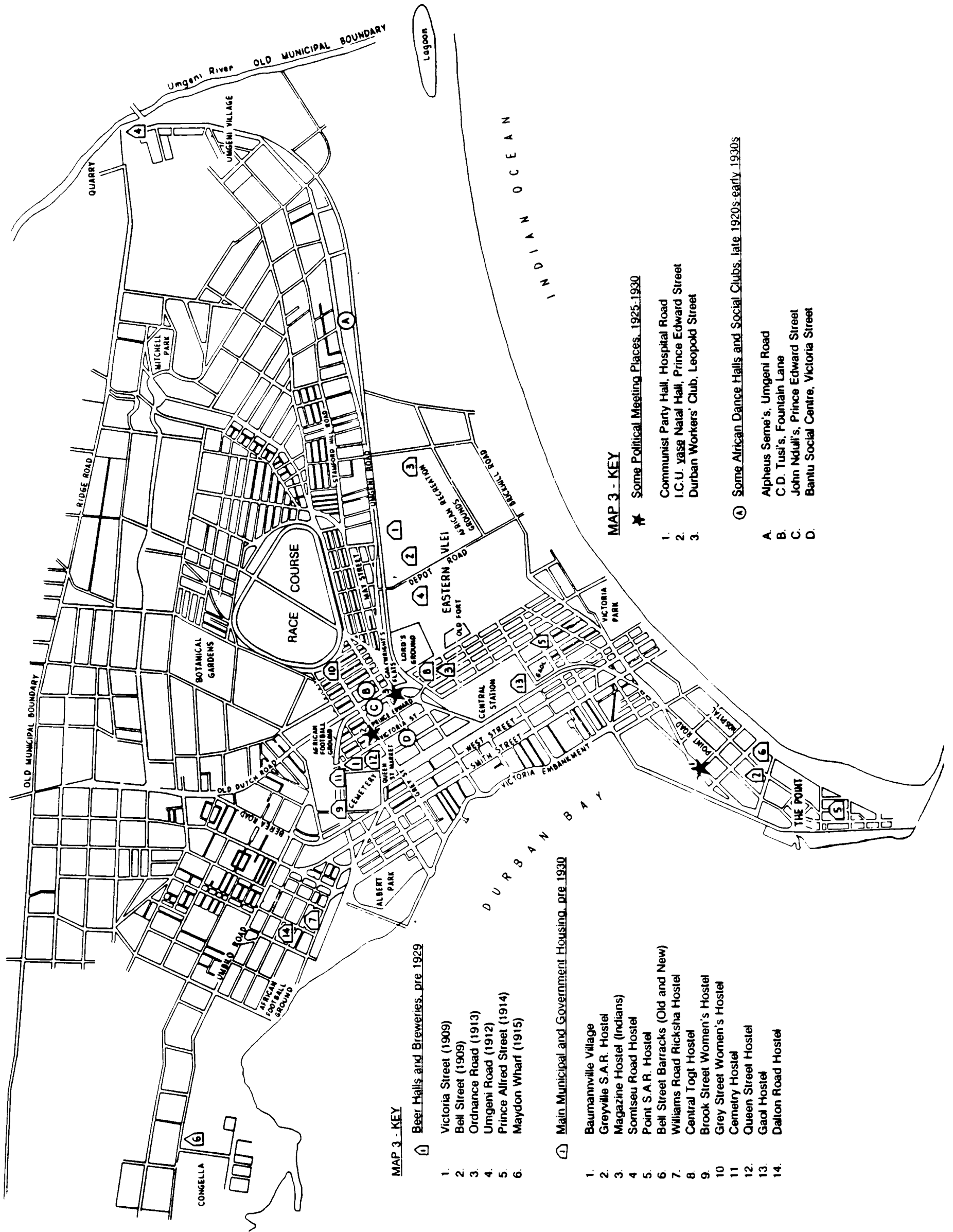
Despite a vociferous anti-Indianism, Durban's whites failed to prevent Indians from obtaining a territorial and commercial toehold in the city centre. This was important because a sizeable number of immigrant Indian merchants and professionals bought property in the lower Greyville area between the race course, Victoria Street and Berea Road (see Map 3). This well-established Indian bourgeoisie came to Durban from the 1880s onwards.² They came to service the market created by thousands of indentured Indian workers who had been drafted to Natal's sugar estates since the 1860s. Soon, Indian-dominated trading networks had penetrated far into the 'Indian' and 'African' markets of the Natal interior. In Durban, the 'Indian quarter' became the hub of Indian and African consumer activity.

Durban's Indian middle class was commercially successful but politically vulnerable. From the 1890s white Durbanites used their voting power to contain Indian property transactions and trading activities in the city centre. Various business and building by-laws, and threats of white vigilante violence against transgressors, threw a cordon around the existing Indian quarter. In consequence, Indian capital was invested in property just beyond the municipal boundaries, to the north, west and south of the Berea. By the end of the 1920s, there were roughly 16,000 Indians living in the city centre (including 7,000 in municipal hostels), and 50,000 residing in districts bordering the municipality.³

1. University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.25.

2. M. Swan, Gandhi: The South African Experience (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985), pp.2-10.

3. University of Natal, Housing Survey, pp. 17-19, 31, 33-35; C.A. Woods, The Indian Community of Natal: Their Economic Position (London, O.U.P., 1954), p.10.



MAP 3 - KEY

① Beer Halls and Breweries, pre 1929

1. Victoria Street (1909)
2. Bell Street (1909)
3. Ordnance Road (1913)
4. Umgenei Road (1912)
5. Prince Alfred Street (1914)
6. Maydon Wharf (1915)

④ Main Municipal and Government Housing, pre 1930

1. Baumannielle Village
2. Greyville S.A.R. Hostel
3. Magazine Hostel (Indians)
4. Somtseu Road Hostel
5. Point S.A.R. Hostel
6. Bell Street Barracks (Old and New)
7. Williams Road Ricksha Hostel
8. Central Togh Hostel
9. Brook Street Women's Hostel
10. Grey Street Women's Hostel
11. Cemetry Hostel
12. Queen Street Hostel
13. Gaol Hostel
14. Dalton Road Hostel

MAP 3 - KEY

★ Some Political Meeting Places, 1925-1930

1. Communist Party Hall, Hospital Road
2. I.C.U. yase Natal Hall, Prince Edward Street
3. Durban Workers' Club, Leopold Street

ⓐ Some African Dance Halls and Social Clubs, late 1920s-early 1930s

- A. Alpheus Seme's, Umgenei Road
- B. C.D. Tusi's, Fountain Lane
- C. John Nduli's, Prince Edward Street
- D. Bantu Social Centre, Victoria Street

The majority of these peri-urban residents were ex-indentured families who had migrated to Durban since the cessation of the indenture system in 1911. They either bought or rented land from Indian owners, building a variety of houses, from solid structures to wooden shanties. These newly urbanised families worked as market gardeners, hawkers, or as unskilled and semi-skilled wage labourers in Durban's commercial and industrial sectors. As new proletarians, Indian workers were attractive to capitalists. They had no political rights, and their labour was cheaper than white labour.¹ The pattern developed in which white workers successfully defended skilled jobs, while employers increasingly favoured Indian labour over white or even Coloured labour for semi- and unskilled work. The caste system produced Indian labour for the most menial of jobs, such as street-sweeping, but on the very bottom rungs of the labour market it was more common to find other workers, African migrants.

Differential incorporation: Africans, migrants, and the Durban System

By the mid 1920s three distinct kinds of workers - dockers, ricksha pullers and domestic servants - made up roughly half of Durban's waged African workforce. The three to four thousand dock workers were identifiable by special badges, tied to their arms or sewn to their clothes. Their badges signalled that they had registered with the municipality as togt (daily-hire) labour. The main motive for the municipal introduction of compulsory togt badges in the 1870s had been to impose standardised wages on a volatile but indispensable group of migrant workers. The twelve hundred or so ricksha pullers offered transport to destinations not served by trams and buses. Ricksha pullers

1. J. Kelly, 'Durban's Industrialisation and the Life and Labour of Black Workers, 1920-1950', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989, chap.2; V. Padayachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann, Indian Workers and Trades Unions in Durban, 1930-1950 (Durban, University of Durban-Westville, 1985), pp.27-50.

did not sell their labour power in return for a wage. Instead, they paid a rental to ricksha-owning companies and then earned what fares they could. Like the dock workers, ricksha pullers engaged in heavy and back-breaking toil, yet retained some independence over how they expended their labour. By contrast, the fifteen thousand domestic servants (three quarters of them men) were at the beck and call of their white masters and madams. Clothed in their distinctive red-trim calico uniforms, they made up the largest occupational category of Durban's Africans. They worked in the kitchens and gardens of white, and to a lesser extent Indian, homes. If the dock workers had to be strong and quick, the ricksha pullers powerful and steady, domestic workers had to learn the rituals of dexterous subservience. It was while their employers were asleep that domestic servants could give vent to vigour in the amalaita gangs which roamed the night-time streets.¹

These three types of workers were prominent in Durban's social landscape. They were unskilled, mostly male, and migrant. The heaviest flow of migrants came from nearby, but Durban drew labour from all parts of Natal and the Transkei. Migrants typically entered the Durban labour market through domestic service and then moved rapidly between jobs in search of better work. Employment was also disrupted by regular movement between town and countryside.²

The high levels of African migrancy in Durban reflected the triple interests of capital, migrants and the municipality. Local business interests were far from monolithic, but almost without exception Durban's employers perceived African migrants to be the most 'suitable', cheapest labour for the large number of unskilled

1. P. la Hausse, "'The Cows of Nongoloza": Youth, Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban, 1900-1936', Journal of Southern African Studies 16, 1 (1990), pp.79-111.

2. Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.307, 332-349.

jobs in the partially industrialised economy. A ‘commonsense’ view developed that Africans were stronger than whites or Indians.¹ This racial stereotype reinforced others, creating a labour market graded by skin colour. The ‘natural’ work of Africans was heavy manual labour, epitomised by the dock workers or the ricksha pullers. The popular description of the dock workers as *izinyathi* (buffaloes) was an apt one. Africans were employed as the packers, loaders, cleaners, diggers and sweepers of the Durban economy. There was no business incentive to stabilise these labourers as there was no skill invested in them. Migrants could be hired and fired more easily than ‘stabilised’ labour. They could also be paid ‘bachelor’ wages which took no account of the costs of maintaining workers’ homesteads. The urban wage was commonly perceived by employers as merely a ‘subsidy’ towards a rural livelihood.²

Migrant labour, however, was not just the consequence of capital’s machinations. In a manner similar to Cooper’s work on East Africa, Kelly has recently argued that migrancy was the preferred strategy of a sizeable number of workers, at least until the 1940s.³ Kelly contends that Africans in the Natal countryside were not simply driven into migrant labour through remorseless rural impoverishment. Rural transformation was certainly rapid from the 1920s onwards, but it was complex and variable. Despite the expansion of commercial agriculture on white-owned farms, and signs of overcrowding in the Reserves, large numbers of African homesteads retained sufficient access to land to provide for a rural livelihood. Kelly agrees that poorer homesteads were certainly coerced into wage labour, but argues that there was also a large number

1. Ibid., pp.453-5.

2. Natal Archives (hereafter NA) 3/DBN 4/1/2/1220, 467, 5: Durban Native Administration report to the Native Economic Commission, March 1930.

3. F. Cooper, On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987); Kelly, ‘Durban’s Industrialisation’, chap.2.

of migrants who entered Durban's labour market selectively. For a range of reasons, not least the wish to resist subordination to full-time wage exploitation, they opted for migrancy. To this should be added Walker's interpretation of migrancy as an outcome, at least in part, of gender struggles within rural households.¹

Municipal policy was the other major influence on the migrant labour system. Indeed, the Durban municipality's energetic effort to enforce African migrancy throws Kelly's argument into doubt. If migrants chose to migrate, why did the municipality develop elaborate measures to perpetuate migration? It seems that a more nuanced answer is necessary. Even if there were migrants who chose to migrate, there were others who wished to settle more permanently in Durban. The municipality sought to sustain migrancy for two main reasons. Firstly, as a custodian of capitalist interests, the municipality tried to ensure that the African workforce remained cheap and 'disciplined'. Secondly, and probably more importantly in the eyes of most municipal officers, migrancy was favoured as a mechanism for retarding African urbanisation. A migrant populace, rather than an urbanised one, was cheaper to administer and control. It also posed less of a political threat to the concentration of urban resources and power in white hands.

A migrant labour framework had been in operation for a long time. Ever since the 1870s, a pass system had been imposed on African workers. The principle was that only employed workers were legally entitled to be in the 'white man's town'. Otherwise, they faced 'expulsion' by the municipal police. From these early days, considerations of cost and control ensured that African workers were housed in single-

1. C. Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c.1850-1930', in C. Walker (ed.), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), pp.177-192.

sex hostels close to their places of work. It was a regular condition of employment that workers reside in hostels. Each hostel, with its bunks and dormitories, had its white manager and team of African 'boss-boys'. Modelled on military barracks or prison, these institutions were places of harsh discipline and rough justice.¹

For Durban's rulers, a negative consequence of the hostels was that thousands of African hostel-dwellers lived in the heart of the city. Added to this were the multitudes of domestic workers in the backyard *khayas* (servant's quarters) of white-owned houses and flats. The pervasive social presence of Africans in central Durban flatly contradicted the colonial notion of a 'white man's town'. By the early 1900s the increasing number of Africans working in Durban prompted a crucial municipal debate about the future of 'native policy'. Should not Durban follow the lead of Cape Town or Bloemfontein, and establish territorially segregated townships for Africans?

Durban's dominant class opted, not without significant dissension, to continue with a hostel-based migrant labour policy. During the 1910s and 1920s a number of municipal hostels were built in or near the city centre. The most important of these was the large Somtseu Road barracks.² A major step was taken in 1916 with the formation of a separate Native Administration Department within the municipality. A new corps of bureaucrats devised a far more systematic procedure to register and check African residents.³ A night-time curfew and a comprehensive pass system sought to control the social presence, mobility and employment of Durban's Africans. Vigilant police action was a central feature.

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1. P. Maylam, 'Shackled by the Contradictions: The Municipal Response to African Urbanization in Durban, c.1920-1950', paper presented to Workshop on African Urban Life in Durban in the Twentieth Century, University of Natal, Durban, 1983, p.18.
 2. G. Maasdorp and A.S.B. Humphreys (eds.), From Shantytown to Township: An Economic Study of African Poverty and Rehousing in a South African City (Cape Town, Juta, 1975), pp.10-13.
 3. La Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.112-114.

Who financed this evolving municipal policy with its hostels, officials and police force? For reasons of class and race, ratepayers - most of them white - resisted municipal expenditure on native affairs. As the poorest segment of Durban society, Africans would drain municipal funds. Durban's answer, legislated in 1908, was to tax Africans indirectly through a municipal monopoly of utshwala (sorghum beer). Beer money would pay for Native Administration, absolving the municipal coffers completely. This became the central principle of what became known as the Durban System. Beer halls were built at major hostels and transport depots in the city centre. The monopoly was a notable financial success. By 1917 the monopoly earned as much as £41,677 per annum.¹ Indeed, beer profits were so high, and municipal expenditure on African facilities so low, that the Native Revenue Account was always in surplus. Like the curfew and the passes, the success of the municipal beer monopoly depended on police coercion. All liquor consumption by Africans outside the municipal beer halls was illegal. This gave the police force almost unlimited scope to interfere in the daily lives of Africans. Pass and liquor raids by the police were routine and incessant.

The principles of the beer monopoly and the service contract passes were incorporated into the 1923 Natives Urban Areas Act. The Act represented a concerted attempt by the central state to standardise urban policy for Africans countrywide.² It seems that no other municipality had been able to emulate Durban's success with beer profits, nor to keep such a high proportion of its African populace migrant. Coercion was an important component of Durban's success; but this alone was insufficient.

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1. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', p.135; P. la Hausse, 'The Message of the Warriors: the ICU, the Labouring Poor and the Making of a Popular Political Culture in Durban', paper presented to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987, p.4, note 10. (A slightly shorter version of this paper was later published in Bonner et al. (eds.), Holding Their Ground, pp.19-58. My referencing in subsequent footnotes uses the page numbers of the History Workshop paper.)
 2. D. Hindson, Pass Controls and the Urban Proletariat in South Africa (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987), pp.32-42.

Thousands of Africans patronised the municipal beer halls daily. The monopoly successfully reshaped the centrality of utshwala in the lives of Natal's Africans. The beer halls became a cultural extension of the male, aggressive world of the hostels. Thousands of migrants stayed in the hostels not only because the Durban System pushed them there; the hostels were cheap, close to work, and bearable in the short-term. They were also places where home-town networks could be relatively easily sustained. The Durban System ingeniously exploited and perpetuated certain material and cultural experiences of the city's most subordinated workers.

Despite its apparent 'success', the Durban System contained flaws and contradictions. It intervened so frequently and pervasively in the lives of Africans that it provided many points of resistance. Municipal regulations were evaded, ignored or blatantly contravened. This usually happened informally, rather than in an organised manner. To have functioned optimally, the System would have required Durban to have been one huge, fenced army camp, with fixed points of entry and exit. The System's 'ideal African' would have been male, employed, willingly migrant, and thirsty only for municipal beer. Of course, this was not the case. Hence the centrality of coercion to the functioning of the System, and the blanket application of the regulations to all Africans.

The System was undermined in other ways too. Durban's harbour, transport and tourist industry required a large pool of casual, unskilled labour. This was necessary to meet the fluctuating demands of these sectors. By the late 1920s it was estimated that a labour reservoir of up to 10,000 African men was required to obviate bottlenecks at times of peak activity. The most important structural challenge to the Durban System came, however, from the process of African urbanisation. By the end of the 1920s as

many as 15,000-20,000 Africans had settled in Durban. They bore the brunt of the Durban System's hostility to non-migrants. They included both men and women; and they ranged from lumpen groups to an aspirant urban African middle class.

An unwelcome minority: urbanised Africans

African urban settlement was contrary to the spirit of the Durban System. The municipality did, however, make a token acknowledgement of an urbanised segment of Africans. By 1925 the authorities had built sixty rudimentary houses at the 'Married Quarters' near the Somtseu hostel.¹ By far the majority of the urban settlers were manual labourers, who could afford only sub-economic housing. Only the state was in a position to provide this. But the Durban authorities were very reluctant to provide township housing for Africans. This would undermine the migrant labour system, and would cripple the Native Revenue Account. During the 1920s a decades-long dispute began between Durban and Pretoria over who was to pay for African housing. African settlers, in the meantime, had to find their own accommodation. The great majority rented lodgings and backyard rooms from Indian property-owners, both in the city centre and in those areas bordering the municipality. Compared to whites, Indian households were, in general, more willing to have African neighbours, and were more reliant on the income earned from African tenants.

The ratio of women to men was far higher in the peri-urban districts than in the hostel-dominated city centre.² For a long time the Durban authorities had been hostile

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1. Torr, L., 'The Durban City Council and Urban Land Use, 1923-33: The Founding of Lamont', paper presented to Workshop on Urban African Life in Durban in the Twentieth Century, University of Natal, Durban, October 1983, p.5.
 2. The census data indicated an African female:male ratio in Durban of 100:623 in 1921 and 100:358 in 1936. See C. Simkins, 'African Urbanisation at the Time of the Last Smuts Government', paper presented to Economic History conference, University of Cape Town, 1982, p.10. La Hausse, 'Message', p.8, estimates

to African women as the most obvious symbol of creeping urbanisation. Vagrancy laws, in particular, were employed with impunity to expel women from the city. The reality was that there were very few waged jobs for African women in the Durban economy. By the late 1920s the only significant employment opportunities were in domestic service, a sector dominated by men. Nevertheless, the rate of migration of women to Durban continued to increase. The great majority of these immigrants relied on the informal sector for a livelihood. Probably the most rewarding source of income was the (illegal) supply of liquor to male shebeen patrons. This threat to the municipal monopoly was yet another reason why the authorities were so keen to stamp out the presence of women. Yet municipal hostility to African women was matched by the determination of many women to stay in town. As Walker has argued, once African women had left the patriarchal homesteads of rural society it was extremely difficult to return.¹

Among the African men who were settling in Durban there were three main social groups. First, there were the lumpen elements: those who had been driven to town by rural poverty, had severed connections with rural homesteads, and had joined the pool of casually employed labour in the Durban economy. Secondly, there were unskilled workers who had secured the best available jobs on offer. These choicer jobs tended to be in the manufacturing sector, and had been reached through a process of job turnover. Many of these workers retained a migrant base, but they stayed in Durban for lengthening periods.² The third group was the African middle class. These were

that three quarters of the peri-urban population of the late 1920s lived in family-based households. See also L. Kuper, H. Watts, and R. Davies, *Durban: A Study in Racial Ecology* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1958), p.118.

1. Walker, 'Gender', pp.188-189.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Secretary, Native Affairs Commission to Minister of Native Affairs, 12 December 1929.

the people who had acquired the skills, resources and social standing to scramble above the ranks of unskilled manual labour. Their education and socialisation had equipped them for an urban world. They ranged from those who had a smattering of western education to those who were confident of their elite status.

Africans used a number of terms to describe and rank groups within the middle class. On the lower rungs were the oJazibhantshi (the wearers of long coats).¹ These were the artisans, petty traders and herbalists who sought to make an independent living through providing a range of goods and services, including foodstuffs, wood, medicines, liquor, tobacco, dagga, shoe and bicycle repairs, and tailoring. Their living standards were perilously close to those of unskilled wage labourers. By the late 1920s, four hundred of these small-scale entrepreneurs were doing business from stalls in the municipal markets attached to the beer halls. Many more ran backyard businesses.

The oJazibhantshi typified those carving out an independent yet fragile existence in the city. Many spoke only broken English, yet their clothing and cultural expressions tended to be flamboyantly Western. They represented a potentially subversive cultural and political phenomenon. For Durban's whites, the oJazibhantshi were the archetypal 'cheeky natives' who did not know their place in the racial order of things. Many had one foot in the world of crime. They were the life and soul of the dance halls which sprang up in the 'Indian quarter' during the 1920s. Many stayed one step ahead of the laws that tried to stop them living in Durban. It was not only the authorities whom they deceived. Scores of freshly-arrived migrants fell foul of the street-wise tricksters who

1. J. Ngubane, 'After the Collapse of Apartheid: An Inside View of Race Politics in South Africa', unpublished manuscript [1978?], pp.144-145.

sold them charms, potions and advice on how to survive in the city.¹

Those groups at the upper end of the African middle class commonly regarded the oJazibhantshi as vulgar and brash. The more established segments of this class were known as amakholwa (the believers) or izifundiswa (the educated).² Both terms pointed to the origins of the African middle class in the 19th century Christian missions of Natal. The more successful products of the mission schools were equipped linguistically and ideologically to interact with the white ruling class. But for the colour of their skins these priests, teachers, clerks and businessmen could have been members of that class. Ever since the 1880s the mission-based amakholwa, many of whom had made money as yeoman farmers, had been fighting the erosion of their material and political position. They were under assault from the consolidation of white rule, which was underpinned by the expansion of gold mining and commercial agriculture. But the crucial point was that the more established individuals and occupations of the middle class had been able to weather these changes. Segregation lowered the ceiling on African advancement, but it still relied on Africans with some educational and administrative skills. Even the most ardent advocates of the Durban System, for all their hostility to non-migrants, grudgingly acknowledged a legitimate niche in Durban society for a small number of African clerks, semi-professionals, and even licensed traders. These people, patronisingly pardoned by the dominant order, were aptly called the izemtiti, the exempted ones.

The term izemtiti originated in the 19th century through an administrative exemption of some mission-educated Africans from the Natal Code of Native Law. The

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1. For an important discussion of tricksters, see P. la Hausse, 'So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Identity and the Picaresque in Natal, c.1920-1948', paper to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990, pp.16-17.
 2. Ngubane, 'Collapse', pp.144-5; Kuper, Bourgeoisie, p.74.

qualifications for exemption were formal schooling to a certain level, or the ownership of fixed property. The exemption law was Natal's conservative alternative to the qualified, but non-racial, franchise at the Cape during the 19th century. Natal's African elite clung to the exemption system as a stepping stone to the franchise. By the early twentieth century this development seemed increasingly unlikely. The exemption concept took on new meaning as the upper ranks of the African middle class pushed successfully for immunity from some segregation policies, such as the pass laws, and restrictions on property ownership and trading in urban areas. A relatively small number of Durban's Africans benefitted from these exclusionary tactics; some even slipped through the net and purchased property in central Durban.

The izemtiti, amakholwa and isifundiswa made up the upper ranks of the African middle class, but they still lived in a racially structured society. They, too, faced the ignominy of being stopped in the street by the police and searched for a pass. They still had to produce their piece of paper, even if it was one of relative privilege. They had to face the many obstacles with which the Durban System resisted urban African settlement. Their economic prospects were curtailed by politically influential white artisans, traders and professionals, and by the established Indian middle class. The resources of the African middle class were scant. Their monthly earnings were not far above the better paid unskilled workers. Dockworkers earned around £4 per month; African semi-professionals averaged £6 to £7 per month.¹ Consequently many of Durban's African middle class notables retained a foot in the rural society and economy of nearby mission reserves like Inanda, Amanzimtoti and Umlazi. This signalled their rural roots as a class, and their perception of Durban as a place hostile to their

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1413, 643J/18, 3: Durban Joint Council, Report on housing in Durban, September 1930.

aspirations.

By way of rounding up this discussion, we can reiterate the theoretical possibility that members of Durban's African middle class would opt for political strategies of both usurpation and exclusion. On the one hand, they would seek to mobilise groups below them in the class hierarchy against broadly defined targets of oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, the middle strata would continue to seek ways of improving their position relative to other oppressed groups. We can expect the lower rungs of the middle class to be attracted more towards strategies of usurpation than exclusion. Africans were so pervasively oppressed as a racial group that even the most establishment of politicians could not ignore the prospects of communal mobilisation. To speak a political language and employ strategies that would appeal to the masses - to the dockworkers, domestic servants, manufacturing labourers, and lumpen casual workers - was a daunting task. To gain a following, sustain it, and still retain the initiative was a tremendous challenge. A related test was to translate the power of a popular following into victories against white authority. The task of the next section is to see how Durban's African middle class leaders grappled with these issues during the mid to late 1920s.

1.2. TO TURN LEFT OR RIGHT? POLITICAL CHOICES AND STRATEGIES IN THE 1920s

South African politics was remarkably turbulent during the decade or so after the First World War. The period saw major shifts and tensions in the country's social structures. Of particular importance was the expansion of manufacturing and commercial agriculture, resulting in a massive exodus of black and white tenants and

peasants from the land. The growth of an industrial proletariat heightened class conflict in the cities. During the 1920s the central state consolidated its power by neutralising the challenge from white worker radicalism.¹ The construction of a broader white dominant class was achieved, in part, through further excluding blacks from civil society.² This was the essence of prime minister Hertzog's South Africanism and native policy. Any remaining notions of gradual African progress and integration into a common society were firmly swept under the carpet of a racially narrow and rigid segregationism.

The African middle class was pushed towards a political T-junction during the 1920s. To the left, members of that class were drawn into a more confrontationalist politics, throwing in their lot with urban workers and an increasingly desperate tenantry and peasantry. The assertive demands of these workers, tenants and peasants made it increasingly difficult for middle class leaders to sustain an elitist, exclusionary political agenda. The most important organisational expression of this trend was the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU). Founded by Clements Kadalie and others in Cape Town's dockyards in 1919, the ICU grew into an unparalleled mass movement in South Africa's countryside and major towns during the mid to late 1920s.³ Durban became a key centre of ICU politics. During the same period, the national leadership of the older and more elitist African National Congress, founded in 1912 to mobilise against the unification of a whites-only state, also underwent radicalisation.

The signposts to the right of the junction pointed in the direction of tribal politics.

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1. See for example, D. Yudelman, The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organized Labour on the South African Goldfields, 1902-1939 (Westport, Greenwood, 1983).
 2. S. Dubow, Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936 (London, Macmillan & St. Antony's College Oxford, 1989), p.15.
 3. Bradford, Freedom.

'Retribalisation', or the reconstructing of pre-colonial African social formations, was central to segregation policy during the 1920s. In essence, this was an attempt to slow down the modernisation of African society, to stifle and re-direct class formation and other processes that threatened to subvert white domination. To use the contemporary language of segregation, African society had to undergo a process of 'cultural adaptation' to the modern world.¹ The door of integration was closed to the African middle class, but new opportunities arose for aspirant intellectuals and politicians of tribalism. Segregation fostered and legitimated ethnic discourses. Natal's experience offers fascinating insights into this process.

Political developments in Durban had a dynamic of their own, but they were also affected by regional trends. The main political organisations were provincial in scope. It will therefore be necessary, at times, to locate Durban in a broader Natal context. Before examining how African politicians in Durban and Natal negotiated the T-junction of the 1920s, we need to look briefly at earlier developments in the region. Then we will be in a position to outline, first, the rightward political trend and, second, those who followed a more consciously populist route.

The Natal Native Congress, Inkatha, and Zulu ethnicity

A landmark in African politics in the region was the founding of the Natal Native Congress (NNC) in 1900. This body sought to co-ordinate the political defence of 'Christian and civilized natives' against the gathering discrimination of Natal's settler government.² It is not clear when a Durban branch of Congress was formed, but one

1. Dubow, Racial Segregation, pp.29-38.

2. S. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion (Oxford, Clarendon, 1970), pp.58-9; School of Oriental and African Studies (hereafter SOAS), Mss English 380077, H.S. Msimang interview, 1975-6, p.79; Walshe, African Nationalism, pp.15-19.

of the founding notables of the provincial body was John Langalibalele Dube, who hailed from the Inanda mission reserve just outside Durban.¹ Dube's political career offers one of a number of biographies which thread their way through this thesis, and which illuminate the experiences of Durban's African middle class. In 1901, having recently returned from a period of missionary-sponsored study in the United States, Dube started an industrial school called Ohlange² at Inanda. Two years later, he launched a Zulu-English newspaper, Ilanga lase Natal (The Natal Sun). In these few years, as was happening elsewhere in the country, the foundations of modern African politics were being laid: formal organisation, education, and media.

By the 1920s Dube was a seasoned politician. In 1912 he had been appointed the first president general of the South African Native National Congress. This body, later called the African National Congress, was a new forum for the regional organisations of the African elite. Dube's speech to the inaugural conference highlighted the uneasy juxtaposition of assimilationist sentiments with reluctant African nationalism. He still believed, ultimately, that 'righteousness and reason' would prevail; that hard work, education, and law-abiding political organisation would achieve South African citizenship for the 'sons of Africa'.³ In 1917 Dube was ousted from the ANC presidency, in a vote of no confidence in the moderate petition politics with which he had become associated. His ousting occurred, ironically, during the period when Dube himself was busy confronting, rather than just petitioning, the Durban authorities. On a number of occasions between 1916 and 1918, Dube and other Congress leaders took

1. Marks, Ambiguities, pp.42-73.

2. Translated as a school 'for the Nation'.

3. NA Chief Native Commissioner (hereafter CNC) 59, 214/1912, Dube's speech to the South African Native National Congress, 2 February 1912.

to the streets of Durban to lead processions and stage public meetings.¹ Their protests were targeted against the formation of the Native Administration Department, and the consequent tightening of the pass and service contract laws. Sensitive to widespread worker discontent, caused by war-time inflation, the Congress leaders also took up wage demands with the authorities. Dube was convicted in a costly defamation case brought against him by Durban's Native Administration.²

This bout of public activism was short-lived. Unlike Johannesburg or Cape Town, African protest politics and industrial strife did not develop in Durban after the war. But Dube's interest in pan-Africanist politics during the early 1920s was a sign that his earlier optimism about integration was turning to disillusionment.³ This was part of a broader trend, highlighted by the leadership contest within the Natal Native Congress in April 1924.⁴ Dube, this time as Natal president, once again came under attack for being too moderate. He was ousted by a long-standing colleague and co-founder of the Natal Congress, J.T. Gumede of Pietermaritzburg. Gumede was himself a well-known moderate. However, supported by figures such as the Durban cleric, Petros Lamula, he was undergoing a political conversion that would propel him, in 1927, to the national presidency of the ANC. Africans, Gumede declared, had 'done enough asking' and should 'shake off' segregation with action rather than talk.⁵ Echoing Marcus Garvey's assertive slogan, 'Africa for the Africans', and rejecting Segregation's preoccupation with 'the Native', Gumede's Natal Native Congress renamed itself the

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1. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1218, 467, 1; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1223, 467A, 1; Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.161-191.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/467A, 1: J.S. Marwick to Town Clerk (hereafter TC), 8 December 1917.
 3. N. Cope, 'The Zulu Petit Bourgeoisie and Zulu Nationalism in the 1920s: Origins of Inkatha', Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, 3 (1990), pp.442-444.
 4. See correspondence in NA CNC 92, 64/2, N1/9/3(X).
 5. Natal Witness, 23 December 1925.

Natal African Congress.¹

An episode late in 1924 revealed just how difficult Dube found it to make a Gumede-like political shift. Trying to counter claims of his moderacy, Dube and his supporters called a public meeting in Durban. A key theme of the meeting was the rejection of the new Pact government's whites-only employment policy. But the only action taken was to send a polite petition to the authorities.² The truth was that Dube, despite his dabbling in pan-Africanist politics, had become increasingly dependent on white patronage for his newspaper and school. His patrons included British and American philanthropists, key Natal Native Affairs Department officials, large-scale sugar farmers, and Durban businesspeople.³ Another brake on Dube taking the road of the Natal African Congress was his involvement in the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives. Durban's white liberals, like their counterparts elsewhere in the country, had established this inter-racial forum in 1922 to counter the nationwide trend towards more radical African politics. The Joint Council offered a natural home to Dube and the fifty or so teachers, clerics and traders who took out membership. Here was a glimmer of hope, a counter to the oppressive thrust of Hertzog's segregation policies. Through the Council the local African elite could rub shoulders with some of Durban's leading white businesspeople, church ministers, professionals, and officials.

But Dube was far too ambitious a politician and public figure to content himself

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1. The national Congress also changed its name in this way. For Garveyism, see R.A. Hill and G.A. Pirio, "Africa for the Africans": the Garvey Movement in South Africa', in S. Marks and S. Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa (London, Longman, 1987), pp.209-253.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1218, 467, 2: J. Dube to Town Council, enclosing resolutions of a meeting on 3 September 1924.
 3. For insights into this network see the correspondence in Rhodes House (hereafter RH), Mss Br. Emp. s.22, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society (hereafter ASAPS) papers, G.191.

with an increasingly influential, but informal, network of white patronage. Effectively excluded from the leadership of the Natal Congress, he needed another base. He found one in the Zulu ethnic organisation, Inkatha, which had been established in 1922.¹ This body's main objective, inspired by retribalisation policies, was to rehabilitate the Usuthu chief, Solomon ka Dinizulu, as the legitimate and officially recognised king of the amaZulu. Ever since the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, the Natal and then the South African government had rejected and undermined the claims to kingship by the Usuthu heirs of Shaka. Inkatha sought to overturn this.

From the mid 1920s Dube became an energetic ideologue of Zulu ethnicity, focused on the Zulu royal house. Prior to this, he had distanced himself from Zulu traditionalism as a 'backward' phenomenon.² On a number of occasions, however, starting with the poll tax rebellion of 1906, he had cherished Zulu resistance to colonialism as an inspiration for African nationalism. There was enormous usurpationary potential in recollections of a strong pre-colonial state and military struggles against colonialism. The Zulu past, however, could be put to a number of uses; it was a malleable and potent political resource. The central purpose of the Zulu ethnicity of the late 1920s was to secure concessions from the segregationist state: the recognition of the Zulu king, and the bolstering of chiefs whose authority was being eroded by migrant labour and land shortages. To advance these claims the subversive potential of Zulu history was downplayed. Instead, the king's historical authority and fitness to rule were stressed. The ethnic politics of the late 1920s tended towards elitism and conservatism. It was based on an alliance of chiefs and educated ideologues. There

1. Cope, 'Origins of Inkatha', pp.444-445.

2. Marks, *Ambiguities*, pp.53-73; Cope, 'Origins of Inkatha', pp.435-444.

were few active attempts to draw ordinary peasants and workers into the resurrected Zulu nation. Inkatha remained a rural organisation, which did not relate easily to the issues of Durban politics.

Why, then, this digression into Zulu ethnicity? Firstly, by following Dube down the ethnic road into Inkatha, we have been able to introduce a crucial aspect of Natal politics. We will return to the theme of ethnicity on a number of occasions during the thesis. Secondly, Dube's political choices and strategies can now be compared with those who turned left at the T-junction. For the latter, Durban was to be a crucial terrain. The growth of radical populism in Durban made it difficult for Inkatha to mobilise there, even if it had wanted to.

Raising the Stakes: The Natal African Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)

J.T. Gumede and his disgruntled middle class colleagues soon showed that they were willing to take up popular grievances far more actively than Dube and his cohorts. They were more explicitly committed to strategies of usurpation. Durban, as the most populous urban centre in Natal, was an obvious place to mobilise support. Towards this end, the Durban branch of Congress, led by Petros Lamula of the Norwegian Native Church, invited Clements Kadalie to visit Durban in mid 1924. The charismatic Cape ICU leader was requested to establish a branch of the Union in Durban. Kadalie appointed Alexander Maduna, a Gumede supporter from the Pietermaritzburg branch of Congress, to launch the ICU in Natal.

The Union had an inauspicious start in Durban. Municipal officials refused Maduna a visitor's permit, and threatened to arrest him for being in the city illegally. He had

to resort to subterfuge from the start. This unsatisfactory position, together with Maduna's apparent mishandling of funds, soon led to his replacement as Natal secretary. In September 1925, George Champion, who had already gained fame as the organiser of the Mine Clerks' Association, was sent by Kadalie from the Transvaal to Durban. Champion, as an 'exempted native', could not be barred from entering Durban, nor from hiring offices for the ICU in the centre of the city. So began a remarkable career - lasting until the 1970s - for this Durban politician.¹ By 1927, the Durban ICU had become one of the largest and wealthiest branches in South Africa.

The ICU billed itself as a trade union, committed to fighting the capitalist exploitation of black workers.² Within months of his arrival, Champion gathered around him a coterie of 'young Native hot-heads', or so the police called them. Addressing each other as 'Comrade', and speaking a language tempered with Marxism, these budding activists aspired to organise workers. Durban's African wages were the lowest in the country. There is evidence of even further decline in these wages during the mid to late 1920s, indicating potential for worker mobilisation.³ But there was little commitment within the ICU to organising workers at the point of production. Granted, the Durban labour market confronted any aspirant trade unionist with huge obstacles. Factories were scattered and small-scale; less than half the African workforce was in the manufacturing sector, and most were migrants. Africans were concentrated in unskilled jobs, with the least bargaining power. Even if these difficulties are taken into

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1. Champion was born on a mission station near the Tugela river mouth in 1893. After being expelled from Adams College during Standard 6 for assaulting a pupil, he became a police informer in Northern Natal. He soon went to Johannesburg and a succession of jobs as time-keeper on various mines before settling as a clerk at Crown Mines from 1919. See A.W.G. Champion, The Truth about the ICU (Durban, 1927), pp.20-21; E. Webster, 'Champion and the ICU', Concept 5 (June 1974), p.14; M.W. Swanson, (ed.), The Views of Mahlathi: Writings of A.W.G. Champion, a Black South African (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1982), p.xiii.
 2. Champion, Truth about ICU, pp.1-3, 6-7.
 3. For wages, see Smith, 'Labour Resources', p.412; for prices, Katzen, Industry, p.155.

account, the fledgling ICU soon showed that its priority was to represent, rather than organise, workers. But the ICU's claim to be a trade union was more an exercise in political rhetoric than anything else. Certainly, individual workers took their complaints to the ICU offices. Champion would then write letters of appeal, challenge, or warning to employers. His use of the term 'boy' to describe adult workers was indicative of his class position.¹

The ICU became a popular front, not a trade union. It was a communal movement which tried to mobilise a number of African groups within the subordinate class. Common experiences of the Durban system and Hertzogian segregation provided a basis for unity. Competing interests and identities between and within sub-groups provided sources of tension. The ICU leaders had continually to mediate between the forces of unity and the strains of division. Much depended on the political strategies that were adopted, and the nature of the organisation that was built. These dynamics of populism can be applied fruitfully to the rise and decline of the ICU between 1925 and 1928.

The Natal African Congress and the ICU raised the pitch and scale of protest politics in Durban to new heights. The similar agendas of these organisations resulted in the eventual absorption of Congress activists into the stronger ICU. Both organisations were willing to confront white authority, rather than plead with it. In doing so, they employed a combination of militant rhetoric, public meetings, mass action, depositions, litigation, and undemocratic organisation. The African Congress and ICU leaders sought to attract a following by taking up mass grievances. But they

1. See for example, University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Historical Papers (hereafter UW DHP), A922, Ba, Champion to Manager, NAD, 19 October 1925.

did so in ways which left the leaders unaccountable to their followers. The result was a movement of fragile unity.

The most common mobilising issues were the Durban System, low wages, and the nationwide poll tax which was imposed on Africans in 1925. Two particularly emotive questions were the police raids for passes, tax receipts and illegal liquor; and the compulsory disinfecting of Africans by municipal officials. The disinfection process, called 'deverminisation' by the municipality but 'dipping' by Africans, had been introduced in 1924. This callous addition to the Durban System was designed to prevent typhus epidemics. All Africans, 'irrespective of sex or class', were required by law to undergo a disinfectant wash at the Deverminisation Station.¹

The main site of the 'negotiation process' between the ICU militants and 'the people' was an open piece of ground called Cartwright's Flats, near the Greyville race course (see Map 3). The use of open-air oratory was a pioneering tactic, exploiting the apparent municipal inability to prohibit these meetings. The municipality had the power to ban gatherings in hostels but, it seems, not elsewhere. Through regular meetings the ICU colonised the Flats as its political home. It was there that the Union's leaders harangued the Durban System, sold red membership cards and distributed pamphlets.

A provocative pamphlet of 1927 highlights the range of tactics deployed by the ICU. The Union held its national conference in Durban that year. As was customary with both black and white organisations, the mayor was requested to open the conference. This plea for recognition from white authority - the municipality had so far refused to meet ICU deputations - was not simply a collaborationist gesture. It was an attempt to push the mayor to confer legitimacy on the Union. Predictably, the mayor

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: A. Maduna to TC, 31 August 1925.

refused. In response, subverting the authorities' portrayal of the ICU as a 'revolutionary' organisation, the Union printed thousands of pamphlets entitled 'Never Mind the Foolish Agitation of the Durban Town Mayor'.¹ Champion told the white press that Durban's mayor should be an African.²

Brazen and subversive demands such as these were backed up with boycotts and litigation. The boycott strategy was first tested early in 1926 by the Durban Congress, which secured a partial stayaway from municipal beer halls in protest against police raids for taxes and passes.³ Later the same year, the ICU spearheaded a major boycott of the Deverminisation Station. Between October 1926 and June 1927, only 468 people were 'dipped', compared to 35,000 during the preceding twelve months.⁴ These collective actions pointed to the potential groundswell of popular discontent.

The administrative and coercive capacity of the municipality, however, made boycott strategies difficult to sustain. Partly for this reason, but also reflecting the inclination of the ICU leadership, the Union turned to the courts to challenge the Durban System. This was a shrewd move, exploiting divisions in local government. Among other things, the courts declared 'dipping' illegal, and excised the hated section of the pass law which called for a 'character reference' from previous employers. Police powers of arbitrary arrest were curbed.⁵ The court victories brought welcome publicity for the ICU. Durban's most oppressive policies were being challenged in a tangible way that had meaning for ordinary people. In interviews conducted five

1. See a copy of this in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3.

2. Natal Witness, 3 March 1927.

3. La Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.149-150.

4. Champion, Truth about ICU, p.9; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Report of Commission of Enquiry - Native Riots at Durban, 1929 (hereafter Riots Commission Report, 1929), p.7, NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: Medical Officer of Health (hereafter MOH) to TC, 20 June 1927.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: C.F. Layman to TC, 27 May 1926; La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.148.

decades later these legal successes were remembered as a central feature of the ICU's struggle for black dignity.¹ There were dangers, however, in a popular movement relying heavily on the courts as a political strategy. Firstly, this was a costly tactic, throwing scarce resources after legal fees. Secondly, courtroom battles were far removed from the realm of rank-and-file ICU members. Litigation was, in a way, a substitute for deputations by ICU leaders to the municipality. There was always the temptation, in the absence of strong organisational accountability, that self-important leaders would become preoccupied with merely representing their followers, instead of interacting with them.

Who led the ICU's social alliance, and who followed? These questions, particularly the first, have been dealt with at some length by Bradford and La Hausse.² These two historians show convincingly how, with a few exceptions, the ICU's leadership was concentrated in the lower middle class. These leaders invariably had some formal education, which equipped them for modern politics. Their mission schooling or their training as artisans enabled them to scramble above unskilled wage labour. Hertzog's segregation policies, however, threw down a firm barrier against their social and political aspirations. The ICU activists were generally young and highly vulnerable to the closure strategies of segregation. As a Durban ICU booklet protested in 1927, state policy was determined to prevent Africans from marching 'in the ranks of civilization and advancement'. Africans were being forced to become nothing other than 'unskilled worker[s] in the land of [their] forefathers.'³ The ICU leaders were characteristically artisans, low-level clerks, petty traders, and impoverished small farmers who had been

1. See for example, Killie Campbell Library, Durban (hereafter KC), KC Audio-Visual (hereafter KCAV), 354: Bertha Mkize, 27 August 1980.

2. Bradford, *Freedom*, chap.3; La Hausse, 'Message', pp.15-22.

3. Champion, *Truth about ICU*, pp.9 and 25.

squeezed off mission reserves.¹ James Ngcobo and Hamilton Msomi were builders; Jim London and Frances Maqwebu, printers; Abel Ngcobo, J.A. Duiker and Champion, clerks; David Sitshe, a blacksmith's hand; and Jolly Macebo, a harness-maker. Bertha Mkize, leader of the ICU Women's Brigade, was a tailor. Elsewhere in the country, disgruntled teachers were key ideologues of radical populism within the ICU. In Durban, most teachers belonged to the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union, which had latched on to Inkatha. George Champion's agile mind and productive pen made him the main ideologue of the Durban ICU.

There was a host of motives and personal skills which underpinned the ambitions of individual leaders. In addition, ICU leadership offered a vulnerable social group the collective attractions of camaraderie and economic reward. The ICU's African Workers' Club, a hired warehouse in the Indian quarter, was a vital source of entertainment revenue for the Union and some of its officials. It was also the place where the leadership core built up a communal identity.² The Workers Club was an entrepreneurial forerunner of other ICU schemes, such as the Vuka Afrika (Awake Africa) general store, a shoe repair business, the All-African Co-operative Society, and the Star Clothing and Shirt Factory.³ The jobs and income which these projects provided were probably just as important as the explicitly political reasons why large numbers from the lower middle class joined the ICU.

What about the mass of ICU supporters? Why did they follow? The ICU promised wage increases, engaged in daring and bombastic rhetoric against white rule, and then backed this up with actions such as the court cases and the anti-dipping campaign. It

1. This section draws heavily on La Hausse, 'Message', pp.15-22.

2. H. Bradford, 'The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union [ICU] of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930', Phd, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, p.209.

3. La Hausse, 'Message', pp.19-21.

was this banner of confrontation which attracted thousands of Durban's domestic servants, industrial workers, tog workers, stall holders and ricksha pullers to the mass meetings on Cartwright's Flats, to sign for the red card and donate hard-earned money. The ICU, which had also caught the imagination of Natal's dispossessed farm tenants, bridged town and countryside. The movement held out hopes of a changed world through collective action and solidarity. There were widespread rumours that the ICU would secure tracts of Natal's land for African occupation. Likewise, Champion's demand that Durban should have an African mayor had revolutionary implications. A number of analysts of the 1920s have stressed that period's state of political flux. It was a time when millennial movements flourished, promising liberation by black Americans and other agents.¹

Two features of the Durban situation contributed to the ICU's prominent place in the popular imagination. The first was that no African organisation in Durban's history had challenged white rule so far and so successfully. The ICU attracted followers precisely because it charted unknown political waters. A second, and related, point was the apparent inability of the authorities to stamp out the ICU phenomenon. The Union gained a collective momentum that went beyond the municipality's power to prevent it. The Durban System was coercive in many respects; but its relatively small municipal police force was over-stretched. The municipality had jealously kept control of policing from the clutches of Pretoria; the South African Police were restricted to dealing with 'serious crime'. The municipal police force was powerful enough to engage in frequent small-scale raids, but not to break up large crowds on Cartwright's Flats. In 1927 a

1. See Hill and Pirio, 'Garvey Movement in South Africa'; Beinart and Bundy, Hidden Struggles, pp.26, 312-314.

senior Native Administration official bemoaned the 'chaotic control' situation that had developed in Durban.¹ The ICU drove a wedge into the legal and coercive apparatus of the Durban System and the people followed, shouting the popular slogan, 'I See You, White Man!'

By mid-1927 the Durban ICU claimed 27,000 paid-up members.² But membership records were not strictly kept; this figure was almost certainly an exaggeration. It could have been a typically 'Championesque' posture to boost his status as a national leader. More likely, this was a cumulative total of the number of red cards sold since 1925.

Counter-offensives and the decline of the ICU

The ICU was a highly unwelcome phenomenon for Durban's dominant class. Africans were contesting the lowly place assigned them by the Durban System. The local authority had never before had to deal with a political movement on the scale of the ICU, and it was hamstrung by inappropriate laws and a limited police force. The municipality concentrated on writing new bye-laws to circumvent the ICU's court victories. By early 1928 'dipping' was back in operation, and tighter pass registration procedures had been promulgated.³ For the rest, Durban tried to wish the ICU away by ignoring it. Municipal officials continued to reject ICU delegations, insisting that grievances should be submitted through the Native Administration's chief African clerk, Pika Zulu.

There were, by contrast, active initiatives against the ICU in the Natal countryside. Some farmers systematically evicted or assaulted ICU-supporting tenants. The most

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: P.E. Chandley to TC, 26 March 1927.

2. La Hausse, 'Message', p.1; Bradford, 'ICU', p.178; The claimed membership of the Natal ICU was 88,000.

3. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.158, note 17; Govt. notice no. 93, 20 January 1928; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: F.M. Xulu to MOH, 18 May 1928.

intriguing development was the emerging congruence of interests between Inkatha, the kholwa elite, and key white segregationists.¹ Influential Natal MP's like George Heaton Nicholls and J.S. Marwick were lobbying hard for the state to recognise Solomon ka Dinizulu as a paramount chief. This would provide a focal point for 'Zulu' identity in the region and would bolster tribal chiefs as the 'natural' leaders of 'their' people. The aim was to counter the ICU's radical vision and its claim to popular leadership. For the Zulu nationalists these were welcome developments. Firstly, Inkatha's campaign for the elevation of the Zulu royal house gained a fillip. This improved the chances of using Zulu ethnicity as a mild form of usurpationary leverage against the segregationist state. Secondly, the tribal and educated elite stood to gain from a state offensive against the ICU. The Union's success had seriously undermined the social and political position of chiefs and the upper middle class. John Dube wrote confidentially to Marwick that the social forces embodied in the ICU were a 'real danger to the community'.² There were cogent reasons, therefore, why the ICU should be excluded and discredited as a political movement. Solomon agreed to a public denunciation of the ICU, urged on by Inkatha, Heaton Nicholls and the wealthy sugar farmer, William Campbell. One such occasion in 1927, reported widely in the press, was a feast of beer and slaughtered oxen at Campbell's Mount Edgecombe Estate, just north of Durban. Solomon instructed 'all Zulus' to reject the ICU and to 'kill this thing in your tribes.'³ Dube's newspaper, Ilanga lase Natal printed a constant stream of invective against the Union.⁴

Significant anti-ICU initiatives came from other quarters as well. During 1927 the

1. Marks, 'Zulu Royal Family', pp.172-194.

2. KC Marwick Papers, 74, KCM 8337: J. Dube to J. Marwick, 24 February 1928.

3. Champion, Truth about ICU, p.26; NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1: Ilanga, 12 August 1927.

4. A.W.G. Champion, Mehlomadala: My Experiences in the I.C.U. (Durban, Crown Printing Press, 1929).

Catholic mission station at Mariannahill near Durban launched the Catholic African Union (CAU). Using the extensive structures of the Catholic church in Natal, the CAU spread its message of self-help, moderate politics, and co-operative schemes. Within three years this organisation, complete with a hall and classroom at Greyville in Durban, claimed 3,000 members.¹ Within the Natal Congress, J.T. Gumede's absence on a visit to the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for John Dube's supporters to effect a leadership coup early in 1928.² The Natal Native Congress was resurrected and Dube reinstated as regional president. A pro-Dube branch of Congress was opened in Durban under the leadership of the veteran France Xulu. It was openly hostile to the ICU, and curried the favour of Durban's Native Administration.³ The ICU's conservative opponents could rest assured that the Hertzog government was on their side. During 1927, parliament passed the Native Administration Bill. This affirmed tribal chiefs as the officially acknowledged leaders of Africans. The Bill also contained an 'hostility clause', which gave the state new powers to suppress those who 'incited racial hostility', in other words, those who challenged white rule.

The ICU fought back. Vitriolic propaganda flowed from Champion's pen, defending the ICU and attacking its opponents. Special doses of invective were directed at the clerics of the CAU and Dube's Congress. Dube was branded as a 'Judas Iscariot', a 'Mr. Facing-both-ways' who was willing to renege on African liberation.⁴ But the reality was that the ICU had begun a fairly precipitous decline from late 1927, both nationally and locally. The Union's mushroom-like growth had left it

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 1: J. Kerautret to H.E. Arbuckle, 2 September 1930; Minutes, Native Administration Committee, 27 September 1930; J. Kerautret to TC, 2 September 1931.
 2. NA CNC 92, 64/2, N1/9/2(X): D.J. Sioka to CNC, 13 February 1928.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 3: F.M. Xulu to TC, 2 April 1928; C.F. Layman to Chairman, Durban NNC, 10 April 1928; Layman to TC, 13 April 1928.
 4. Champion, Truth about ICU, p.26.

organisationally weak and susceptible to anti-ICU forces. It had failed to move beyond rousing mass meetings and highly personalised leadership to the building of solid and accountable organisational structures. All that remained of the ICU's litigation against the Durban System was a crippling debt to lawyers. The Union had fuelled communal confidence, but had brought few concrete benefits to the holders of the red card. Popular hopes of a changed world subsided. Mass membership had been superficially mobilised, and it could evaporate as quickly. Towards the end of 1927 a number of corruption scandals erupted, involving Champion and other Natal officials. As a result, Champion was acrimoniously expelled from a fracturing national ICU in 1928.¹

Undaunted, Champion launched the ICU yase Natal (ICU of Natal) in Durban in May 1928. Appealing to a sense of 'Zulu' betrayal at the hands of the national organisation, Champion's secession secured the support of many Natal branches, with the important exception of Pietermaritzburg. The appeal to Zulu ethnicity reflected the new priorities of a distinctly regional organisation searching for new strategies. In the immediate aftermath of secession the ICU in Durban revived its popularity. A demonstration of several thousand people celebrated the formation of the new body. But this momentum was not sustained. The ICU leaders seemed more preoccupied with the Union's business schemes than re-mobilising active support. Tactically, they concentrated on submitting grievances to an unresponsive mayor. Complaints about trading restrictions took precedence over more popular demands. In November 1928, Clements Kadalie came to Durban to attempt to heal the rift in the ICU, but this degenerated into a violent clash between the respective followers of Champion and

1. Champion, Mehlomadala, pp.7-8.

Kadalie.¹

It was as if the ICU had exhausted its repertoire of strategies. Vague appeals to Zulu identity gave an urban content to ethnicity in a way that Inkatha had failed to do. But the Union entered the ethnic terrain in ways which pointed towards conservative Zulu nationalism. There were attempts to attract the support of chiefs, and even to woo Solomon ka Dinizulu.² Towards the end of 1928, sergeant 'Shaka' Arnold, Durban's police expert on the ICU, confidently reported that the organisation's days as a threatening mass movement were over.³ What Arnold could not foresee, however, was that during 1929 and 1930 Durban was to become a stormcentre of African resistance politics.

1.3. CONCLUSION

Durban, Natal's largest city, was an important focal point for struggles over space and capital accumulation. Whites, Indians and Africans were incorporated differently into the local political economy. By 1920 the 'Durban System' was firmly in place, pushing Africans as a group to the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Yet the interests of an embryonic urban proletariat and middle class were incompatible with the migrant-labour priorities of the Durban System. These groups spearheaded communal mobilisation against a pervasively oppressive municipality. During the mid to late 1920s this opposition reached new heights.

Hertzog's more rigidly exclusive segregation policies joined the Durban System as the crucial stimuli of organised African politics during the 1920s. The African middle

1. Ibid., pp.10-11.

2. NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1: Handwritten note by Mr. Pringle, 16 February 1928.

3. La Hausse, 'Message', pp.25-26.

class, with its acculturation, skills and aspirations, was the obvious source of leadership of these organisations. Subject to ever firmer exclusion by the dominant class and to new usurpatory pressures from urban workers and rural tenants, middle class politicians were forced to make crucial strategic and ideological choices. One option was essentially conservative, the other more militant. John Dube and his supporters in the Natal Native Congress and Inkatha epitomised those who turned right at the political T-junction. They continued to cling to hopes of assimilation into a multi-racial dominant class, but increasingly saw new openings in the segregationist politics of Zulu royal ethnicity. Inkatha did not mobilise in Durban, even though there were large numbers of migrants there who hailed from north of the Thukela and who might have been attracted to the message of Zulu ethnicity. Inkatha was an elitist, rural movement that concentrated on winning over chiefs and white lobbyists at a time of rapid social transition. Even if Inkatha had tried to drum up popular support in Durban, it would have come up against a far more radical populism which had captured the imagination of the city's Africans.

Between 1925 and 1928 Durban saw an unprecedented surge of usurpatory African politics. The Natal African Congress (NAC) and especially the ICU challenged the Durban System with a range of tactics, from rousing mass meetings to boycotts and court cases. The NAC-ICU represented a merging of interests between a disgruntled, vulnerable lower middle class and the workers of Durban. The thousands of supporters consisted of both urbanised residents and migrants, united behind a banner of confrontation against the Durban System. Migrants were attracted not to a conservative ethnic message, but to millennial promises of land redistribution by rural ICU activists. Both in the countryside and the city, the ICU went further than any other modern

organisation had done in challenging the structures of white power. In conditions of political flux, this achievement gained the Union mass momentum. The ICU, in effect, led a rebellion in which ordinary people believed that by buying the red card they could change their world. The Durban municipality seemed relatively powerless to stop this demonstration of popular power.

Inevitably, though, a counter-reaction emanated from the dominant class at municipal, regional and central government levels. The offensive found an ally in Inkatha and other African organisations. But just as the assault on the ICU gathered momentum the Union itself began to fragment internally from late 1927. The mass movement had been built on the personal charisma of key leaders, and without accountable and durable organisation. Popular support was dissipated as the 'moment' of expectation passed. One symptom was the breakaway of most Natal ICU branches in mid 1928, after George Champion's expulsion from the national body on corruption charges. As an explicitly regional organisation which was losing its popular following, the ICU yase Natal began to encroach on the ethnic terrain that had already been mapped out by Inkatha. With its range of confrontationist tactics apparently exhausted, the Durban ICU had declined to a rump of its former self by the end of 1928. Few would have predicted then that the next two years were to see a dramatic efflorescence of resistance against two cornerstones of the Durban System: the beer monopoly and the pass laws.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DURBAN SYSTEM CHALLENGED: POPULAR CONFRONTATION AND WHITE POWER, 1929-30

Riots in June 1929 and a violent anti-pass demonstration in December 1930 were the pivotal events of a sustained period of African struggles against exclusion from the city. These events, and the many smaller acts of defiance which occurred during this period, provide rich ingredients for Natal's resistance historiography. The central themes of this chapter can best be posed as two questions: Why and how did political conflict escalate into rioting and public violence directed against white authority? Secondly, and this was vital to the political dynamics of this period, how did the authorities respond? Direct and potentially violent collective action by subordinate African groups signalled a dramatic attempt to 'mobilize power against a legally defined and state-supported dominant group.'¹ This was at once a heritage of the political campaigns of the previous few years, and a move towards even more radical demands and tactics.

Riots and public disorders challenge the capacity of the authorities to rule.² From the crowd's point of view a riot is a direct protest action. The consequences of that action are characteristically open-ended, although its participants generally believe that concrete results can be achieved. By its very nature, a riot contradicts the legal framework and political process sanctioned by the dominant order. From the authorities' point of view, a riot is a 'disturbance'. As long as such an action does not

1. Parkin, *Marxism*, p.85.

2. These ideas are drawn from E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1959), 1978 reprint, pp.110-111, 122; G. Rude, *The Crowd in History* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1981), p.11.

directly threaten the property and political control of the dominant class, the authorities will try, at the least, to contain it. If riot action is directly threatening, no effort will be spared to suppress and defuse it. The escalation of political conflict in Durban in 1929-30 can be analyzed as a complex interplay of the capacity to rebel versus the capacity to impose authority, whether through coercion or legitimizing reforms.

2.1. THE MAKINGS OF THE 1929 RIOTS

In setting the scene, two aspects of the 1929-30 period bear particular examination. First, a culture of defiance was generated. Second, this defiance was directed against easily identifiable targets through popular mobilisation. When coupled with perceptions of weak state authority, these two features precipitated an intensifying process of challenge and reaction between African subordinate groups and the dominant class.

Culture of Defiance

The social expression of defiance was a nebulous, but vital, aspect. There were many instances of an assertive political mood amongst Durban's Africans. The Durban System had weathered the challenge from the ICU, but it had not been able to suppress that organisation. The ICU had declined, but ordinary people had glimpsed a vision of a changed world. The fluid medium of popular culture provided a means of subverting the norms and authority of Durban's dominant strata. The physical presence of large numbers of Africans in the city was magnified by an aggressive cultural presence.

This can be illustrated through three cultural practices of the time: ingoma dancing, entertainment halls, and widespread drunkenness. Ingoma dancing in highly drilled formations was popular amongst migrant workers. During leisure time, workers would

gather on vacant plots in the city centre to practice their dances. Rooted in social and military ceremonies of rural culture, ingoma dancing absorbed new meaning and expression in the Durban context.¹ In particular, it gained an explicitly political character. Ingoma dancers often performed at ICU yase Natal meetings and led processions. Their rhythmic movement was accompanied by fighting songs about land dispossession and other experiences of exploitation.² The growing popularity of ingoma dancing in 1929 prompted an ICU stalwart, James Ngcobo, to propose regular competitions between troupes.³ Ngcobo hoped to make money from entrance fees, but the police saw things differently. They were fully aware of the politically charged and potentially subversive character of ingoma dancing. They rejected Ngcobo's request to use a vacant lot in the city centre, on the grounds that 'hundreds of young men parading our streets, armed with sticks and shields, on a Sunday afternoon is not desirable.'⁴

The three or four African-run entertainment halls, including the ICU's African Workers' Club, provided another kind of threat. In addition to their sheer rowdiness, which went on late into the night, these rundown warehouses - 'dance halls' - in the Indian quarter were the favourite stamping ground of the city's oJazibhantshi, those people on the lower margins of the African middle class. The dance halls offered a stage for budding music groups and comperes. They were oases of a rough urban culture in a city which fought African urbanisation. A contemporary observer described the crowd at one dance hall, comprising 'every type, young bucks in waistcoats and

1. La Hausse, 'Message', pp.28-30. (As stated in Chapter 1, my referencing uses the page numbers of the History Workshop paper and not the slightly shorter version which was later published).

2. M. Perham, African Apprenticeship (London, Faber, 1974), pp.199-200.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 4: Cowley and Cowley to TC, 26 February 1929.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 4: Chief Constable to TC, 13 March 1929 and 21 July 1930.

Oxford trousers ... through all possible grades and shades of shirts and collars to the collarless and the coatless, to men with hair plaited in porcupine spikes and women in nothing much but brass wire and beads ...'¹ Government officials visiting Durban during this period were alarmed by the popularity of the dance halls,

'where the notaries of the national Zulu dance [i.e. ingoma dancers] rub shoulders with others after indulging in European dances in some cases with loose women etc. The atmosphere at these forms of amusements is unhealthy in the extreme and can but lead to deterioration.'²

The municipality had not just sat by while these cells of urban culture grew. As early as 1924 the Durban Corporation closed down the entertainment halls.³ But loopholes in the law, and the willingness of dance hall proprietors continually to break the law, meant that by the late 1920s these institutions were still alive and well.

A third strand of the culture of defiance was the widespread incidence of drunkenness amongst Africans. Durban's officials and employers had long been worried by heavy drinking amongst African workers. This practice resulted in unpredictable and violent behaviour on a large scale. Drunkenness undermined capital's attempts to instil time discipline and workplace routines amongst African workers. Temperance reformers had repeatedly pointed out that municipal beer halls did not assist sobriety. The centrality of the beer halls to the Durban System, however, meant that municipal officials overlooked this inconsistency. They were much more concerned with the illegal shebeens that flourished near the hostels and dance halls, and especially in the peri-urban areas just beyond the municipal boundaries. These drinking dens, warned the manager of Native Administration, were places 'where conditions for demoralisation

1. Perham, Apprenticeship, p.197.

2. Report of the Native Affairs Commission on the Native Population in Durban, An. 205 (1930), quoted in la Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.140-141.

3. Umteteli, 13 September 1924.

are almost unlimited.’¹ Durban’s liquor laws and police raids forced scores of Africans to spend their leisure time either in the beer halls or engaging in subterfuge drinking. Others opted for brazen parties. The municipal files of the late 1920s are dense with complaints about an ‘uncontrolled’ African presence in the ‘white’ residential areas. An irate letter written in mid 1929, from a resident of a wealthy area of the Berea, is particularly revealing:

‘Stick-fighting, concertina playing, dancing, shouting, yelping and every other nerve-racking noise, such as Natives alone know how to make, are our constant portion. ... If I call out to them to stop I only succeed in provoking insults, cat-calls and derisive laughter. If I ring up the Mitchell Park Police I get only temporary relief. They clear out the boys who do not belong there, but the noise breaks out afresh as soon as they have gone.’²

Popular culture was diffuse and fluid. It was not necessarily politically informed; indeed, cultural practices were often a means of coping with hardship, rather than confronting it. Some of the more oppositional aspects of popular culture amongst African subordinate groups have been stressed here to illustrate the milieu in which organised militancy could take root.

Targeting defiance through organisation

For any aspirant African politician it was not simply a case of tapping into this culture of defiance, and then giving it explicit political content. On the contrary, some of the more established middle class politicians responded uneasily and even negatively to this phenomenon. Their relatively privileged position and their style of politics were threatened by subversive cultural practices. The Natal Native Congress and its political

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1412, 643J/18, 1: Layman to TC, 8 January 1926.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1219, 467, 4: B. Freakes to General Purposes Committee, 10 June 1929.

ally, Inkatha, were to be conspicuously absent from the confrontationist politics of 1929-30. John Dube, for one, believed that '[t]own Natives are out of control, and the criminal element is increasing in large numbers. Law-abiding Natives cannot tolerate this state of things. The heterogeneous mixture of detribalized Natives in our large Towns is a problem within a problem.'¹ He had a number of things in mind, but uppermost was no doubt his recent escape through a window after armed ICU yase Natal militia broke up a Congress meeting in Durban.²

The ICU yase Natal was ideologically and tactically more attuned to defiance. Yet by 1929 the Union had a credibility problem as a mass organisation; it was in financial trouble, and it seemed to have exhausted its tactical repertoire. Furthermore, the ICU yase Natal had gained a new competitor to the left of it in the political spectrum: a Durban branch of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was founded in February 1929. An additional radical influence, not connected to any political body, came from Durban's African dock workers, who waged a series of struggles around living conditions in their hostels in early 1929. During June 1929, the various activities of a resilient ICU yase Natal, a fledgling Communist Party and angry dock workers dove-tailed around the issue of the beer monopoly. This combustible 'moment' unleashed the riots of that month.

The municipality's decision to build a beer hall in the Sydenham district offered the ICU yase Natal a chance to revive its flagging fortunes. The central government, and local health boards near to the city, had been pressurizing Durban to take responsibility for the districts being urbanised by Indians and Africans just beyond the municipality.³

1. Quoted in Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.225.

2. Ibid.

3. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1412, 643J/18, 1-2; Torr, 'Founding of Lamont', pp.5-14.

The proposed beer hall at Sydenham, one of the more densely settled areas on the western perimeter, was a first, reluctant step in this direction. The erection of a beer hall in the area would make all shebeens there illegal. This threatened the income of the women liquor suppliers, and the leisure options of male shebeen patrons. In general, the beer hall signalled the extension of irksome municipal regulations over an area relatively free of them.

In March 1929 some Sydenham residents requested the ICU yase Natal to fight the planned beer hall.¹ The request indicated the standing which the depleted ICU yase Natal still had in Durban. Union officials formed the Anti-Kaffir Beer Manufacturing League, and collected five hundred signatures for a petition to the Minister of Native Affairs. Leaders like Champion used eclectic reasoning in opposing the beer hall. Moral arguments based on Christian temperance were coupled with rejection of beer halls as an unjust indirect tax which did not benefit Africans. Empty coffers precluded the ICU yase Natal from its favoured tactic of taking the beer hall matter to court. Consequently, Union activists pioneered a different strategy. During the weekends of May 1929, public marches were staged from the ICU hall in Prince Edward Street up the hill into Sydenham. The marching columns, with numbers ranging from 300 to 800, were flanked by the red-uniformed members of the Unity League - the ICU yase Natal militia. As la Hausse has shown, the marches were vivid and drew on a wide range of images.² They were headed by a brass band; flags were displayed, including the Union Jack and the Soviet flag; the ethos was militaristic; and white passers-by were roughed up. The Sydenham campaign propelled the ICU yase Natal into a

1. La Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.163-171.

2. Ibid., p.167; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Riots Commission Report, 1929, p.9.

prominent public position, from which it mounted a renewed challenge against the Durban System. Weekly meetings at Cartwright's Flats attracted 'a few thousand workers'.¹ The tempo of protest politics quickened as ICU yase Natal crowds pitted themselves against municipal planners.

In the meantime, the founding of a Durban branch of the Communist Party brought a new actor into African politics.² Committed to the establishment of a 'Native Republic' of workers and peasants, the white radicals who launched the Party branch concentrated on mobilising an African constituency.³ D.G. Wolton urged Durban's Africans to 'follow Russia, overthrow the government and set up their own black government of majority rule.'⁴ Wolton and his interpreter Caleb Mtshali were promptly arrested. The subsequent court case brought the Party welcome publicity. Johannes Nkosi, a young Natal worker and a prominent graduate of the Party's training school in Johannesburg, was sent to Durban as main organiser.⁵ A hall was hired in the Point district for lectures and meetings; and weekly open-air meetings were held outside the Railway hostel.⁶ Worried police reports noted the potential threat of the communists, and the receptiveness of Durban's Africans to their message. It seems likely, however, that formal Party members numbered no more than a hundred by mid 1929.⁷

With its mixture of Marxism and African populism, the Durban Party was in many ways an eligible successor to the ICU of 1926-27. The major difference was that Party

1. 'Worker Correspondent', South African Worker, 28 February 1929.

2. Central Archives Depot (hereafter CAD) Naturellesake (hereafter NTS) 7214, 56/326, 1: R.H. Arnold to Officer in Charge, C.I.D., Durban, 6 September 1929; La Hausse, 'Message', pp.26-7; Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.254-262.

3. For details, see South African Worker, 30 November 1928 and 31 January 1929.

4. South African Worker, 31 January 1929.

5. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', p.426; Simons, Class and Colour, pp.376, 410, 660; La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.176, note 78.

6. 'Worker Correspondent', South African Worker, 28 February 1929 and 31 May 1929.

7. La Hausse, 'Message', p.27, note 83.

leadership was more solidly rooted amongst African wage labourers. The fighting talk and energetic organisational initiatives of communist militants injected a new tone into protest politics in Durban. Included in this was a novel stress on internationalism. In February 1929, for example, at least two hundred African workers attended a celebration of International Anti-Imperialism Day. The meeting pledged 'to work unceasingly for the removal of the yoke of Imperialism from South Africa and from all subjected and oppressed countries of the world.'¹ Despite differences between the Party and the ICU yase Natal, the two organisations operated closely together during early 1929. In some ways this seemed implausible, for Champion had supported the expulsion of communists from the national ICU in 1927, and Nkosi had been a victim of this move. Nevertheless, Party activists addressed ICU yase Natal meetings and sold their paper, South African Worker, to ICU crowds. The fledgling Party exploited the political space opened up by the ICU yase Natal. Champion allowed the communists to operate under his wing, so long as he could distance himself if they became too radical.²

A third contribution to the militancy of mid 1929 came from the 1,500 togt (daily-hired) dock workers at the Bell Street barracks in the Point district.³ These workers were not formally organised, but they were effectively mobilised through the leaders of hostel dormitories and through bonds of affection based on home-town networks. Like dock workers the world over, Durban's izinyathi ('buffaloes') were well aware of their strategic position in the labour process of the harbour. Unlike most of Durban's African workers, they were strike-prone, with a history of industrial action stretching

1. South African Worker, 28 February 1929.

2. Roux, Rope, pp.245-6.

3. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.207-217.

back to the 1890s. Most recent had been a one-day strike of 1,500 dock workers in June 1927 against the arrest of poll tax defaulters.¹ During 1929, the dock workers again resorted to collective action, this time in a battle with hostel management. It was a struggle over the liquor policies of the hostel, and the power of officialdom to withdraw togt badges.

In June 1929, in an abrupt departure from existing practice, the Bell Street hostel manager prohibited residents from making mahewu, a drink of fermented porridge.² The hostel-dwellers believed that this initiative came from a nearby Indian shopowner, who wished to boost his sales of mahewu. Within days, both the Indian store and the Point beer hall were being boycotted by disgruntled dock workers. The inclusion of the beer hall was no doubt influenced by the publicity of the Sydenham campaign. When the Native Administration singled out Mcijelwa Mngomezulu as the ringleader of the dock workers and confiscated his togt badge, in effect making his presence in Durban illegal, the hostel-dwellers called for a meeting with the ICU yase Natal.

On 12 June Champion and others met with Point workers in the sand dunes opposite the hostel. The Anti-Kaffir Beer Manufacturing League (AKBML) agreed to take up the grievances of the dock workers. The League now represented both urban settlers and migrants. Urbanised Africans in Sydenham were determined to resist the erection of a beer hall as a first step of incorporation into the Durban System. Migrant dock workers at the Point were angered by a fickle change in liquor policy. The AKBML's resolution to close down all five of Durban's beer halls signalled a common strategy, linking both issues. The ICU yase Natal led a deputation of Bell Street hostel-dwellers

1. Ibid., pp.202-206; Roux, Roux, p.173.

2. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.207-217.

to the Native Administration. The League distributed thousands of pamphlets exhorting people 'to part company with Kaffir Beer'.¹ The only reason the municipality sold this beer, the pamphlet argued, was to 'build compounds and barracks which are full of bad laws and disagreeable control.'

Things moved fast. On Friday 14 June the ICU yase Natal militia closed all the beer halls. Echoing the actions of the police liquor squad when it raided shebeens, pickets emptied all beer containers in the halls. Municipal beer was declared 'bad', and it was 'consumed by the earth.'² The Point workers, characteristically, went a step further. A thousand-strong crowd stoned the Bell Street beer hall. The municipal police intervened, but they were armed only with sticks. Three African constables sustained serious injuries. The crowd was finally dispersed by the unlikely figures of George Champion and other ICU yase Natal leaders.³ The middle class politicians were in danger of being outpaced by the toqt workers, and they dramatically snatched back the initiative.

The Anti-Kaffir Beer Manufacturing League flooded Durban with boycott leaflets on Saturday 15 June, and the next day the ICU's Tom Gwala chaired a meeting of 5,000 people at Cartwright's Flats. The principal speakers were Champion and J.T. Gumede, the radicalised ANC president who was visiting Durban. Champion launched a bitter attack on Durban's Native Administration, police force, and beer monopoly. He pledged the ICU's support for the beer boycott, and urged the large crowd to join the Union. God would bless those who had broken the Point beer hall windows, he shouted. He ridiculed the police detectives who were present, urging them to telegraph

1. Quoted in la Hausse, 'Struggle', p.174.

2. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Translation of ICU, Blood and Tears (Durban, 1929).

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Riots Commission Report, 1929, p.11.

Hertzog to 'stop the beer for good.'¹ Following on, Gumede provided a cohesive ideological thrust to the protest movement. The ANC demanded a 'Native Republic' where there would be neither beer monopoly nor passes. He popularised the new slogan 'Mayibuye!' ('Let [Africa] come back!'). Praising the work of the ICU and the Communist Party in Durban, he issued a fiery challenge: 'Now let us combine and take our freedom.'²

2.2. CAN THE WHITES BEAT US? FROM BOYCOTT TO RIOT

The culture of defiance had been tapped and mobilised against an easily identifiable target, the beer monopoly. Yet what were the implications of the fighting talk of the ICU yase Natal and the Communist Party? What was meant when Gumede spoke of 'taking freedom'? Champion's intervention to disperse the excited crowd at the Point beer hall showed that he understood the issues differently from the hostel-dwellers. Yet, two days later, from the platform of a mass meeting, he praised these same workers for their militant action. These apparently contradictory stances revealed just how volatile the political climate was. Ordinary people were intent on taking direct action to make their demands and frustrations felt; they were not leaving it up to their 'leaders'. This was both an indictment of the leaders, and a consequence of the political consciousness those leaders had initiated and symbolised. But if we are to understand how the events of Monday 17 June 1929 escalated into a number of riotous encounters, we must also explore popular perceptions of the dominant class that was being fought against.

1. Ibid., p.12; La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.177.

2. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.169, 178; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Riots Commission Report, 1929, p.12.

Sheer anger, frustration or desperation amongst Africans as a subordinate group were insufficient stimuli, on their own, for the 1929 riots. The other key factor was the nature of the oppressive state. If white authority was weak or divided, then the potential success of direct action by the black underclasses was that much greater. A particularly combustible situation was created in 1929 by popular perceptions of a state whose strength was brittle. There were a number of paradoxes, keenly observed by Durban's Africans. Nationally, South Africa's first 'Swart Gevaar' (Black Danger) general election was fought that year, indicating the extent of African resistance since the mid 1920s. The victorious Hertzog government prepared even tougher legislation to suppress this challenge. Locally, the municipality's power was compromised by the weakness of its police force. This had implications for the coercive safeguarding of Durban's 'Native' policies. Urban growth had seriously eroded the policing capacity of the municipal force. This was the increasingly shrill warning from Pretoria's South African Police.¹ Clinging to municipal autonomy, the Durban corporation continued to spurn this view. The municipal police had the capacity to engage in liquor, pass and tax searches, and to make the lives of individual Africans unbearable. But during 1929 they had failed to curb the revival of the ICU yase Natal and the germination of the Communist Party. In other words, a big question mark hung over the municipality's power to suppress a concerted usurpationary thrust 'from below'. In the 1929 riots Durban's Africans put this coercive capacity to the test.

On Monday 17 June, the day after the passionate meeting at Cartwright's Flats, pickets armed with sticks guarded the entrances to all beer halls.² During the morning

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1. See for example, CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: S.J. Lendrum to Commissioner, SAP, 17 June 1930.
 2. Unless stated otherwise, this account is drawn from la Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.170-183; Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.207-217; NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Riots Commission Report, 1929; CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Translation of ICU pamphlet, Blood and Tears.

the city centre was tense, but there were no obvious signs of the conflicts that would erupt later in the day. Three factors fuelled the escalation. First, there were attempts to extend the boycott to cafes and eating houses run by Indians and whites. Second, the Point hostel-dwellers decided to march en masse into the city centre, provoking surprising political consequences. Third, a white crowd intervened to bolster the coercive capacity of the police, and to repulse African displays of popular power.

Sensing an opportunity to use the beer hall boycott to their advantage, African traders and hawkers organised pickets to discourage Africans from entering white and Indian shops. African traders were discriminated against by the laws of the city; here was a chance to fight this through direct action. The pickets roamed the city centre, threatening those who did not heed them. During the lunch hour a group of pickets clashed with police in Railway Street. From the police point of view, the mobile pickets were subversive alternative embodiments of armed power which had to be dispersed. But the municipal police were only armed with batons. The dispersal of the Railway Street crowd was only achieved once further police reinforcements had arrived, and white civilian onlookers had lent a hand.

The news of this confrontation spread quickly, by word of mouth, through the workshops, warehouses and hostels of the nearby harbour area. In response, a large crowd began to gather at the Point, talking excitedly of a march towards the site of the lunch-time clash. There was a sizeable concentration of workers and hostel-dwellers in the harbour district; and home-town networks and ingoma dance teams, among other collective identities, offered important mobilising networks. As recently as the previous Friday, the 'Point crowd' had flexed its muscle by stoning the beer hall. Now, what would it do?

To the local commandant of the South African Police, G. Baston, the situation looked precarious. His small force, normally restricted to policing serious crimes in the Durban area, offered an ineffectual supplement to the under-staffed and under-armed municipal force. Facing the prospect of an uncontrollable African crowd occupying the city centre, Baston made a bold decision. He contacted the arch-enemy of the authorities, George Champion. In return for offering to arrange a meeting between the ICU yase Natal and selected city councillors, Baston asked Champion to pacify the Point crowd.

For Champion this offered an unexpected, if risky, opportunity. Ever since 1926, ICU deputations to the authorities had been spurned. This had been deeply frustrating for the Union's leaders. Now, in the heat of the furnace, the municipality's strategy of political exclusion began to bend. But what would the implications be for Champion's status as a mass leader if, in the company of the police, he repeated his tactics of the previous Friday and asked the hostel-dwellers to disperse? By climbing into Baston's car and heading for the Point, Champion took his first steps along a political tightrope that was to shape his career until the 1940s, and beyond. Acrobatic skills are necessary, of course, for all politicians. In Champion's case, exceptional tightrope talents were to serve a highly ambitious agenda. He sought to curry maximum influence with white officialdom, and yet to perpetuate the role of popular leader with a large following. A pamphlet published by the ICU yase Natal leader in 1929 stated self-consciously that 'the majority's word is the word of the Lord ... I know that my life is in the hands of the masses.'¹ Champion's behaviour in June 1929 offered a microcosm of 'dual closure' by the African middle class, in other words the simultaneous political strategies

1. Champion, Mehlomadala, p.3.

of exclusion and usurpation.

Champion and his ICU lieutenants had sufficient political stature to disperse the Point workers for the second time in four days. Once again, the primacy of an ICU-led boycott was asserted against the unpredictable tendencies of the hostel-dwellers. Now Champion was also able to offer the sop of a meeting with the authorities. By mid afternoon, the police issued a bulletin saying that the threat of a march on the city centre was over.

At around 5.00pm, however, the day's events took an unexpected turn. A crowd of around one thousand whites, sceptical of the police's capacity to quell the volatile threat to white rule, took the law into their own hands. The crowd assembled outside the ICU's African Workers' Club in Prince Edward Street in the Indian quarter. Stones rained on the Club. About one hundred ICU members were trapped inside. Suddenly a phalanx of those besieged rushed out of the building, throwing the crowd into disarray. The police arrived to find two white men beaten to death and another two left for dead. The white crowd regrouped and refused the mayor's request to disperse. The police were given the unlikely task of pushing this crowd back from the ICU Club.

Things now unfolded as though the events of lunch-time had been a dress rehearsal. Reports of the siege of the ICU Club spread like wildfire around the hostels. Columns of workers, some armed with sticks and marching in military formation, converged on Prince Edward Street. Estimates of the African crowd vary from 2,000 to 6,000. The white crowd, which had swelled to around 2,000 people, was still in Prince Edward Street, providing a target for African militancy. The whites, some of whom brandished pistols, were flanked by around 300 municipal and South African Police. At least 170 of these were African constables, armed with sticks. The more senior officers had an

assortment of guns. Champion and other ICU yase Natal leaders were notably absent; to have intervened now would have endangered their lives and verged on political suicide.

It was dark by the time the African crowd came face to face with the police and the whites gathered behind them. When the massed confrontation finally came, it was surprisingly short and one-sided, in favour of the police and their white backers. The police opened fire, killing six Africans. This was a display of force that the African marchers had apparently not expected. Many had probably joined the march believing that the police, as usual, had only batons. In the dark, it was difficult to see how well the police were armed. The police use of firepower worked; the African crowd scattered. In the ensuing melee, 120 people were injured and 90 Africans were arrested for 'public violence'. There were no further incidents that night. The next morning, as if to stress their 'victory', a group of whites vandalised the ICU Club. Their final act was to push the Club's piano, a central symbol of dance hall culture, crashing into the yard below.

2.3. MILITANCY, REFORM AND COERCION

Africans had collectively displayed their power on the streets of Durban. Police guns, however, put an abrupt stop to this. Ultimately, the state had coercive resources which the African rioters could not meet. This strengthened the resolve of African subordinate groups to exert their power in other ways. Reflecting the culture of defiance, the beer hall boycott remained remarkably solid over the next twelve months. It was enforced through 'underground' organisation by the ICU yase Natal militia and

amalaita gangs.¹ Between June 1929 and July 1930 revenue from municipal beer sales totalled only £6,107, compared to budget expectations of £52,000.² The financing of the Durban System was thoroughly undermined. Moreover, the ICU yase Natal and the Communist Party remained intact. Soon after the riots, the president of the Durban Joint Council of Natives and Europeans observed that ‘unrest’ was ‘prevalent amongst the civilised as well as the uncivilised.’³ Durban seemed to confirm the Hertzog government’s obsession with ‘Swart Gevaar’ (Black Danger). Furthermore, the onset of the worldwide Great Depression threatened new kinds of social upheaval. From the authorities’ point of view, something had to be done to quell or neutralise the militancy.

The local and central state deployed a classic combination of reform and coercion. In general, these different strategies did not contradict each other, even though they emanated from a variety of interests within the dominant class. Reform strategies sought to weaken the usurpationary movement by diverting its attention and by partially responding to its grievances. Particular efforts were made to prise leaders from followers by offering them new political and material opportunities. In Durban’s racially ordered society there were, however, distinct limits on the concessions white powerholders were willing to offer to Africans. Among the proponents of reform strategies were certain city councillors, church figures, members of the Durban Joint Council of Natives and Europeans, the government’s commission of enquiry into the riots, and the central state’s Native Affairs Commission.

Coercive strategies, by contrast, aimed to impose the political control of the dominant class, to threaten those who defied the law, to frighten followers away from

1. La Hausse, ‘Nongoloza’, pp.106-107.

2. La Hausse, ‘Struggle’, p. 217.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1575, 323A, 1: Champion to TC, 29 December 1934, quoting J.H. Nicholson’s evidence to the de Waal Commission.

their leaders, and leaders from followers. This was done through a variety of enforced exclusionary strategies. Those who wielded physical power within the state were the most obvious proponents of this approach. These included Durban's Native Administration, the chief magistrate, the Department of Justice, the courts, and the police.

Iron fist and rough glove

The task of this section is to unravel the complex interplay, after June 1929, between coercion and reform. What was the impact of these developments on African politics? Usurpatory initiatives, and the intensity and variety of state and municipal reactions to them, reshaped the political terrain. The result was a decline of militancy by early 1931. These developments, together with the onset of the Great Depression, made this period something of a watershed in Durban's history.

The response of the authorities to the June 1929 riots was quick and decisive. Representatives of the central state took the main initiatives. The magistrate banned all African gatherings, including sports events. The Borough Police confiscated ICU documents and barred up the Union's office.¹ The aim was to disorganise the collective mobilisation that had provided political direction to defiance. Within days, Pretoria appointed Transvaal's judge president, D. de Waal, to investigate the causes of the riots. His enquiry gave African middle class politicians, including George Champion, ample scope to voice their grievances. De Waal's central finding was that the riots would not have occurred if the Durban System had had a more humane face.² He

1. NA Durban Magistrate, Correspondence (hereafter DMC): N1/9/2/1: Magistrate to Secretary for Justice, 19 June 1929 and 16 July 1929; Champion to Magistrate, 24 June 1929.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Riots Commission Report, 1929.

criticised, in particular, the blunt exclusion of the African middle class from a stake in the city. His main recommendations were essentially tinkering measures, intended to rectify this. The municipality, he urged, had to make a concerted effort to provide family housing for 'the better class of natives'. Secondly, an advisory board had to be created, to provide a formalised channel of communication between African leaders and the Durban corporation. Both these proposals consciously sought to attract African politicians away from the popular alliance. De Waal's third main suggestion also had this in mind, but it had a broader objective too; he argued for the creation of a new municipal post of Native Welfare Officer (NWO). This person would liaise between Africans and the city council, offering an approachable alternative to the harsh Native Administration Department. The NWO would also co-ordinate sporting and other leisure activities. The intention was to distract the African masses from political activity, and to counter the subversive social practices which underpinned the culture of defiance.

De Waal sought to reduce some of the political friction generated by the Durban System. He largely ignored the continuing beer boycott and the signal it gave of pervasive hostility towards the System as a whole. He concentrated on appeasing the middle class politicians through a series of measures designed to enhance the political legitimacy of the Durban authorities. His proposals were sufficiently convincing and practicable for the city council to adopt them. The council increased its oversight of the unpopular Native Administration Department by creating a new standing committee, the Native Administration Committee.¹ This body attracted a number of liberal city

1. Hitherto, the municipal NAD had had relatively free rein. Within the city council, 'native affairs' matters had previously been dealt with by the Markets and Abattoirs Committee!

councillors, who initiated the formation of a Native Advisory Board (NAB) and approved the new post of Native Welfare Officer. The principle of a new township was supported, but the siting, funding and building of this was to prove a protracted issue.¹ The Native Administration Committee also set about drafting new bye-laws for the control of African gatherings, in preparation for lifting the ban on political activity.

The creation of a Native Advisory Board, which held its first meeting in January 1930, was probably the most significant reform initiative. The 1923 Natives Urban Areas Act provided for municipalities to set up 6-member advisory boards for each 'location' or township.² Three members were to be elected, and three appointed by the location superintendent, who was to chair the board. Durban had no 'locations', only hostels and the Married Quarters. This had provided a useful excuse for ignoring the provision of the Act. The idea of Africans formally advising the Council clashed with the autocratic style of Native Administration and with the migrancy framework of the Durban System. In the aftermath of the 1929 riots, however, the new Native Administration Committee established an Advisory Board that was more substantial than anything envisaged by the Urban Areas Act. Durban's Native Advisory Board arose from consultations involving officials, white liberals, and African leaders, including those of the ICU yase Natal.³ The Board was to consist of fourteen members: four city councillors, two representatives each from the Natal Native Congress and the ICU yase Natal, and six municipal appointees from the hostels. Here, within the harsh parameters of the Durban System, was a major initiative to legitimate authority and deflate the political unity of Africans.

1. Torr, 'Founding of Lamont', pp.20-29.

2. H.J. Simons, 'Some Aspects of Urban Native Administration', *Race Relations* 7, 4 (1940), p.106.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Native Administration Committee minutes, 3 and 24 October 1929, and 26 November 1929.

There were, however, segments in the dominant class who questioned the efficacy of reform strategies. These groups believed that the optimal way to defeat African militancy was through decisive displays of the state's coercive power, directed against those who continued to challenge the ruling order.¹ Despite the reform-talk, the beer boycott and political radicalism continued. The ICU Women's Auxiliary had successfully spread the beer boycott to other Natal centres.² In Durban, the illegal liquor trade was rife, and migrant workers continued to evade the poll tax on a massive scale. The Communist Party and the ICU yase Natal defied the ban on meetings. Addressing a gathering at the Bell Street hostel soon after the riots, Johannes Nkosi proposed a 'pass strike' in addition to the 'general beer strike'. 'It is now time to unite', he continued, 'whether [we are] Basuto or any other race. ... They won't look to see if an African is an ICU or a Communist, they will shoot every black man. ... There should be an Independent Black Republic. ... The rulers of that Republic should be blacks.'³

Reform strategies did not automatically moderate the ICU's politics. The ICU yase Natal leaders had won gains through municipal reforms, but they still had a following to answer to. They realised how important it was to sustain popular support as a means of bargaining with the authorities. For this reason the ICU yase Natal published a pamphlet, Igazi neZinyembezi ('Blood and Tears'), which commemorated the riot martyrs and praised the beer boycott. The pamphlet proclaimed that the ICU had been 'tried in the furnace', and would become 'greater and stronger' as the 'mouth-piece of

1. See correspondence in NA DMC N1/9/2/1.

2. Bradford, Freedom, pp.247-50.

3. Quoted in la Hausse, 'Struggle', p.196.

the workers'.¹ In its boldest move since the riots, the ICU yase Natal openly defied the ban on meetings by organising a gathering of 2,000 people at Cartwright's Flats on 25 August 1929.² In response, the magistrate sentenced six ICU yase Natal leaders to hard labour. He also proposed that Champion be banished from Durban under the Native Administration Act, and he asked Pretoria to dispatch the Mobile Squadron to Durban.

The arrival of the para-military Mobile Squadron in Durban on 1 September 1929 was greeted with relief by the magistrate and the South African Police. They both believed that the perceived weakness of the borough police was a major stimulant to continued African militancy. Over the next two months the Squadron did 'excellent work' in continuous raids for illegal liquor and tax receipts.³ However, this show of force still did not have the desired effect. Indeed, it might have stimulated defiance. Towards the end of October police raiding parties were ambushed in Sydenham and at the Point.⁴ It was rumoured that the six imprisoned ICU yase Natal leaders were plotting a jail mutiny.

Early in November 1929 the hard-nosed Minister of Justice, Oswald Pirow, decided that Durban's African resisters deserved shock treatment. Further police reinforcements were drafted to Durban, and on 14 November Pirow flew to the city to take personal charge of massive pre-dawn raids on workers' hostels.⁵ For the first time in South Africa, tear gas was used. Hostel-dwellers were flushed out into long queues where their poll tax receipts were inspected. Those who failed to wake up fast enough were

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1. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Translation of Blood and Tears.
 2. See correspondence in NA DMC N1/9/2/1; A.W.G. Champion, Dingiswayo (Johannesburg, Abantu Batho, 1931), p.9.
 3. NA DMC N1/9/2/1: Magistrate to District Commandant, SAP, 24 October 1929.
 4. NA DMC N1/9/2/1: District Commandant, SAP to Magistrate, 24 October 1929.
 5. La Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.202-3; Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.229-230.

beaten with rifle butts.¹ On the first day 6,000 workers were searched, and makeshift open-air courts secured 739 tax convictions.² Over the next few days the enlarged 700-member Mobile Squadron continued its raids. Within a week £5,000 had been paid in arrear taxes.³

There was no doubt that, in the short term, the Pirow raids struck fear into many hearts. But this burst of state terrorism was only partially successful. The mood of defiance and the beer boycott continued. People could be roughed up for their tax receipts, prosecuted for drinking illegal liquor, chased out of Durban for not having a pass, but they could not be forced into the beer halls. This made the beer boycott a powerful campaign. The 'underground' pickets still operated; the politicians still insisted that utshwala (sorghum beer) was a 'national' drink which should only be brewed by Africans; and the municipal monopoly was still widely seen as an unjust indirect tax. As the boycott dragged on, people's drinking habits changed, away from municipal beer to stronger shebeen concoctions. The financial implications for the Durban System were bleak.

The pendulum swung back in favour of local reformers, among whom were the new mayor, A. Lamont, and the head of the Native Administration Committee, H.E. Arbuckle. For all its tough talk, even the Hertzog government was not pre-disposed towards maintaining semi-permanent martial law in Durban. Soon after Pirow's raids, the Native Affairs Commission, representing different interests to the repressionists in the state, visited Durban. Endorsing the de Waal report, the Commission argued

1. NA DMC N1/9/2/1: Manager, Kaffrarian Steam Mill Co. to Magistrate, 19 November 1929.
2. NA DMC N1/9/2/1: Telegram, Magistrate to Department of Justice, 19 November 1929.
3. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.203.

strongly for political, not military, 'solutions' to the continuing boycott.¹ Reflecting this shift of emphasis, Durban's special 'goodwill' Native Advisory Board was launched in January 1930, and a liberal Native Welfare Officer, J.T. Rawlins, was appointed in April 1930. In the medium-to-long term these two measures were to be vital in re-shaping mainstream African politics in Durban. In the short term, even the most moderate of Natal Congress politicians were reluctant to be seen to be siding with the authorities against the masses.

The proceedings of the NAB during early 1930 were a good barometer of this reluctance. The manager of Native Administration, C.F. Layman, had hand-picked the six hostel representatives. The Durban Congress delegates, the trader Ray Msimang and the teacher A.F. Matibela, were political moderates. The only contentious figures, it seemed, were the two ICU yase Natal representatives, George Champion and James Ngcobo. Contrary to the reformers' expectations, the first few Board meetings were strained and combative. There was unease at the Board's undefined status, and opposition to the beer monopoly was unanimous.² The Board remained remarkably sensitive to popular feelings.

However, the way in which the Board was constituted meant that the majority of its members favoured pragmatism rather than confrontation. The acrimonious fourth monthly meeting, in April 1930, was a critical one.³ The Board agreed, by eight votes to two, with Msimang's motion that the beer hall boycott be suspended. Two municipal warnings had split the Board's pro-boycott stance. The first was that the boycott threatened progress on the promised 'native village' at Clairwood. The second was that

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323:1: Secretary, Native Affairs Commission to Minister of Native Affairs, 12 December 1929.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 2: Draft NAB minutes, 19 February 1930 and 19 March 1930.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 1: Draft NAB minutes, 16 April 1930.

stall holders' fees in the municipal markets would have to be increased to offset beer revenue losses. Board members, and the aspirant middle class which most of them represented, were materially threatened by these warnings. They decided to follow their political pre-dispositions and lobby for concessions, rather than maintain a defiant posture. On occasions, NAB meetings were still to generate a good deal of heat, but from mid-1930 the Board became increasingly preoccupied with piecemeal and limited demands.¹ These related to the proposed township, conditions in hostels and municipal markets, and the grievances of interest groups such as traders, ricksha pullers, taxi drivers, and herbalists.

For the more conservative segments of the African middle class, the NAB became a legitimate forum. In October 1930, extending this process, the Durban branch of the Natal Bantu Ministers' Association and the Durban Native Church Council were each allocated a seat on the NAB. But had the Board defused African militancy? The anti-boycott resolution had little material effect on trade in the beer halls. The legitimacy of the Board was further challenged when the Bell Street hostel-dwellers forced Layman's appointee to resign.² A meeting in the hostel then elected a new representative. Fearing that this signalled broader disaffection with the Board as a reform measure, black and white members of the Durban Joint Council proposed that the six hostel representatives should be elected not appointed. The Native Administration Committee supported this. An interesting source of opposition was Ray Msimang of the Durban Congress. Showing his political colours, and revealing how he and others of his ilk were available for collaboration with white authority, Msimang

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1: NAB Minute Book.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 1: Resolution from Point Barracks to NAB, 21 November 1930.

wrote:

‘Are the Natives at the Point (or the majority of them) sufficiently vested with the knowledge of voting? Even old organisations such as Congress have a difficult task educating the mass of who to select and how to vote. It will mean that instead of having the best man the mass will elect some ‘Induna’ or some popular Native who knows nothing of matters worth knowing and the change will be from bad to worse.’¹

The political organisations: responses to reform, and new directions

Other members of the Durban Congress may not have been as blatantly elitist as Ray Msimang, but in general this body responded positively to reform. The reforms were limited, but they were in line with the lobbying style of the establishment politicians. What of the ICU yase Natal, the other main organisation with a middle class leadership? At one level, Champion seemed to be opting for a similar strategy of currying official recognition, setting himself and other ICU leaders apart from the masses. In early 1930, Champion appealed privately to the city council for ‘mutual understanding’ and a ‘clean chapter’ between the ICU yase Natal and the authorities.² But Champion and other ICU yase Natal leaders were not to be swallowed up that easily by municipal reform initiatives. They were highly ambitious, and their organisation differed from the Durban Congress. The ICU yase Natal had gained its character and its following from its activism, its militant rhetoric, and its confrontationist style. The ICU yase Natal leaders knew that this was their bargaining chip with the authorities. Furthermore, the Communist Party had survived the post-riots clampdown on political organisations. The Party had not been included in any way in the municipal reform agenda, and it continued to preach its uncompromising message:

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 2: J.R. Msimang to TC, 12 March 1931.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 1: Champion to TC, 27 December 1929 and 16 January 1930.

‘Comrades, to crawl means nothing else but more slavery, more starvation, more oppression. ... Let us fight for our emancipation. Down with pass laws! To hell with the Poll Tax! Down with Pirowism! Down with Hertzog, Smuts and Co! Long live the struggle of the working class.’¹ The ICU yase Natal had to work hard to prevent being eclipsed on the left by the communists and their brand of radical African populism.

In effect, during 1930, to develop my earlier analogy, the ICU yase Natal became a juggler on a tightrope. This popular front tried to combine an increasing number of political strategies. The Union took up its place on the new Advisory Board. It tried to keep the urban crowd on the boil through public meetings, now legal again. It continued to campaign actively in support of the beer boycott. At one particularly lively meeting in the Somtseu hostel hall in March 1930, ICU yase Natal speakers instructed whites to ‘take their religion and Beer back to where they had come from.’² An observer from Durban’s Native Administration described how this meeting developed into a ‘succession of Natives working themselves into a frenzy and slanging the Corporation, the Police, and members of the Native Administration ... as being enemies of the Zulu nation.’³

Yet, as in 1928, the ICU yase Natal was faced with prospects of losing popular support. Once again, the Union seemed to have exhausted its repertoire of tactics. Its followers had participated in a renewed collective challenge against the Durban System, but had gained few material benefits. Municipal reforms were directed at leaders, not followers. The ICU yase Natal leaders were tempted to concentrate on activities narrowly beneficial to the African middle class. One example of this was Champion’s

1. Johannes Nkosi to Umsebenzi, 8 August 1930.

2. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: N. Howard to Manager, NAD, 13 March 1930; H.A. Robson to Manager, NAD, 14 March 1930.

3. Ibid.

increasing preoccupation with the 'Clermont Township' scheme. He was a key figure in this business syndicate which bought up land near Pinetown, and sold it to the African middle class in Natal and beyond.¹

By mid-1930, the Durban ICU was searching for new strategies to stay in mass politics. This process was constrained by remarkable continuities in the Union's leadership. The core of leaders, forged in 1926-27, stayed intact. The ICU yase Natal stalwarts continued to flock around Champion's charisma and the bright lights of the Natal Workers' Club. By mid-1930 most of these highly talented politicians had become 'establishment' figures in their own right. Their very cohesion excluded new aspirants, whose only opening as radical politicians was in the Communist Party. The ICU yase Natal leaders became increasingly detached from the urban crowd which they claimed to lead. The result was a shift away from usurpationary politics.

In its attempts to sustain a following, the ICU's most intriguing initiative was a conference held with Natal chiefs in Durban in May 1930.² This was the Union's most aggressive attempt yet to capture Inkatha's terrain. Fifty to sixty chiefs and their supporters responded to Champion's widely circulated invitation to an Umhlangano Wesizwe (Meeting of the Nation). The meeting was highly secretive. Resolutions circulated afterwards suggest that chiefs were attracted by Champion's offer to co-ordinate their request to the recently formed Native Economic Commission for more land, and for an end to dipping and stock regulations. Shrewdly exploiting the state's and Inkatha's retribalisation strategies, Champion sought to reconstruct his status as a

1. M. Swanson, 'The Rise of Clermont', paper presented to Workshop on African Urban Life in Durban in the Twentieth Century, University of Natal, Durban, October 1983.

2. Details for this paragraph are drawn from University of South African (hereafter UNISA) Champion papers AAS1, 36, 27.2.1: Izingumo, Umhlangano WeSizwe (Resolutions, Meeting of the Nation), 31 May 1930; CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: R.H. Arnold to CID, Durban, 2 June 1930, and District Commandant, SAP to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, 16 June 1930.

regional leader. He secured the chiefs' support for the demands of African traders, and for the repeal of the liquor prohibition laws. Champion intended, as a Durban politician, to become an urban advisor to chiefs. The political potential of this was indicated when an inquisitive crowd of 6,000 - the ICU's largest for a long time - gathered for a public meeting of the Umhlangano Wesizwe. Some of the ICU yase Natal speakers trotted out the familiar slogans about the beer boycott, wage demands, and white oppression. But Champion had moved to 'higher' things: he spoke as the representative of the chiefs. Reinforcing this, an ICU praise singer eulogized Champion as the latest of a long line of Zulu chiefs and heroes, beginning with Shaka.

Was Champion, through this active construction of an ethnic mythology, merely adding another ball to his juggling set? Or was he moving towards a more conservative political position? Or was he challenging the status quo in new ways? It was a measure of the ICU leader's skill and ambiguity as a politician that all three questions could be answered affirmatively. The conference of chiefs was certainly an opportunistic initiative to gain publicity, influence and sustain a following. The ICU yase Natal was actively looking for drawcards to stem flagging support. To cite another example of this, we need look no further than the lively reception the Union gave to the new ANC president, Pixley Seme, just two weeks after the meeting of chiefs.¹ The Durban Congress was out-manoeuvred, and it did not seem to bother anyone that Champion had voted for J.T. Gumede and against Seme in the recent ANC leadership tussle.²

It could be argued, however, that the ICU yase Natal leaders were not merely darting from one publicity event to the next. There were signs of a shift towards a more

1. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Notice about Seme's visit, 19 June 1930.

2. Champion was not a member of the Natal Native Congress, but since 1927 he had been appointed to the national executive of the ANC.

moderate political stance.¹ Mobilising people ethnically was an ascriptive process, building collective identities based on authoritarian leadership and on political myths about a 'founding community'.² At one level this was an inherently conservative process, requiring a largely passive following on the basis of a given ethnic identity. The conference of chiefs in May 1930 did not seriously challenge the rulers of Durban. This was because, unlike other aspects of ICU politics, mobilising chiefs did not have usurpationary implications for urban class struggles. For this reason, coupled with the ICU's apparent loss of popular support, the Union could be perceived as less of a threat than before. This view no doubt shaped the Durban mayor's decision, in June 1930, to introduce the Native Welfare Officer to a public meeting in the ICU hall.³ For the repressionists this supping with the ICU was treacherous; for the reformers, it was a victory for moderation.

The South African police, the Durban magistrate, and the Natal MP George Heaton Nicholls were, by contrast, deeply alarmed by the ICU's conference of chiefs.⁴ In the eyes of the repressionists, this event could bring a new lease of life for the ICU yase Natal as both an urban and a rural movement. The Durban ICU threatened to link city and countryside in a manner similar to what was happening in East London and the Western Cape.⁵ There were prospects of further urban unrest in Durban, and a radical appropriation of retribalisation policies in the region. In July 1930, therefore, the ICU yase Natal leaders were warned by the magistrate and senior police officers that they

1. Marks, Ambiguities, pp.107-109.

2. A. Sitas, 'Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal's Black Working Class', in The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Vol. 15 (London, ICS, 1990), pp.268-9.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323, 1: NWO report, 8 July 1930.

4. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: S.J. Lendrum to Commissioner SAP, 17 June 1930; NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1: G. Heaton Nicholls to E.G. Jansen, 4 July 1930, 12 July 1930, 18 July 1930.

5. Beinart and Bundy, Hidden Struggles, chapter 8; Marks and Trapido (eds.), Race, Class and Nationalism, p.40.

were being closely monitored for infringement of the law. The 1927 Native Administration Act and the 1930 Riotous Assemblies Act had strengthened the state's legal battery against liberatory politics. A high-ranking police officer was sent from Pretoria to investigate the situation in Durban. He identified Champion, in particular, as a 'deep, cunning scoundrel'.¹ For the third time in the year since the June 1929 riots, the ICU general secretary was threatened with banishment from Durban.

All the fears of the repressionists were fulfilled in September 1930 when the aspirant Zulu 'king', Solomon kaDinizulu, paid a surprise visit to the ICU Club in Durban.² Three years before, Solomon had publicly denounced the ICU. Now, having angered the authorities and alienated Inkatha through his drunkenness, his indebtedness, and his political inconsistencies, Solomon played the dangerous game of courting Champion.³ The ICU leafleted Durban with invitations to a special banquet for the 'King of the Zulus'. Three thousand people thronged the ICU hall. Realising belatedly what a political minefield lay in wait for him, Solomon failed to arrive and slipped out of Durban.

For Pretoria's commissioner of police, George Champion had taken one step too many. The Minister of Justice banished Champion from Natal for twelve months from September 1930.⁴ This happened against the strong wishes of Durban's mayor, A. Lamont, who warned that Champion would be better 'disposed of' by remaining in

1. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: S.J. Lendrum to Commissioner SAP, 17 June 1930.

2. Unless stated otherwise, details in this paragraph are drawn from CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Commissioner of Police to Minister of Justice, 19 September 1930; NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1: CNC to Secretary for Native Affairs (hereafter SNA), 17 September 1930; Solomon to NC, Nongoma, 13 October 1930; and Minutes of interview between CNC and Solomon, 22 October 1930.

3. See correspondence in NA CNC 81, 57/438, N1/1/3(32)1 and NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1; Marks, *Ambiguities*, pp.15-21.

4. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Minister of Justice to Champion, 20 September 1930, with banning order under the 1930 Riotous Assemblies Act.

Durban, than being made a martyr.¹ This appeal fell on deaf ears. Pretoria had evidently decided to take a hard line against charismatic leaders in a co-ordinated, countrywide bid to snuff out the political radicalism of the late 1920s.²

A last gasp: the Communist Party's anti-pass campaign

Lamont's prediction of an upsurge of unrest after Champion's banning was proved wrong. The local ICU yase Natal failed to turn this into a mobilising issue. Indeed it seemed that, finally, repression and reform were dove-tailing to defeat African militancy. Just six days after Champion left the city, the Native Welfare Officer hosted a huge sports gala at the Albert Park Oval. This was part of Rawlins's innovative strategy to substitute 'sound' leisure practices for mass political activity.³ The size of the crowd at Albert Park signalled the potential for success in this objective. An estimated 10,000 people gathered to watch various sporting events and a ricksha parade. Lamont presented the prizes; Rawlins was applauded when the Durban Congress and Native Advisory Board member, A.F. Matibela, megaphone in hand, introduced him to the spectators. This was a far cry from the seething crowds which took to the streets in June 1929. The ICU yase Natal continued to be active, with James Ngcobo and other veterans at the helm. But it lost that combative style that was so characteristic of Champion's leadership. Furthermore, the Great Depression began to take its toll; the buoyant mood of popular culture faded. For many, the priorities of economic survival superseded the activities of opposition politics.

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 1: Mayor to Minister of Justice, 26 September 1930.

2. See Umsebenzi, May - December 1930.

3. See monthly reports of the NWO for the second half of 1930 in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 1.

This was the context for the anti-pass campaign launched by the Communist Party.¹ The pass system was attacked as one of the worst 'slave laws forced on us African workers by the white bosses' dictatorship.'² This message was hitched to the continuing beer boycott. Party militants believed that the Depression was industrial capitalism's worst crisis yet, and that it would provoke new intensity in the Marxist class war.³ This inspired a redoubling of effort as the Party tried to keep militancy aflame. Radical populism was still the central mobilising weapon, focused on the rallying call to burn passes on Dingaan's Day, 16 December 1930.⁴ Johannes Nkosi, the local Party leader, told a meeting of dock workers:

'We must fight on the 16th December, even if we fill the gaols ... We must fight Pirow, Hertzog, Smuts and the Corporation, and send them to hell ... I want you to smash the barrels in the Beer halls and spill the beer. On the 16th December I want all kitchen [workers] to let the food burn in their employers' stoves and stop work. This country is ours and we must do as the Russians did and free ourselves. All the taxes we pay are to employ soldiers to shoot us. Any Africans who go to drink beer at the beer halls ... are to be killed.'⁵

This fiery language, la Hausse argues, was most appealing to Basotho and amaPondo workers, who occupied the ethnic margins of Durban's depressed economy.⁶ These semi-lumpen groups were most threatened with exclusion from the city through pass laws, and they also had the least to lose from political militancy. They were excluded, too, from the Zulu ethnic call of the ICU yase Natal. For these reasons, they were 'available' for mobilisation. During November 1930, the Party attracted a growing

1. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', p.256; Roux, Rope, pp.245-252.

2. Umsebenzi, 10 October 1930.

3. A.T. Nzula, I.I. Potekhin, and A.Z. Zusmanovich, Forced Labour in Colonial Africa (London, Zed, 1979), pp.91-102.

4. The 16th of December has long been a controversial public holiday in South African history. Officially, it commemorates the decisive Afrikaner victory over Dingaan's Zulu army in 1838. Unofficially, the day was and is appropriated as a symbol of resistance against white domination.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1146, 323, 2: Layman to TC, 13 November 1930.

6. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.237.

following; by early December it claimed 6,000 members.¹ But there were definite limits to the Party's capacity to resurrect the popular front of 1929. The Durban branch struggled with funds, as an organisation made up entirely of workers. Furthermore, older and more established workers feared the coercive consequences of defiance, equating Nkosi's brash militancy with his youthfulness.²

The middle class leadership of the ICU yase Natal agreed with the spirit of the anti-pass campaign, but not with the tactic of burning passes.³ Direct action was seen as too extreme a strategy by an organisation which had weathered the political vagaries of the past few years, and which had recently lost its most important leader. Like Champion, Nkosi had been warned by the police during 1930 that he would be prosecuted or banished for 'incitement'.⁴ Unlike the ICU, there had been no attempt to incorporate the Communist Party into the municipal reform process. Nkosi, in response, had been uncompromising in his commitment to worker-led revolutionary politics. His Party training, his impoverished origins, and the desperation of his followers contributed to an unambiguous politics of usurpation against racial oppression and capitalist exploitation. The communists favoured one word above all others: Fight!

Local police and municipal officials were, however, confident that the Party leaders' commitment to confrontation would not gain a mass following in the inauspicious conditions of late 1930. The authorities must, therefore, have been surprised by the thousand-strong crowd which had gathered on Cartwright's Flats by midday on Monday 16 December.⁵ It was raining, and conditions did not favour an outdoor gathering. By

1. La Hausse, 'Message', p.53.

2. Ibid, p.53.

3. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1: NAB Minutes, 26 November 1930.

4. Umsebenzi, 8 August 1930.

5. The following account is drawn from la Hausse, 'Struggle', 235-237; Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.260-262; Roux, Rope, 245-251.

late afternoon, the pass protesters had swelled to 3,000. Speaker after speaker attacked the hated pass laws, which had caused workers 'to eat dirt'. Africans should 'give the government a big Christmas box' by burning their passes.¹ A man in a red robe collected up pass books, which were then set alight. Thereafter the crowd prepared to march towards the city centre. It was then that the municipal police charged, and a fierce battle of sticks and flying stones ensued. Four of the demonstrators, including Nkosi, died from police batons and gunfire.

The municipal police force had been the butt of sustained criticism for their ineffectiveness as a source of coercion. Their attack on the pass demonstration, and their subsequent persecution of communist leaders, were designed to confound their critics. The Communist Party was subject to repression on a scale which made the state's treatment of the ICU yase Natal look tame. Up to two hundred Party members were either sentenced to hard labour or banished from Durban. Skilled Party leaders - Gana Makabeni, Edwin Mofutsanyana, and Eddie Roux - were sent to Durban to maintain the organisation, but each of them was arrested and banished from the city.² The municipality's dramatic overkill of the relatively small Communist Party had the effect, together with the Depression, of decimating radical political activity. The curtain fell on the 'Turbulent Twenties'.

2.4. CONCLUSION: FROM THE TURBULENT TWENTIES TO THE DEPRESSED THIRTIES

The period 1929-30 saw unprecedented deployment of usurpationary strategies by

1. Natal Mercury, 17 December 1930 and Ilanga, 19 December 1930, quoted in Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.261.

2. Roux, Roux, pp.248-251; Interview by T.A. Nuttall with E. Mofutsanyana, Buthe Buthe, February 1990.

Durban's African underclasses against the municipal authorities. In short, class struggles deepened. A combustible situation developed through defiant cultural practices, grassroots frustration, material deprivation, and popular perceptions of weakness in the coercive capacity of the municipality. Conservative politicians, clustered around the Natal Native Congress, feared this volatile situation. They tried to distance themselves from it, and they certainly did not see it as a political resource. By contrast, the ICU yase Natal and the newly formed local Communist Party saw political opportunity in the confrontational mood of Durban's popular classes. During 1929 both organisations stoked up and targeted a radical populism against white authority, and the Durban System in particular. There were a number of easily identifiable targets for mobilisation. Finding a new lease of life through the campaign against the Sydenham beer hall, the ICU yase Natal tended towards an ethnic-nationalist discourse. The Communist Party espoused nationalism led by the African working class, with the ultimate goal of implementing a 'Native Republic'.

The riots of June 1929 took the politics of confrontation on to a new plane. The political organisations lost the initiative to the 'crowd', intent on a direct display of popular power. The riots were an open-ended gesture of defiance against the municipality's capacity to rule. The location of the riots in the densely populated city centre heightened their impact. The pattern of the riots indicated, however, the brittle bravado of the African crowd. It was easily broken by the unexpected use of police firepower. The moment of massed physical confrontation was brief. African subordinate groups then made a strategic retreat to other tactics, especially the beer hall boycott. The political organisations could come back into play.

The beer hall boycott, which lasted solidly for at least a year, was a highly

successful political campaign. It had ruinous financial implications for the Durban System. Furthermore, the usurpatory class alliance in Durban confirmed all the warnings of 'Swart Gevaar' on the part of the newly elected Hertzog government. Like other areas of the country, particularly in the western and eastern Cape, and to a lesser extent on the Witwatersrand, extensive rank-and-file militancy had been coupled with threatening organisational initiatives. The 'hawks' in Hertzog's government, and their allies in local administration, insisted that the Durban uprising be crushed with force. Durban was subjected to an unprecedented dose of armed power, aimed at frightening followers from leaders in African politics.

There were others in national and local government who argued that reform was a more effective response to massed defiance. Reform was not mutually exclusive from coercion. Reform was targeted at the leaders of the resistance, not the followers. Reform, in essence, was a means of dividing the usurpatory movement, by giving its middle class leaders new political openings, attracting them away from mass mobilisation. The reforms were mediocre, but in conjunction with the use of armed power, they had a significant impact on the middle class leaders of the Durban Congress and the ICU yase Natal. The Durban Congress was almost wholly drawn into moderate 'advisory' politics. The ICU yase Natal also entered this territory, but far more circumspectly. The Union ambitiously tried to sustain a mass following at the same time, against the fighting talk of its competitor, the Communist Party.

During early 1930 the star of the ICU yase Natal began to fade. The Union was in reality a fragile popular front, which had been through the trough of decline before. In the absence of conclusive victories, and hamstrung by limited finances and ossifying leadership, there were many obstacles to sustaining the organisation. The state's

banishment of George Champion from Durban in September 1930 was a serious blow. It was left to the tightly knit, energetic and ideologically committed leadership of the Communist Party to persevere with the increasingly difficult task of whipping up rebellion. The Party gained a following among disgruntled ICU yase Natal members and the more marginal and desperate segments of Durban's African society. Led on by Party leaders who talked dramatically of overthrowing white rule, these followers braved the rain, and the cold winds of the Great Depression, to burn their passes on 16 December 1930.

The proudly independent municipal police used strong-arm tactics to suppress the pass campaign, hound communist activists, and ensure the decline of organised political militancy. Durban's police acted to reverse the gathering impression that they were unable to contain African agitation. The exclusionary tactics of the municipal authorities were compounded by the Great Depression, which began to bite in Durban during the second half of 1930.¹ During November 1930, three hundred Africans were convicted by the Native Commissioner under the vagrancy laws. During the first three days of December 1930, one source recorded the retrenchment of a hundred Africans.² Priorities of economic survival made political defiance a risky option for many Africans, who were on the margins of the city's political economy.

Politically and economically, then, the 1929-30 period was a watershed. The politics of the 1930s was to be qualitatively different, and far less militant. The signs of this were already there: the success of the state's reform measures, the survival of the middle class leadership of the Natal Native Congress and the ICU yase Natal, and the

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1. D.W.M. Edley, 'Population, Poverty and Politics: A Study of Some Aspects of the Depression in Greater Durban, 1929-1933', MA, University of Natal, Durban, 1983, p.9 note 53.
 2. UW DHP Trade Union Council of South Africa (hereafter TUCSA) AH646, Dc5.35: D.R.O. Thomas, 'Memorandum on Unemployment', 3 December 1930.

increasing resort by these two organisations to the politics of Zulu ethnicity. These were to be cardinal features of political developments during the next decade.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DOLDRUMS? THE AFRICAN MIDDLE CLASS AND THE CHANGING BOUNDARIES OF POLITICAL INCORPORATION DURING THE 1930s

3.1. INTRODUCTION: DEFINING THE 1930s

This chapter is organised around a central theme: the relative quiescence of popular politics amongst Africans in Durban during the 1930s. The character of African politics was notably different from that of the late 1920s. First, there was little pressure ‘from below’, in other words from the mass of Africans, on the political leaders. Second, the social base of African political leadership was overwhelmingly a middle class one; and these leaders tended to pursue a narrowly defined class agenda. Third, municipal and government policies offered new openings, via ‘advisory’ and ‘tribal’ politics, for middle class politicians to negotiate new terms of accommodation with white power. At the same time, ironically, that Africans were being excluded in new ways from white-dominated civil society (through policies of segregation) new possibilities arose for African moderates to exert influence with white powerholders. This chapter concentrates on the self-interested politics of the African middle class and its ‘negotiation’ with white authority. The absence of a groundswell of pressure is illustrated through the collective behaviour of the political leaders. Analysis of popular consciousness and experience during the 1930s is held over to the next chapter.

Contrary to the late 1920s, then, African politics in Durban during the 1930s was dominated by distinctly moderate and incorporationist ideas and practices. This reflected the choices of the political leaders, made from a position of relative powerlessness; the development of new forms of social differentiation in African

society; and the decisive influences of government and municipal policy. We begin by looking at the main political organisations and their priorities. This sets the scene for examining the interaction of social change, policy development, and African politics in Durban during the 1930s.

3.2. THE POLITICAL MARKETPLACE: SIMILAR PRODUCT, DIFFERENT BRANDNAMES

There was, from the previous decade, a remarkable continuity of African middle class political leadership in Durban. Organised politics was dominated by the remnant of the ICU yase Natal and by the Natal Native Congress. Increasingly, these two organisations fought over the same political ground. A telling indicator of leadership continuity and political convergence was George Champion's challenge to John Dube in 1936 to hold a public debate over the merits of their respective organisations.¹ For the middle class leaders, the 1930s was a period full of factionalism, intrigue and petty power struggles.

The ICU yase Natal showed remarkable resilience. In 1931, George Champion's banning order was extended for a further two years, so his 'homecoming' was delayed until October 1933. In the meantime, the Durban branch had survived; its activities were focused around entertainments at the Workers' Club, and infrequent political meetings. A useful insight into political tensions in the ICU yase Natal during the early 1930s was provided by the municipal reintroduction of the curfew for Africans in 1931.² Some of the militants still attached to the Union demanded direct action to fight

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2: Champion to Mayor, 20 April 1936.

2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1, NAB Minutes, 17 June and 15 July 1931.

this. James Ngcobo, who had stepped into Champion's shoes as general secretary, called angrily for the resignation of the Native Advisory Board (NAB) in protest at the curfew. Ngcobo was won over, however, to the more moderate, but unsuccessful, strategy of lobbying the mayor. The ICU yase Natal's path to 'respectable' politics was to be strewn with such tensions and failures.

Champion spent his 'exile' in Johannesburg working as a clerk with the Colonial Banking and Trust Company.¹ Apart from a tour of the country and the publication of a pamphlet recounting his experiences, Champion's political activities appear to have been minimal.² He kept sporadically in touch with ICU yase Natal-happenings in Durban. In October 1933, he re-connected with his Durban base and began another chapter in his political career. He was given a rousing welcome at the ICU Club, preceded by a trumpet fanfare.³ He returned as the self-proclaimed leader of 'blood and tears' and the prophet of a grandiose co-operative scheme, the Isu Leminyaka Emitatu (Three Year Plan).⁴ Religiously venerated by his core of followers, Champion re-asserted his stamp on the Union. The leadership group of the ICU yase Natal remained intact, with the exception of James Ngcobo who led an ineffective breakaway.⁵

During the mid 1930s, Champion tried to push the ICU yase Natal back onto a tightrope between confrontation and accommodation. With grim determination and

1. Swanson (ed.), Mahlathi, p.42.

2. Champion, Dingiswayo; UNISA, AAS1, 1: Champion's answers to questionnaire by M.W. Swanson, 1972, paragraph 39.

3. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Extract from the Natal Mercury, 21 October 1933, and J.S. Marwick to Minister of Native Affairs, 21 October 1933.

4. NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 12 December 1933, with Champion's letter to Ilanga, 24 November 1933.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1148, 323A, 3: J. Ngcobo to Native Administration Committee, 16 January 1934; RH LGAA Mss Afr.s.1427, 1, 1, ff.51-62: Report by W.G. Ballinger on the ICU to the IFTU, Berlin, 1933.

threats of legal action, the Workers' Club survived a concerted municipal campaign to close down all African entertainment halls in 1935. When Champion was refused permission to resume public meetings at Cartwright's Flats, the ICU yase Natal colonised a nearby venue at the corner of Cross and Lorne Streets.¹ With impressive regularity, ICU orators addressed Sunday meetings at this spot. Brazenly repeating the tactic that had triggered his banishment in 1930, Champion called a regional meeting of Natal chiefs in Durban in December 1934.² The meeting was chaired by an old ally, J.T. Gumede, who had been involved with Clements Kadalie and Champion in attempts to resuscitate a national ICU.³

All this was too much for alarmed Native Affairs and Justice department officials in Durban, who called for Champion to be re-banished.⁴ But others in the state perceived that Champion's star had faded as a mass politician. The view prevailed that Champion was less of a threat in Durban than if he were to be banished for a second time. Circumstances were very different from the late 1920s. The Union's public meetings attracted a few hundred people at the most. Champion had resumed his seat on the Native Advisory Board, finding a legitimate avenue for the politics of representation which he so relished. Indeed, in 1935 Champion had written to Natal's Chief Native Commissioner urging him 'to recognise my services [and to] put [them] to a test.'⁵ The Commissioner, who merely ignored this taunt, believed that Champion's ability to mobilise chiefs was limited. In other words, despite the blustery rhetoric, Champion's ICU yase Natal failed to re-ignite usurpatory tactics. The

1. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1-3.

2. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: 'General meeting of Natives in Durban', 15-17 December 1934.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1148, 323A, 3: J. Ngcobo to Native Administration Committee, 16 January 1934.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1575, 323A, 1: C.F. Layman to TC, 1 March 1935.

5. NA CNC 93, 64/19, N1/9/3(X): Champion to CNC, 18 April 1935.

Union failed to get back on the tightrope; it remained on the more stable ground of middle class politics. Among many indicators of this, perhaps the most remarkable was Champion's attempt to colonise the Durban branch of the Natal Native Congress in 1935-6.

Compared to the self-made leadership of the ICU yase Natal, the more established traders, clerics, teachers and clerks of the Natal Native Congress were better placed to exploit the reformist and tribal thrust of municipal and state policy during the 1930s. Through its elected representative, and through the two church delegates, the Durban branch of Congress had a significant presence on the Native Advisory Board. Practically all members of the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives were sympathetic to Congress, and were able to make their views heard amongst leading white policy-makers and opinion-formers. Congress notables worked closely with the Native Welfare Officer (NWO) in implementing a whole new range of sanctioned leisure activities, from soccer matches to ingoma dances and Pathfinders (Boy Scouts).¹

Congress personalities dominated the activities of the Bantu Social Centre (BSC), opened by the municipality and liberal organisations in downtown Durban in 1933.² The BSC was sponsored as a venue for moderate politics; its activities were designed to 'build up ... decent native citizens'.³ It was here in 1935, for example, that the visiting British academic, John Murray, addressed Durban's African intelligentsia on 'education'. Murray patronisingly recalled the incident:

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1. See monthly reports of the NWO in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147-48, 32A, 1-3; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1575-78, 323A, 1-4; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/341, 49A, 4.
 2. Durban Rotary Club, The First Forty Years of the Rotary Club of Durban, 1925-1965 (Durban, Brown, Davis and Platt, 1966), p.19.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1148, 323A, 3: Draft NWO report, 10 February 1932.

‘They were fine fellows, intelligent, jovial and decided, all Christian, and mostly of splendid physique. I had to explain that Education, in their eyes the master-key, comes by slow stages and works imperfectly. ... They listened well, patient and wise, with the sophistication of a subject race that yet has hope, and presently were explaining how much they found their education cut them off from the comparatively primitive mass of the race.’¹

The Centre became the favourite gathering place of the African elite, for reading, dancing and debating. One commentator caricatured the Centre’s prominent patrons as ‘[p]rofessors of Learning ... with their gowns flying in the air’; ‘ladies of taste who had their silks on’; and ‘clerks ... in their clean collars and shirts, with their usual broad smiles and cheap manners’.²

During the 1930s John Dube reached the peak of his long political career. He did so as a regional rather than a national politician, operating from his base at the Inanda mission reserve north of Durban. After the challenges to his leadership during the 1920s, he became the undisputed president of the Natal Congress during the 1930s. He also became the celebrated doyen of white liberals and officials in Durban and beyond. When these whites wanted ‘Native’ opinion, they would contact John Dube. He was invited, among other things, to address meetings of the Rotary Club, and in 1934 became the first African to write a Christmas column for the Natal Mercury.³ He was a popular speaker in educational and missionary forums. In 1937 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of South Africa, and he received a Coronation medal from the governor general.⁴ Exploiting the retribalisation strategies of that decade, Dube became the key link-person between government administrators and tribal

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: Extract from J. Murray, ‘South Africa: A Visitor’s View’, The Contemporary Review [?1935].
 2. Ilanga, 5 August 1939.
 3. Natal Mercury, 25 December 1934.
 4. Natal Advertiser 28 May 1937; Marks, ‘Ambiguities’, p.164. For the Coronation medal award, see correspondence in NA CNC 103, 78/2, N1/1/2(X), 4.

chiefs in the Natal region.

The Natal Congress was suited to the essentially non-confrontational political climate of the 1930s. The organisation was not tight-knit; its meetings were spasmodic, and its officers were not subject to regular elections. Durban had its own branch, which was loosely attached to a provincial committee. The impact of Congress was felt not so much through its organised presence, but through its permeation of the church associations, the Natal Bantu Teachers Union and, from 1936, the ethnic think-tank called the Zulu Society. Tactically, Congress figures were most at home when lobbying for concessions from white power. There was always the temptation to adopt exclusionary strategies, pushing forward narrow middle class interests. But this was not always the case, for even the most elitist of politicians tried to speak on behalf of other strata in African society. John Dube's nickname, Mafukuzela, spoke of a hen protecting its chicks.¹

The nature of political competition between the Natal Native Congress and the ICU yase Natal changed during the 1930s. In the late 1920s the political practices of the two organisations differed significantly. Now, there was a greater congruence. The loss of the ICU's mass following, and the priorities of the Union's leaders, pushed that organisation on to Congress terrain. Congress adopted a largely defensive posture, claiming a high-ground of moderate, reasonable politics from which the ICU yase Natal's ruffians should be excluded. The Union adopted a more varied set of strategies. The Union sought to demonstrate its respectability to the authorities, to maintain a radical rhetoric, to infiltrate Congress structures, and to use violence against Congress members. Champion's attempt to gain influence in Congress circles was concentrated

1. Thanks to Adrian Koopman for this suggested translation.

on the Durban branch.¹ By 1936, he had taken under his wing the less 'established' members of the Durban Congress, grouped around a semi-literate induna from the Lion Match factory, A.N. Ntuli. This faction was locked in a running battle for control of the local branch against Abner Mtimkulu's group of better-off clerics, teachers, traders and clerks. Things became sufficiently serious for Dube to call a regional conference of the Natal Congress in April 1936. With the aid of the prominent Durban lawyer-politician, Denis Shepstone, the Congress constitution was amended to dissolve the Durban branch. A Durban-based provincial committee, loyal to Dube, was created in its place, absorbing the Mtimkulu faction. A new clause was added to the constitution, barring joint membership of the NNC and the ICU yase Natal.

Neither organisation was resourceful or strong enough to absorb or displace the other as the 'authentic' representative of 'Native' interests. Champion, Jolly Macebo, Tom Gwala and other leaders in the Durban ICU yase Natal found their match in local Congress heavyweights such as Dube, Mtimkulu, Arthur Sililo and A.Z. Mazingi. The two leaderships had to co-exist and advertise their respective wares in the political marketplace. There was always the temptation to take short-cuts. Champion's personal militia stayed intact, and was known to break up Congress meetings.² If physical violence was Champion's secret weapon, Dube's was his influence with white officialdom. Dube used this on occasions to marginalise Champion. In 1936, for example, the Natal Congress leader persuaded the Durban town clerk to recognise the Mtimkulu faction and not the Champion-backed Ntuli group as the legitimate Congress

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1. Details for the rest of this paragraph are drawn from: Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1148, 323A, 3; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1575-6, 323A, 1-2; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1; NAB Minutes in NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1-3; Inkundla, 2nd fortnight, June 1946, p.4; CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: ICU circular, 'We explain the failure of the meeting with S.W.B. Shepstone, 10 February 1935.'
 2. NA 2/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: BSC Executive Committee minutes, 17 January 1936; Ngubane, 'Collapse', pp.145-46.

representative on the Native Advisory Board.¹ Dube influenced the Chief Native Commissioner to exclude Champion from the regional meetings of 'chiefs and leaders' held in Pietermaritzburg from 1935 onwards.²

The lines of competition between the ICU yase Natal and Congress were most starkly drawn when Durban was used as a stage for regional or national politics. Both organisations tried to capture the mantle of ethnicity by arranging receptions for the region's chiefs when they visited Durban. Both Champion and Dube mobilised separately in Durban prior to attending meetings of the All African Convention, held in Bloemfontein during 1935-1936 to protest Hertzog's 'Native' legislation.³ Both politicians used Durban as a platform for the electoral contest for the Natives Representative Council (NRC), the national advisory body set up by the 1936 Acts. Champion was outgunned in the elections; all three Natal seats were filled by Congress candidates. To Dube's chagrin Champion was appointed to the ANC's national executive in 1937. Champion secured the important portfolio of Secretary for Lands and Locations (a strange role for an essentially urban leader!), while Dube was given the figurehead position of honorary president.⁴ Champion now had an additional point of organisational leverage against Dube's Natal Congress, of which he had never been a member, and from which he had been constitutionally excluded since 1936. With an eye to forcing Natal to depart from its parochial path and re-affiliate to the national Congress, Champion invited the new ANC executive to tour the 'peculiar' region of

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1576, 323A, 2: J. Dube to TC, 22 October 1936.
 2. This issue, and the regional themes of the following paragraph, are dealt with in some detail later in the chapter.
 3. For a brief overview of the Representation of Natives Act and the Native Trust and Land Act, see P. Maylam, A History of the African People of South Africa (London, Croom Helm, 1986), pp.166-167.
 4. Walshe, African Nationalism, pp.231-232.

Natal.¹ The holding, for the first time, of the ANC's national conference in Durban in 1939 was a response to this appeal. The last word, however, belonged to Dube, A.S. Mtimkulu and others, who hosted the conference.²

The cudgels, then, were always close at hand in the political rivalry between the Natal Congress and ICU yase Natal. It was a contest which relied little on the mobilisation of followings, and much more on a scramble to monopolise claims to leadership. In rhetoric, the ICU yase Natal was still more prone to war-talk than Congress, but in political content there was increasing similarity between the two organisations. Both were pre-eminently concerned with middle class political and economic interests, and with the careers of a handful of highly ambitious individuals. Strategic jostling for the same spot was clearly revealed when Durban was used as a base for regional or national politics. In local, municipal politics inter-organisational conflicts tended to be subsumed as middle class figures combined forces to exploit new channels of communication opened to them. They settled their differences in order to advance their narrow interests in the urban political economy. Sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, Durban's African middle class was drawn together as the core of a group of 'urban insiders', separated from the mass of migrant workers and lumpen elements.

3.3. WHAT PROSPECTS FOR A CLASS OF 'URBAN INSIDERS'?

During the 1930s Durban began to experience the first symptoms of a serious urban crisis. The city outgrew the Durban System, which relied on a hostels-based

1. UNISA AAS1, 4, 9.1.1: Champion to General Secretary, ANC 4/1/38.

2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3: NAB Minutes, 15 November 1939; Karis and Carter Microfilm (hereafter KCM), Reel 7a, 2, DA14, 30/3: Minutes of ANC general conference, 15-18 December 1939.

policy for the accommodation of Africans and, to a lesser extent, Indians. Three kinds of responses emanated from the authorities: coercion, neglect, and concession. Each of these, in turn, provoked distinct political initiatives amongst African leaders, ranging from protest to collaboration. There was little explicit collaboration; uneasy accommodation with white authority was the most common response. In a tight-fisted way, and amidst a number of repressive moves, Durban began to edge away from its hostels-only policy, signalling that the African middle class had a legitimate place in the city. Some municipal interests wanted to avoid a repeat of 1929, and to minimise the social and political threat of a growing African proletariat. The crucial strategy was to keep the middle class politicians believing that more benefits would arise from talking to the authorities rather than leading the masses on the streets. For the African politicians, the crucial issue was the extent to which Africans, and the middle class in particular, had a right to reside in the city, and to make a living there. The strategies deployed signalled the relative powerlessness of African political demands, the absence of usurpationary pressures, and the increased channels for communication with white authority.

Lending an ear

New possibilities for Africans to 'advise' those in power helped to set the political tone of the 1930s. Compared to the mid- and late 1920s, the central government and the municipality were more willing during the 1930s to create forums for African moderates, to sponsor commissions of enquiry into Native Affairs, and to speak the language of co-optation. It was as if, having weathered the challenge from ICU and communist militancy, the dominant classes shifted gear during the 1930s towards a

more sophisticated 'management' of African subordinate classes. Durban's Native Advisory Board and other reform measures were, from this perspective, crucial safety valves. For the African politicians they were a vital bridgehead in the battle for more rights in the city.

During the 1930s, Durban's advisory board machinery was far more weighty than that of other centres.¹ It was also broadly representative of Durban's African middle class. In 1931 the Durban Native Church Council and the Natal Bantu Ministers' Association gained seats, in addition to those reserved for the Durban representatives of the ICU yase Natal and the Natal Native Congress. The following year the Catholic African Union gained representation. In 1936 additional places were created for the Bantu Women's Society and the Bantu Girls' Friendly Society. The admission of these last two bodies was an unprecedented move, signalling the municipality's recognition of the political legitimacy of African middle class women and some of their demands.

The advisory board machinery was enhanced even further through the creation of a second, parallel structure in 1937: a Combined Locations Board of thirty six members. Durban was pushed into creating the Locations Board by Pretoria, so that the Representation of Natives Act of 1936 could be implemented. Location Advisory Boards were to be the main voting units in urban areas for the new Natives Representative Council and the white parliamentary representatives. Durban's problem was that its only legally defined 'location', in terms of the Urban Areas Act, was the new township of Lamont, opened in 1933.² In an administrative flurry, five-member Location Advisory Boards were established for the Married Quarters and five of the

1. For comparison, see Simons, 'Administration', pp.101-111.

2. At the suggestion of the NAB, the township was named after the Revd. A. Lamont, the liberal city councillor and ex-mayor, who died in late 1933. See NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2: NAB Minute Book, 10 April 1935.

municipal hostels, which were defined as 'locations'. The hostel representatives were withdrawn from the 'goodwill' Native Advisory Board, which now consisted only of the various political and welfare organisations. To simplify administration, the Location Boards were streamlined into a Combined Board, to be chaired by the head of the Native Administration Committee, the well-known liberal councillor, J. Farrell. One casualty of these developments was the large Bell Street hostel, home of the militant dock workers. This hostel had provided the only major source of disaffection with the advisory board system. Bell Street hostel was quietly dropped from both Boards.

The Boards drew the major political actors into institutionalised 'advisory' politics. A host of demands and aspirations were communicated to the authorities, ranging from petty hostel matters to major policy issues. The success rate of the Boards in achieving their objectives was low. Crucially, however, there were some successes, usually on the petty details of policy. Furthermore, senior members of the city council and municipal bureaucracy showed their willingness to engage in discussion with the Boards. The credibility of consultation was also enhanced by the increased openness of visiting officials from Pretoria's Native Affairs Department (NAD). Two examples will suffice. When the NAD's Young-Barrett Committee, charged with investigating urban policy, visited the city in 1935, it was entertained by African political leaders at the Bantu Social Centre.¹ Secondly, in 1936, the government's inspector of urban locations made an exceptional decision to meet with the Native Advisory Board during a visit to Durban.²

Petition politics was the order of the day. At the end of 1937 the prominent

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: S.W.B. Shepstone to Executive Committee, BSC, 11 February 1936.
2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2: NAB Minutes, 11 June 1936.

Lutheran churchman and advisory board member, M.J. Mpanza, wrote to the town clerk to praise 'our sympathetic European friends in this City', and to say that Africans in Durban were assured of a 'bright future'.¹ Such sycophantic statements aside, the truth was that 'advisory' politics kept the initiative in municipal hands. African politicians were generally powerless to see their demands through. Their petitioning, however, was not merely a passive activity. Leadership claims were ingeniously constructed and justified; white officials and interests were played off against each other. The municipal and government archives for the period are filled with examples of this lively politicking. This was a game in which Dube and Champion, as one might expect, were skilled players.² To understand the stage on which these dramas were acted out, the nature of municipal policy must be outlined.

Urban growth, municipal policy, and the demarcation of African politics

Municipal policies exerted a formative influence over African politics by defining key points of exclusion and incorporation. The 1929-30 militancy contributed to policy developments, but of longer term impact were demographic and economic changes in Durban. The African population of greater Durban grew from around 60,000 in 1930 to nearly 80,000 in 1940.³ This growth was due, by and large, to immigration of adult work-seekers. Even during the Depression years, a job as domestic worker in Durban was favoured over employment in the gold or coal mines, or on the sugar estates.⁴ From the mid 1930s, the buoyant local economy attracted growing numbers of migrants

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/340, 49A, 1: M.J. Mpanza to TC, 15 December 1937.

2. See for example, NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1576, 323A, 2: J. Dube to TC, 22 October 1936; NA CNC 93, 64/19, N1/9/3(X): Champion to CNC, 3 January 1935.

3. Simkins, 'African Urbanisation', p.5; University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.32.

4. See NA CNC Box 97, 68/33, N7/8/2(X): NC, Mapumulo to CNC, 26 March 1932, and surrounding correspondence.

from all parts of Natal. The Durban economy was still dominated by commerce and other tertiary sector activities, but the growth of new factories towards Mobeni signalled industrial development.¹ It was not only the pull of the labour market which brought people to Durban. The early to mid 1930s were years of malaria epidemics and searing droughts in the Natal countryside.² White farmers, battling to commercialise their production in depressed conditions, placed ever tighter constraints on African tenants, provoking a constant flow of young men from farm to city.³

A 1937 survey of 50,550 service contract forms for African men indicated that 17% of these workers lived in municipal accommodation, 28% occupied domestic workers' rooms, 35% stayed in private-sector hostels, and 17% lived in hired rooms or shacks.⁴ There were another 25,000 or so Africans who were not counted in this survey, most of whom would have lived in informal housing. What these statistics indicate is that as many as 40,000 Africans lived in the city centre, mostly in hostels or *khayas* (domestic servants' quarters). Africans continued to have a marked social presence in the white-run city. The distinguishing spatial feature of the 1930s, compared to the previous decade, was the growing density of Africans living in the peri-urban districts. These so-called 'Added Areas' were incorporated into the municipality in 1932 (see Map 3).⁵ By the end of the 1930s, up to 40,000 Africans lived in Durban's 'black belt', a name coined by white administrators.⁶ It was here that

1. Katzen, *Industry*, pp.1 and 131.

2. See NA CNC boxes 94 and 95; J.B. Brain, 'But Only The Black Men Die: The 1929-33 Malaria Epidemics in Natal and Zululand', paper presented to the Workshop on Natal in the Union Period, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, October 1988.

3. N. Hurwitz, *Agriculture in Natal, 1860-1950* (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1957) p.18; Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.263-279; Edley, 'Population', pp.4-6.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1206, 643J/NH, 6: Manager NAD to TC, 28 April 1937.

5. They were South Coast Junction, Umhlatuzana, Mayville, Sydenham, Umgeni, Greenwood Park, Red Hill and Durban North.

6. *Mayor's Minute*, 1931: Report of the Durban Boundaries Commission, October 1930.

the growing nucleus of a settled African proletariat made its home. By 1939 there were as many as 1,000 African-occupied shacks in Durban, about half of which were concentrated in Cato Manor.¹ White and Indian landowners just beyond the Berea ridge began to turn their smallholdings and market gardens into shack sites. By the late 1930s, Durban was experiencing the first major symptoms of a deepening housing crisis amongst Africans.

What was the authorities' response to these developments? Within the municipality, there were three main voices. First, there were those who opted to continue a hostel-based housing policy, accompanied by strict pass controls to ensure migrancy, and reinforced with segregation laws to restrict African residence to defined areas. Second, there were those who ignored African squatter settlements, as long as these were situated 'out of sight' behind the Berea ridge and on Indian-owned land. Third, there were those who argued that the municipality, with the financial assistance of employers and the central government, should grasp the nettle by providing mass sub-economic housing, granting freehold rights to Africans, and servicing the burgeoning squatter settlements.

In broad terms, the first two points of view were espoused by municipal bureaucrats wedded to the Durban System, city councillors preoccupied with the narrow interests of white ratepayers, and industrialists employing cheap African labour. The third argument was made by a handful of progressive officials and city councillors. They were concerned about the long-term socio-political implications of a disgruntled African middle class and an uncontrolled African proletariat, crowded into backyard-rooms and shack settlements. By the late 1930s the proponents of 'stabilisation' found

1. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.298.

increasing backing from commercial capitalists who began to see African city-dwellers as a potential mass market.

Conflicting municipal proposals for African housing were complicated by various pressures from the central government. The South African Police and the department of Justice favoured large-scale segregation and physical removal of Africans as the solution. Such measures were to be backed up with rigorous pass laws. There was some sympathy in the Native Affairs Department for these views. In 1934, for example, the Secretary for Native Affairs reprimanded Durban for allowing the 'uncontrolled intermingling of Natives and Europeans'.¹ 'Stabilisation' proponents within the NAD increasingly pushed for large-scale, segregated African townships. Funding was the problem. Through various housing formulae during the 1930s, the central government took on an increasing share of housing costs. Faced with a gathering African housing crisis, and the tardiness of municipalities countrywide to provide accommodation, Pretoria began to modify the underlying philosophy of 'urban native policy'. The 1923 Urban Areas Act was based on the Stallard Commission's view that Africans were 'temporary sojourners' in white-run towns.² The 1937 Native Laws Amendment Act differentiated between migrants, who were to be kept migrant through even stricter pass controls, and fully urbanised Africans who were to be controlled through formal housing and placated through the provision of urban services. This was a grudging concession. George Heaton Nicholls, the Natal politician and key framer of Native policy, explained the 1937 law as one designed 'to clean the towns of undesirable Natives, and incidentally to improve the conditions of the settled Natives in urban

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1222, 467, 10, SNA to TC, 31 October 1934.

2. T.R.H. Davenport, 'The Triumph of Colonel Stallard', South African Historical Journal 2 (1970), pp.77-96.

areas.’¹

The practical implementation of housing policy towards Africans in Durban during the 1930s revealed a continuing commitment to hostels and migrant labour. Urbanised Africans were largely neglected. A new development was the implementation of residential segregation in central Durban. Section five of the Urban Areas Act provided for a district to be ‘declared’, and for African residence there to be prohibited or controlled through a licensing policy.² Section five infringements became yet another item on a long list of African ‘crimes’. Between 1930 and 1934, while Africans were economically vulnerable and politically disorganised, there was a concerted application of vagrancy, curfew, tax, liquor and Section five laws. Any African dwelling, from a single room to a shack to a brick house, was liable to be raided by the police. The same applied to any African gathering, from a soccer match to a political meeting to a church service.³

According to the Urban Areas Act, Section five evictions were only lawful if alternative accommodation was available. Durban’s measly answer to the African housing shortage was the completion of Lamont township in 1934.⁴ This project had been in gestation for nine years. It finally produced one hundred houses, a laughable scheme compared to the Durban Joint Council’s proposal in 1930 of 10,000 houses.⁵ Lamont filled up slowly because it was rudimentary and twelve kilometres out of town. The period 1934-36 saw a marked escalation in Section five raids. People had to be

1. NA CNC 110, 94/19, N1/15/5, 4, Record of meeting at Eshowe, 28 July 1937.

2. See for example Proclamation no. 261 of 1931, Government Gazette, no. 1967, 24 July 1931; Proclamation no. 145 of 1932, Government Gazette, no. 2058, 26 August 1932.

3. For reference to a tax raid on a church service, see NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1, NAB Minutes, 11 November 1931.

4. L. Torr, ‘The Social History of an Urban African Community: Lamont, 1930-60’, MA, University of Natal, Durban, 1985, pp.34-43, 85-92.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1413, 643J/18, 3, Joint Council Report, 4 September 1930.

chased to Lamont, but it took nineteen months to fill one hundred rented houses with 'better class natives', who had been specially screened by officials.¹ During this period, many of Durban's African notables who hired rooms in the city centre were caught in the segregation net.

Two more coercive initiatives occurred in 1936: the extension of the pass laws, and the strengthening of the police force. Durban became the first South African city to introduce a full-scale pass system for African women.² The authorities had for a long time used vagrancy and liquor laws to expel 'illegal' women from the city; officials now supplemented this with control over entry. Women were the most visible index of urban settlement. Between 1921 and 1936 the male:female ratio had declined from 632:100 to 359:100.³ This signalled the erosion of the male, migrant foundations of the Durban System. The elaborate pass regulations, promulgated in April 1936, prohibited African women from coming to Durban without a written certificate of approval from the city council.⁴ On arrival, all women were required to obtain the necessary permits and then to register service contracts. The women's pass laws and the segregation proclamations were important additions to the authorities' coercive attempts to curb African urbanisation and to reshape the residential presence of Africans. But was the small municipal police force equal to the tasks of policing this burgeoning city? We saw in the last chapter how the militancy of 1929-30 threw this question into sharp relief. It was a sign of the relative autonomy of the Durban

1. Torr, 'Social History', pp.85-92.

2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2: NAB Minutes, 11 June 1936; Maylam, 'Shackled', p.8.

3. Simkins, 'African Urbanisation', p.10. It was in the embryonic shack settlements that the gender ratio was most balanced. In 1935, for example, one settlement of 40 shacks at Happy Valley, Wentworth, housed 55 men, 62 women and 84 children. See NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2103, 643J/NH, 1, MOH to TC, 24 August 1935, enclosing data of Native Housing Survey.

4. NA Town Council minutes, 8 March 1935; Government Notice No. 368/1936, Government Gazette, 20 March 1936.

municipality that it was able to resist Pretoria's determination to impose the SAP on the city. The odds were stacked against the municipality, however, and in April 1936, coincidentally the same month as the new pass laws, the SAP took over all major policing in Durban, with the exception of traffic control.¹

In the midst of these developments, there were signs of a different policy thrust in some municipal quarters. Proponents of policy reform during the mid 1930s were clustered around the Medical Officer of Health, the leaders of the mainline churches, the Durban Joint Council, and a handful of progressive city councillors. They participated in a specially constituted municipal 'native affairs' sub-committee, which examined more sophisticated management strategies.² The reformers wished, firstly, to meet some of the socio-economic aspirations of the African middle class, particularly the wish to own property. Secondly, drawing on British experience, they proposed mass municipal housing for a settled African working class.³ They looked for new forms of control, as well as new levels of 'responsibility' and 'harmony' amongst urbanised Africans. Durban's low wage structure for Africans made housing subsidies imperative. The reformers argued that if funds for sub-economic housing could not be raised from the state or from employers, then site-and-service schemes should formalise existing squatter settlements on the city's peripheries.⁴

The only lasting impact of the reformers' deliberations was to keep the issues of leasehold and freehold tenure alive. The city council ratified the principle of African leasehold housing in 1935, and the idea was supported from 1937 by the new manager

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1. J. Jewell, A History of the Durban City Police (Durban, Durban City Council and Rotary Club (Musgrave), 1989), Chap. 10.
 2. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1690-91, 467, 1-2.
 3. See especially NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1690, 467, 1, Memo on Durban Municipal Native Policy, by E.H. Brookes, D.G. Shepstone and M. Webb, 22 May 1935; Natal Mercury 12 February 1935, p.14.
 4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2103, 643J/NH, 2, G.H. Gunn to TC, 11 September 1935.

of the Native Administration Department, T.J. Chester.¹ However, conservative forces in Durban and Pretoria successfully blocked these proposals. The majority in the city council wished either to ignore the African housing shortage or to provide a palliative of limited, rented accommodation. In 1938, after much wrangling with Pretoria, 380 houses were added to Lamont and a loan was raised for a further 2,000 hostel beds.² The municipality also purchased land at Blackhurst Estate near Cato Manor for a future African township.³

During 1937, the reformers' sub-committee had been disbanded, and the whole of Durban had been proclaimed under Section five of the Urban Areas Act.⁴ This had long been proposed by the South African Police. Legally, African residence in Durban was now restricted to the hostels, Lamont, domestic servants' quarters, and specially licensed 'private' accommodation. But the accompanying reduction of the special licence fee from ten shillings to one shilling per month was a signal that Africans were hiring rooms throughout the city. This was being tacitly accepted, subject to continued police raiding. A similarly pragmatic approach developed towards squatter settlements during the late 1930s. Those close to white residences were demolished under the Slums Act of 1934; those hidden from white eyes by Durban's hilly terrain were left untouched and unserved. At the end of the decade, Durban's administrators were no closer to having a tightly controlled, segregated African population than they had been in 1930. Indeed, the housing situation was by then even less controlled. The seeds of a major crisis had been laid.

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1. NA Town Council Minutes, 8 March 1935; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1206, 643J/NH, 6, Report, Manager NAD to NAC, 20 May 1937.
 2. Torr, 'Social History', pp.44-48; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2107, 643J/NH, 7: SNA to TC, 29 September 1937.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2108, 643J/NH, 9: Mayor and others to Finance Committee, 15 August 1938.
 4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1206, 643J/NH, 6, Manager NAD to TC, 28 April 1937.

Representing others or fending for themselves? African middle class responses to municipal policy

The deployment of coercion to perpetuate the political and economic subordination of Africans provoked few organised, usurpationary reactions. Africans were powerless and disorganised, and they were disillusioned with ICU-style populism. Middle class leaders opted, almost unanimously, to ‘negotiate’ with white authority, rather than confront it. Amidst the coercive measures, these leaders clung to the reform initiatives, and were drawn towards moderate and often self-serving stances.

The 1930s in Durban saw only two ‘events’ which could be classified as potentially mass-based challenges against municipal or government policy. Neither developed significant momentum. The first, which will be examined in the next chapter, was a spontaneous beer hall riot in April 1936 to protest the South African Police’s assumption of control of policing in Durban. The second was the outcry over the introduction of passes for women in 1936. It was through their position on the Native Advisory Board that African leaders first came to hear about the proposed passes for women. Soon after the regulations were first debated in the city council, in April 1935, the Natal Native Congress, the Bantu Women’s Society and the NAB sent a joint deputation of five men and two women to the Native Administration Committee.¹ The Committee was the obvious choice for the deputation, as it was the most liberal forum within the municipality. Most of the men on the deputation, led by the Methodist cleric and Congress leader, Abner Mtimkulu, were themselves izemtiti, that is, they were exempted from regulations like the pass laws. The burden of their argument was that the new passes were an unacceptable infringement on the mobility of women,

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2: NAB Minutes, 10 April 1935; Natal Mercury, 15 April 1935.

particularly middle class women. The men were defending patriarchal control over their households against interference by the state.¹ The delegates from the Bantu Women's Society, one of whom was Isabel Sililo, represented those middle class women who were trying to secure homes for their families in Durban. Sililo and others had recently joined with a group of white liberals to found the Bantu Child Welfare Society.² The new pass laws threatened the status and aspirations of all women in the city, but particularly those in the middle class. The latter had been less likely to fall foul of vagrancy and other laws used by the municipality against African female proletarians. Now, a blanket pass law threatened to tar middle class women with the same brush of indignity and criminality.

The deputation to the Native Administration Committee may well have delayed the implementation of the new laws, which were only promulgated one year later, in April 1936. The NAB felt so strongly about the new passes that it took the unusual step of establishing a sub-committee to monitor their operation.³ Board members also hosted a successful protest meeting of 300 people in July 1936.⁴ It was under the leadership of Bertha Mkhize, however, that the protests spilled over from the meeting hall into the streets. Mkhize was an ex-ICU stalwart, an ex-teacher, and a trader by profession. She and Ruth Shabane had recently established the Bantu Girls' Friendly Society, which sought to counsel and support young, single African women, protecting them from the

1. For a Johannesburg case study, see K. Eales, 'Patriarchs, Passes and Privilege: Johannesburg's African Middle Classes and the Question of Night Passes for African Women, 1920-1932', in P Bonner et al. (ed.) Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press and Ravan, 1989).

2. Natal Mercury, 30 May 1935.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2: NWO to TC, 17 June 1936.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: J. Stubbings to Executive Committee of BSC, 18 August 1936.

vices of the city.¹ In mid-1936, Mkhize led 500 marchers down West Street to the Native Commissioner's office.² Mkhize made a protest speech; the women refused to elect a deputation and insisted that the Commissioner address the whole crowd. The Commissioner conceded this, and agreed to investigate the women's grievances. The demonstrators sang 'Nkosi Sikelele Afrika' and then dispersed, believing they had won a significant victory. But the implementation of the pass laws went ahead. Anger flared again in March 1937, resulting in a further protest gathering followed by a deputation to the municipality, led by the NAB's M.J. Mpanza. He reported that police harassment of women for passes had created a 'restless' situation that was 'difficult to handle'.³

The anti-pass protest action did not, in the end, gain a following beyond the ranks of the middle class. Men and women eloquently defended themselves against this latest infringement of African rights, but they did so in a language and style that did not generate mass appeal. The 'silent majority' opted to accommodate themselves to, or evade, the new law. The pass controls, moreover, were divisive in both class and age terms. This weakened the women's protests. A city councillor explained to the Native Advisory Board that the pass law was not aimed at 'respectable' women who already lived in Durban, but illiterate younger women who left their 'kraals without the permission of their guardians.'⁴ As if to reinforce this perception, the pass laws were modified slightly late in 1936 by making it easier for women already living in Durban

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1575, 323A, 1: B Mkhize and R Shabane to TC, 3 August 1936; 1/2/12/1/3: NAB Minutes, 12 August 1936; KCAV, Interview with B. Mkhize, Transcript of tapes 147, 151 and 180, pp.45-47. Another women's organisation founded in Durban during the 1930s was the Daughters of Africa, whose leading figures were linked to the Natal Native Congress and the Zulu Society. See correspondence in CAD NTS 7243, 179/326, 1.

2. KCAV, Interview with B. Mkhize, nos. 147, 151 and 180.

3. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3: NAB Minutes, 10 March 1937 and 14 April 1937.

4. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2: NAB Minutes, 10 April 1935.

to obtain exemption certificates.¹ Both the Bantu Women's Society and the Bantu Girls' Friendly Society were given seats on the Native Advisory Board during 1936-37.

Frustrations with the pass laws were counter-balanced by African middle class concerns about the 'disintegration' of patriarchy and parental control within African society, as it underwent the strains of urbanisation. The formation of the Bantu Women's Society and the Friendly Society was symptomatic of this. Another indicator was the work of the remarkable Sibusiso Makhanya. During the 1930s she built up her community centre and Bantu Youth League at Umbumbulu, with the aim of shoring up patriarchal society and women's domesticity in the semi-rural environs of Durban.² John Dube, to cite another example, articulated clearly the potential common ground between the African middle class (especially its men) and male municipal administrators on the question of influx control for women. In 1935, Dube wrote to a prominent city councillor saying that those women leading 'respectable lives' should be accepted as rightful Durban residents, but that the 'irresponsible and the criminal class of Native women should by all means be sent back to their kraals.'³

Dube's letter usefully portrays the 'insider-outsider' dichotomy which undermined protests against the pass laws. It was a distinction which became increasingly marked during the 1930s, both in policy circles and in African politics. The underlying view was that a segment of Durban's African population was entitled to live and thrive in the city, while the remainder, as migrants, were to be kept transient. New boundaries of social closure and class formation developed. The major points of difference between the policy-makers and the middle class African politicians concerned the size of the

1. Ibid., 20 May 1936.

2. S. Marks (ed.), Not Either An Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1987), pp.30-39.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1691, 467, 2, Dube to Chairman, NAB, 8 August 1935.

urbanised segment and the opportunities it should have. If the size and facilities of Lamont and the Married Quarters were anything to go by, the authorities envisaged a group of 300-400 families, with few opportunities for advancing their living standards. The African politicians demanded urban rights for a far larger group, and unrestricted possibilities for material advance.

But when specific middle class interests were threatened, the leaders of that class were prone to reach for a more elitist vocabulary. This can be illustrated in the responses to segregation evictions as Durban was progressively 'proclaimed' under the Urban Areas Act. Special police units inspected rooms rented by Africans, and if these were found to be unlicensed or 'unsuitable', their occupants were instructed to move to a municipal single-sex hostel. The segregation initiatives could conceivably have provided a focal point for a populist political campaign against the municipality. There were hints of this in successive protest deputations to the authorities from the Native Advisory Board, the ICU yase Natal, and the Natal Congress. But this was overridden by middle class appeals for preferential treatment, around which understandable strategies of self-defence developed. Calling for additional, separate housing for 'civilized Natives', Abner Mtimkulu of the Natal Congress observed that there was a 'class of Native who could not be expected to live side by side with other Natives of the class of Ricksha boys'.¹ Champion argued that there was a 'fundamental difference' between 'kraal natives', for whom Durban's hostels were designed, and 'responsible persons such as Chiefs and ministers, Native leaders and Teachers...'. He concluded: 'My plea is for the recognition of this difference without which there shall always be

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1, NAB Minutes, 13 September 1933.

a feeling of mistrust and hatred.’¹ Alexander Monkhe, a freelance typist who was ordered to leave his room in town and move to the Somtseu Road hostel, protested that the hostel was ‘inhabited mainly by noisy Squats and numerous unruly people ... countless unemployed people and Gamblers who [threaten] ... the freedom and interests of the modern civilized law-abiding natives and their belongings.’² Some individuals, like Champion, were successful in their appeal for ‘exemption’ from the segregation law. Others, like Monkhe, were hounded. Much depended on the whim of officials and police officers. After 1936, however, there was a decline in city-centre evictions.³ Acknowledging the failure to clear Africans from private accommodation in the city, the municipality relaxed the licensing laws and diverted its attention to the incipient squatter crisis.

The housing situation nevertheless remained highly tenuous for members of the African middle class. Using a variety of forums, but particularly the Advisory Board machinery, demands were made for the right to own land and houses. This conflicted with the history of Durban’s native policy. During the 1930s, however, African hopes were raised by proposals in some municipal quarters for granting leasehold and even freehold rights to ‘educated’ Africans. This, more than anything else, would give the African middle class a material stake in the city. While the plans for Lamont were still on the drawing board the ICU yase Natal leader James Ngcobo described his hopes for a thriving, contented community based on freehold tenure, and equipped with a shopping centre, a school, a hospital, a cemetery and sporting grounds.⁴ In practice,

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2104, 643J/NH, 3: Champion to TC, 2 March 1936.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1221, 467, 8: G. Alexander and A. Monkhe to TC, 28 February 1934.

3. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1692-93, 467, 3-4

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1414, 643J/18, 4: J. Ngcobo to Chair, NAC, 13 March 1931.

the bare facilities at Lamont, and the absence of even leasehold opportunities, fell far short of this vision. But the continuing openness within the local ruling strata to the idea of African property-ownership kept hopes alive. In 1935, for example, the Methodist minister N.M. Nduli appealed to the municipality on behalf of 'all the enlightened and civilized natives of this town' to set aside freehold plots for Africans to buy. With a fascinating mixture of submission, assertion, and Victorian liberalism, Nduli claimed to speak on behalf of 'British Subjects under the Union Jack' who were both 'Children and Brethren' of the town clerk.¹ Similar calls were repeated later in the decade, but promises of municipal benevolence never materialised.

Others in the African middle class were not prepared to wait for the never-never world of 'British justice'. They pursued an alternative strategy of purchasing land in peri-urban areas, beyond the jurisdiction of the Urban Areas Act. In addition to random individual transactions, a number of land-purchase schemes were floated.² Most schemes fell through, but the most successful was the Clermont settlement near Pinetown. Many of Durban's African notables and aspirant property owners paid their £2 deposit for an eighth of an acre at Clermont, and began paying monthly instalments.³ Both NNC and ICU yase Natal leaders were involved in advertising Clermont as a place where 'all our Zulu Chiefs and prominent people [could] have an allotment of their own.'⁴ By 1937, 1,450 plots had been sold.⁵ In another development during the early 1930s, members of the African middle class bought up 91 acres of land

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/2103, 643J/NH, 1: N.M. Nduli to TC, 27 July 1935.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1416, 643J/18, 6: E. Madhlala to J.L. Farrell, 21 December 1934; RH Mss Brit. Emp.s.22: ASAPS Papers, G.196: H. Mapscott to Harris, enclosing letter to Ballinger, 2 October 1934.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1414, 643J/18, 4: NWO to TC, 23 October 1931; Secretary, Clermont Township (Pty) Ltd., circular letter, n.d.

4. NTS Vol 7606, 49/328, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 12 December 1933, enclosing translation of letter by Champion to Ilanga, 24 November 1933.

5. Swanson, 'Clermont', p.17.

for housing in the Cato Manor valley.¹

Through their appeals to authority, and their independent initiatives, the African middle class leaders showed a prior commitment to furthering their own narrow interests in securing preferential policy treatment and access to urban property. The introduction of pass laws for women was the only issue which attracted a partially populist response. The middle class leaders increasingly articulated the dichotomy between urban 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and they placed themselves at the core of the first group. The politicians saw their primary task as representing the interests of urban settlers, and the property-owning aspirations of the middle class in particular. The advisory board machinery, and differing policy prescriptions within the municipality and the government, raised hopes that something concrete could be achieved. In effect, little was won through petition politics, but the middle class leaders did not see their way to adopting alternative strategies, except to take some independent initiatives to secure peri-urban property.

Alongside land and housing, trade in consumer goods offered the only other main source of material accumulation for Durban's Africans. The professions, except for the lowest strata, remained closed to African advance. African business aspirations, however, came up against municipal policy restrictions and the commercial dominance of white and Indian traders. Nevertheless, the 1930s saw the growth of an incipient African trading class, a development which had important political implications.

1. University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.300; CAD NTS 5756, 29/313L, 2: J. Casteleijn to NC, Durban, 3 December 1941.

3.4. FIGHTING FOR A SHARE OF THE MARKET

In 1930 George Champion said that unless a class of African capitalists developed, there was 'no hope for liberation.'¹ The Depression hit some of Durban's African traders hard. Henry Majolla, for example, closed his taxi business, due to lack of trade and harsh competition from Indian-owned transport.² But others survived, and with the return of more buoyant conditions from 1934, a class of more substantial traders developed.³ By 1940, Champion himself had become a petty capitalist: he ran a boarding house and traded as a 'general merchant and produce dealer' at his Vuka Afrika (Africa Arise) Stores in Beatrice Street.⁴ Champion's claims to be a trade unionist, which he still made regularly, wore increasingly thin. Evidence is available of a few others who joined this trading class. Champion's ICU colleague, Daniel Bopela, became owner and manager of the 'New Melody Laundry' in Warwick Avenue; Alfred Mdhladhla ran a bicycle repair shop in Umgeni Road; and the agriculturalist from Inanda mission, Henry Ngwenya, set up as a general dealer and tearoom proprietor in Alice Street.⁵

But the biggest success story of the 1930s involved a handful of mail-order inyangas (herbalists) who set up shop in Durban during the Depression. The three most prosperous herbalists were the colourful Nathaniel Hlatshwayo (alias Mafavuke Ngcobo), Israel Alexander Ntsihlele, and Fisher Cele. They dispensed entirely with the notion of the inyanga as an itinerant traveller who sold his wares from a pavement

1. Cape Times, 7 January 1930, quoted in Walshe, African Nationalism, p.146.

2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1, NAB Minutes, 15 July 1931 and 1 October 1931.

3. In 1935 an estimated 103 licensed African traders operated outside the municipal market halls. See NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1691, 467, 2, C. Layman to TC, 22 August 1935.

4. UW DHP Xuma collection, A843, ABX381230, A.W.G. Champion to A.B. Xuma, 30 December 1938.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1692, 467, 3, D.L. Bopela to TC, 3 December 1936; A. Mdhladhla to TC, 10 June 1936, and H. Ngwenya to TC, 31 March 1936.

corner; they went furthest amongst African traders in accumulating capital and employing labour. They set up consulting rooms, which had 'all the outward appearance of European chemist shops.'¹ Their mail-order businesses took their wares deep into Natal and Pondoland, offering explanation and assurance at a time of increased material deprivation.² The African herbalists claimed a cultural monopoly over their medicines and charms, making it difficult for white and Indian traders to break into this market. The profits for the mail-order inyangas were high. Nathaniel Hlatshwayo, for example, paid £27 income tax in 1932 and £42 in 1933.³ These tax amounts were two to three times higher than the annual salary of most African teachers.

The rise of a group of larger-scale African traders during the 1930s, as opposed to the mere handful who operated earlier, must be situated within the racially-ordered commercial world of Durban. Even the most lucrative of African trading operations remained on the margins of commerce. They remained very much under the shadow of white and Indian businesses, which had extensive capital, skill and wholesale networks. Discriminatory licensing policies favoured white over Indian traders, but aspirant African traders were the worst off. The basic tenets of municipal and government policy sought to prevent Africans from gaining a substantial and independent material stake in the city. Prospects brightened with the shift towards a differentiated urban-migrant policy but, as we have seen in the case of housing, Durban was very tardy in changing its ideas.

The Durban authorities distinguished between petty and larger-scale African

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1. See the correspondence in NA CNC Box 50, 43/25, N1/12/8(X).
 2. Ibid., Minutes, United Transkeian Territories General Council, 19 April 1934.
 3. Ibid., NC, Durban to CNC, 12 February 1935.

trading. The former was not discouraged, but was subject to strict controls. African trade was only sanctioned in municipal halls, where traders were restricted to one small stall each. Profit margins were small in this cut-throat trading environment. Those who aspired to run bigger operations, outside the municipal halls, had to have their licences vetted by no less a person than the South African governor general! This was not only a time-consuming process, but it gave free play to official whims. Those who successfully ran the gauntlet to the governor general had to renew their licences annually. They also faced the perennial problem of an African trader: raising capital. Restricted from owning urban property, what sureties could Africans offer in a bank loan application?

The increasing number of larger-scale African traders during the 1930s was due less to a change in restrictive laws, and more to effective exploitation of an expanding market in a growing city. Some opted to trade illegally. Examples range from a butter-making business in the emerging shackland of Cato Manor, to Israel Alexander's herb enterprise in the central city.¹ The illegality of anything other than petty trading was soon detected by the authorities, however. Israel Alexander, who was prepared to live with official persecution and prosecution, was an exception to the rule that a successful trader needed official sanction.² In this regard, the growth of communication between African politicians and the municipality during the 1930s was crucial. In 1931, the Durban Bantu Traders' Association was formed to make collective representations to the authorities.³ Daniel Bopela, Henry Ngwenya and George Champion were all Native Advisory Board members during the 1930s, and they were key ideologues of trader

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1. *Natal Mercury*, 9 August 1935, p.20; NA 3/DBN 5756, 29/313L, 1: NC Durban to SNA, 15 January 1945, and Copy of Supreme Court judgement in Israel Alexander vs. Native Commissioner, 26 June 1945.
 2. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 5756, 29/313L, 1.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1147, 323A, 2: W. Bhulose and A.J. Mtembu to TC, 28 August 1931.

interests. The municipal files of the period are replete with demands for more opportunities for African traders.

Only a few of these demands were met. On the whole, white officialdom was still committed to stifling the ambitions of larger African traders. As a result, a number of independent co-operative schemes were initiated from within the African middle class during the 1930s.¹ These sought to accumulate savings and capital through subscriptions and co-ordinated trading. The 'main object' of W.K. Luvuno's African Co-operative Trading Society was to provide 'a career for educated natives'.² The membership card of another scheme put its objectives succinctly: 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I will not want.'³ On his return to Durban after his banishment, George Champion launched a Three Year Plan (Isu Leminyaka Emitatu) to collect subscriptions for a 'Bank of the Black People'. Champion's brochure promised that subscribers would be able to draw from the 'Bank' to purchase plots at Clermont, fund businesses, obtain life insurance, and finance higher education.⁴ Another important co-operative figure was William Mseleku. He resigned his teaching job at Mariannahill mission in 1933, and between 1934 and 1936 he travelled widely in the Pinetown and South Coast regions as organiser for the Bantu Welfare Society.⁵ Through subscription savings and agricultural marketing, the Society aimed to 'promote and safeguard the principles of good citizenship, to further the economic and social welfare of Bantu races, and to

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1. For further details see correspondence in NA CNC 94, 64/31, N1/14/3(45); NA CNC 111, 102/5, N1/14/3(X); NA CNC 94, 64/26, N1/14/3(28); and RH Mss Afr. s.1427, LGAA papers, 1, 1, ff.161-2: M. Hodgson to F.S. Livie Noble, 15 September 1936.
 2. NA CNC 94, 64/31, N1/14/3(45): Acting magistrate, Verulam to CNC, 6 February 1937.
 3. NA CNC 94, 64/18, N1/14/3(42): Bantu Welfare Society membership card.
 4. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 12 December 1933, enclosing translation of letter by Champion to Ilanga, 24 November 1933; UNISA AAS1, 5, 11.4.1: Circular letter Isu Leminyaka Emitatu [December 1934?].
 5. See correspondence in NA CNC 94, 64/18, N1/14/3(42).

encourage co-operation amongst Bantu organisations.’¹

Despite the high-sounding constitutions, even the better organised co-operatives struggled to survive, let alone prosper. Over two years, Champion was only able to collect £50.² After three years of hard work, Mseleku had only ninety six subscribers on his books.³ Some of the schemes successfully tapped into the middle class ideology of self-help, and they provided useful capital for co-operative leaders, but they soon reached their limit of voluntary subscribers. Below the Champions and the Mselekus, there were a sizeable number of lower middle class figures who tried to make a living by persuading people to part with pennies for schemes that often verged on trickery.⁴

Native Affairs officials took a dim view of the co-operatives, fearing that economic accumulation would fuel political assertiveness.⁵ For this reason, both Champion and Mseleku had their books seized for official audits. But the authorities would have been hard-pressed to deny that these co-operative schemes, based on evolutionary socio-economic advance, were a preferable alternative to direct political mobilisation against white power.

Indeed, it was questionable whether aspirant African trader-capitalists were a vehicle for liberation, as Champion had asserted in 1930. The increasing numbers of African entrepreneurs who broke through the web of policy restrictions were more concerned with elbowing their way into existing commercial relations, rather than radically altering them. African traders lobbied white authority; they did not confront it. The frustration of African traders was directed not so much at white rule, but

1. NA CNC 94, 64/18, N1/14/3(42): Bantu Welfare Society membership card.

2. UNISA AAS1, 5, 11.1.1: Three Year Plan subscription forms, 1934-36.

3. NA CNC 94, 64/18, N1/14/3(42): Auditor's report on the BWS, 7 July 1937; and NC Pinetown to CNC, 13 April 1937.

4. For an important exploration of this phenomenon see La Hausse, 'Elias Kuzwayo'.

5. See correspondence in NA CNC 94, 64/18, N1/14/3(42).

increasingly against the Indian traders who blocked their immediate advance. Champion's 1934 'conference of chiefs' invoked segregation to demand that only Africans be allowed to trade in 'African' areas.¹ In Durban, there were few all-African residential areas, but Indian stores serviced most districts where Africans were concentrated. By 1937, Champion was urging ICU yase Natal followers to 'smash Indian traders' and become 'trustees of their own wealth.'² This did not threaten the municipality, which was generally hostile to Indian traders anyway. African traders, then, demanded a greater share of the market, but their demands contained little that sought to usurp white power.

The central theme of this and the previous section has been the unwillingness and the inability of Durban's African middle class to mount significant collective challenges against municipal policy. There were definitely points of tension, but on the whole the middle class accommodated itself to the dominant order. This reflected the political and economic weaknesses of that class. It also showed a willingness to exploit the political reforms and economic opportunities of the 1930s. In doing this, and in pursuing a number of independent economic initiatives, the African middle class followed narrowly defined group interests, to the exclusion of the mass of Africans. The masses, in turn, made few demands on the middle class politicians. But it was still essential, mainly as a bargaining ploy with the authorities, for these politicians to 'represent' wider followings. Latching on to changes in urban policy, the middle class leaders increasingly spoke on behalf of urban insiders. The clearest sign of this was the Advisory Boards' support for a new municipal census in 1938, to differentiate between

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1. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: CNC to SNA, 2 March 1935, enclosing resolutions of ICU conference held on 17 December 1934.
 2. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, 12 October 1937. For a fuller discussion of anti-Indianism amongst African traders see Chapter Seven.

urbanised Africans, migrants, and those unemployed people who should be expelled from the city.¹ But there was another kind of collectivity which African politicians claimed to represent during the 1930s: ethnic groups or, in the dominant language of the time, 'tribes'. What were the implications of this for Durban politics?

3.5. DURBAN AS A SITE OF ETHNIC POLITICS

During the 1930s Zulu ethnic politics reached a high-point in Natal. At the beginning of the decade one would not have predicted this. Inkatha, the Zulu nationalist organisation of the 1920s, had collapsed under the weight of huge debts. One reason was the expensive lifestyle of chief Solomon, whom Inkatha financed and sponsored as king of the Zulus.² A second financial drain was the ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful Shaka Memorial Fund, which sought to build monuments to Shaka, Mpande, Cetshwayo and Dinizulu.³ The prospects for Zulu nationalism seemed bleak. But a revival was soon underway, spurred on by Zulu ethnic politicians and by new initiatives from state officials. By 1939, as one contemporary commentator put it, the 'Zulu nation, led by the intelligentsia, was "coming of age"'.⁴ The occasion for this comment was the state's recognition of Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu, the Usuthu regent and brother of the late Solomon, as Paramount Chief of the Zulus.⁵ In the process, regional ethnicity developed way beyond the goals set by Inkatha during the 1920s. There had

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1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2 NLAB Minutes, 27 April 1938; NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3, NAB Minutes, 11 May 1938 and 10 August 1938. For the motivation behind the census, see NTS 8864, 99/362(2), 1: Notes of conference, 21-22 February 1938.
 2. See correspondence in NA CNC 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32)1; NA CNC 82, 58/7/5, N1/1/3(32)1; NA CNC 84, 58/7/4, N1/1/3(32)1.
 3. See correspondence in NA CNC 72, 57/29, N1/1/1(32).
 4. J. Hertslet, Natal Mercury, 12 April 1939.
 5. NA CNC 110, 94/19, N1/15/5, Part 2: Proceedings of Conference of Native Chiefs, Pietermaritzburg, July 1939.

been a significant convergence between Zulu ethnicity, centred on the royal family, and the retribalisation policies of the state.

This is not the place for a detailed portrayal of regional ethnicity in Natal during the 1930s, a theme which Marks, la Hausse and Cope, among others, have tackled.¹ But this phenomenon must be outlined, for it exerted a significant influence on African politics. The dominant form of Zulu ethnicity which was constructed was one of a number of possible versions. It gravitated around the royal family, and especially Mshiyeni, who assumed the regency after Solomon's premature death in 1933. This 'royal' Zulu ethnicity was conservative, in both a political and a social sense. It did not challenge the state, but sought to exploit the state's own policies of bolstering tribal society against the corrosive forces of industrialisation, urbanisation, and new kinds of class formation in African society.² The tribal hierarchy was threatened by these social changes, making chiefs enthusiastic supporters of a regional project to conserve their position. Zulu ethnicity offered to restore and modernise the power of chiefs. Segregation policies provided state support to this end, not only politically but through promises of more 'reserve' land. The proposed addition of 526,000 morgen to Natal's reserves was crucial in winning the region's politicians over to the controversial Hertzog Acts of 1936.³ But so too were the political developments which accompanied this legislation. The key player here was Natal's new Chief Native Commissioner, Harry Lugg. He had a personal passion for 'Zulu tradition', and from 1935 he initiated

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1. Marks, 'Zulu Royal Family', pp.172-194 and 'Patriotism', pp.215-240; P. la Hausse, 'Ifa Lesizwe: Petros Lamula and the Creation of Zulu History', paper presented to Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal, University of Natal, Durban, 1988; N. Cope, 'The Zulu Royal Family Under the South African Government, 1910-1933: Solomon kaDinizulu, Inkatha and Zulu Nationalism', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1985'.
 2. Marks, 'Patriotism', pp.216-219.
 3. E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, A History of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1979), p.294.

bi-annual consultative conferences of 'chiefs and leaders'.¹ The first major conference was called as part of a nationwide campaign to 'sell' the Hertzog legislation.² In these conferences, Lugg was even willing to contravene the Natal NAD's longstanding antipathy towards the royal family by according special status to Mshiyeni, who was far more 'loyal' and predictable than Solomon had been. Referring to Lugg's initiatives, one prominent chief commented: 'The white man scattered and broke us up and is now putting us together and uniting us.'³

State policy in Natal, and the annual conferences in particular, gave new substance to the idea of a 'Zulu nation'. These developments, which coincided with the consolidation of 'indirect rule' elsewhere in Africa, created important new political space for 'tribal' intellectuals.⁴ An ethnic nation was fashioned, using the cultural practices of the present and rooting them in a proud past. Chiefs, many of them illiterate, were advised and represented by those with the tools of mission education. During the 1930s John Dube became the example par excellence of an ethnic politician, pushing the claims of a modernizing Zulu nation. He worked closely with both Mshiyeni and Lugg in building an ethnic alliance. Dube's individual role as an intellectual was collectively supported from 1936 through the foundation of the Zulu Society, an offshoot of the Natal Bantu Teachers Union.⁵ The Zulu Society was to play an important role, alongside the Natal Native Congress, as a think-tank for popularising and defining Zulu ethnicity.

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1. See, for example, NA CNC 93, 64/19, N1/9/3(X): CNC to SNA, 2 March 1935; NA CNC 103, 78/2, N1/1/2(X): H. Lugg to D. Smit, 10 July 1937.
 2. NA CNC 110, 94/19, N1/15/5: Proceedings of meeting between NAD and 'leading Zulus', 3-4 September 1935, Pietermaritzburg; Dubow, Racial Segregation, p.165.
 3. NA CNC 110, 94/19, N1/15/5: Conference proceedings, Pietermaritzburg, 22-25 October 1935.
 4. T. Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), pp.242-254.
 5. For details, see correspondence in CAD NTS 7232, 137/326, 1, and NA Zulu Society Papers.

The conservative Zulu ethnicity of the Dube-Mshiyeni alliance sought to extract concessions from a segregationist state for chiefs and their middle class backers. Even while accepting the Hertzog legislation in principle, and making clear their intention to 'work in close harmony with our rulers', this grouping tried unsuccessfully to extract further political concessions from Pretoria.¹ The Dube-Mshiyeni circle was well placed to engage in this politics. It had the ear of Natal's Native administrators, and it won a clean slate of the four Natal seats on the new Natives Representative Council, set up by the Hertzog legislation to advise the government at a national level. Dube and William Ndlovu, a Congress veteran from Vryheid, were elected by the chiefs to the two rural seats; Mshiyeni was Lugg's choice for the nominated seat; and the Durban Congress leader, Arthur Sililo, was elected by Natal's Native Advisory Boards to the single urban seat.²

How did Durban fit into this picture of regional ethnicity? It is striking that not one of Lugg's regional conferences during the mid to late 1930s was held in Durban. Pietermaritzburg and Eshowe were always the chosen venues. Is it possible that Durban, as a large and growing city, was detached from the tribal politics of the rest of Natal? As we have seen, there were many specifically urban issues which kept the city's middle class politicians active during the 1930s. With the exception of Dube, did they care for ethnic politics?

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1. CAD NTS 7232, 137/326, 1: A.W. Dhlamini, C.J. Mpanza and J. Dube to CNC, 29 July 1936; NA CNC 110, 94/19, N1/15/5: Conference proceedings, Pietermaritzburg, 22-25 October 1935, and subsequent correspondence in this file.
 2. Voting was by a specially organised 'communal' ballot. Each 'Councillor' was paid an annual salary of £120, a princely sum. Champion came a close third to Ndlovu for one of the rural seats, and lost to Sililo in the urban contest. There had been a delay in filling the latter seat, because Natal had insufficient registered urban taxpayers to meet the quota stipulated by law. Durban's Combined Locations Advisory Board discovered that its vote represented a mere 27 such taxpayers! The election proceeded once the legislation had been amended to take account of the Natal situation. For these and other details, see the correspondence in NA CNC 41, 38/1, N1/7/2(X); NA CNC 42, 38/47, N1/7/2(X); CAD NTS 8812, 89/362/231, 1-2; and CAD NTS 8814, 89/362/233, 1

The dominant ethnic paradigm was such an influential one that although some of Durban's African politicians related uneasily to it, they could not ignore it. The central tension was that common designations of the African middle class like isifundiswa (the educated ones), amakholwa (Christians) and izemtiti (those exempted from native law) connoted progression from a backward, tribal, pre-colonial social order. The city was the 'modern' environment in which these new social identities flourished. During the 1920s and 1930s, the social processes of modernisation continued but segregation policies put the brakes on African aspirations towards political integration. George Heaton Nicholls put this succinctly when he told a Durban meeting in 1935 that the Hertzog Bills sought to encourage 'the development of a Bantu people as a conscious racial element rather than as an exploited class in a White Capitalistic State.'¹ What worried some of Durban's African politicians was that the 'racial element' which Heaton Nicholls and others had in mind was an inferior tribal identity within a segregationist order. Heaton Nicholls, Lugg and others proposed a restored Zulu tribalism rather than African nationalism, and certainly not racial equality in the state. Urban politicians and their aspirations were left out of the picture. Durban's African middle class expressed its unease over the implications of this in a variety of ways. One intriguing example was the request to remove the 'paintings of the primitive Native Customs shown on the stage in the Main Hall' of the Bantu Social Centre.² More politically pertinent was Selby Ngcobo's public criticism of the Native Bills soon after they were published. Ngcobo was a young teacher at Adams College, and a member of the Natal Congress and Durban's Joint Council of Africans and Europeans. He

1. Natal Mercury 15 August 1935.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 2: J S Malinga to Secretary, BSC Executive Committee, 24 September 1937 and 2 November 1937.

argued: 'Today the Natives are not one class. There are Natives and Natives'. He went on to say that the Representation Bill entrenched 'tribal and ignorant' interests at the expense of 'educated natives'.¹ This view was repeated by both African and white liberal speakers at Durban public meetings about the Bills.²

But Ngcobo, like many of his compatriots in Durban's African middle class, was a political pragmatist. He knew that the Bills would be passed in some form. He and others hoped to influence their content. His criticism was tempered by an appeal for 'segregation with honour'.³ What this boiled down to was a demand for Natal's proposed Native Representative in the Senate to be an African not a white person, and for 'educated' Africans to have a greater say in the proposed Natives Representative Council. The government's regional conference in September 1935, called to discuss the Native Bills, and Lugg's subsequent gatherings of 'chiefs and leaders', provided just the opening which Ngcobo and others were looking for. Lugg made a careful point to invite Natal Congress and Zulu Society figures to these conferences, including Durban people like John Dube, A.S. Mtimkulu, Selby Ngcobo, A.Z. Mazingi, W.F. Bhulose, E.H. Mabaso and A.W. Dhlamini, the Durban teacher who was president of the Zulu Society. Durban's Congress intelligentsia was drawn into the regional project of retribalisation. In 1935 Selby Ngcobo was an urban critic of the Native Bills; within months he became 'secretary to the chiefs' in their bi-annual conferences with the government.

What of George Champion and the ICU yase Natal? They were deliberately

1. Natal Mercury, 7 and 20 May 1935.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: S. Shepstone to BSC Executive Committee, 10 December 1935; Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1-2; E.H. Brookes to Natal Mercury, 20 May 1935; Natal Mercury, 27 May 1935, p.12, 3 June 1935, p.13, 15 August 1935, p.8.

3. Natal Mercury, 7 and 20 May 1935.

excluded by Lugg and the Natal Congress from the government's conferences. Champion, in consequence, turned Durban into a platform for politicking around the Native Bills. The gist of his ideas can be gleaned from a pamphlet the ICU yase Natal produced in 1935, uSihlanguanisile (He Has United Us).¹ The title was misleading. Despite the occasional reference to white oppression, this was not a nationalist tract rejecting the divisive tactics of segregation. The burden of the pamphlet was to explain the Hertzog legislation rather than to reject it outright. Champion lamented the passing of the Cape franchise for Africans, but he did so cynically: now the 'Xhosas' had been reduced to the level of other African groups.² The pamphlet was not about unity either. It was really about Champion's claims to a leading position as a Natal politician. It was his opening bid in the anticipated electoral contest for the Natives Representative Council. Champion and his supporters, like those of Congress, were willing to nail their flag to the mast of segregation. In Natal this meant joining an ethnic discourse and competing over various versions of the 'Zulu nation'. The politics of the Hertzog bills was absorbed into broader political competition. Unlike Lugg, African politicians did not ignore Durban as a base for this ethnic politicking.

Durban's African leaders, both in the Congress and the ICU yase Natal camps, saw the city as a platform where sponsorship of ethnicity could enhance their political status. By contrast with the more explicitly middle class demands of the urban politicians for housing, land, urban services and trading opportunities, ethnic mobilisation was more populist, defining social groups as those 'belonging' to certain chiefs. The middle class leaders gained publicity and influence as the sponsors of

1. A.W.G. Champion, uSihlanguanisile (Durban, Natal Workers' Club, 1936). The 'He' in the title referred to the prime minister, J.B.M. Hertzog.

2. *Ibid.*, Preface and p.1.

chiefs, advising them and setting up meetings to 'welcome' them when they visited Durban. As a migrant labour centre, Durban offered many possibilities for this kind of politics. Chiefs wished to secure wage remittances to rural households from male breadwinners working in Durban, so preserving the social structures which underpinned chiefly power. For male migrants, away from home for long periods, visiting chiefs embodied assurance of control over the land and gender relations of faraway households.¹

Almost any pretext seemed justifiable for Durban politicians to call a meeting for a chief to meet 'his people'. The Zulu royal family was the biggest drawcard. Two thousand people, for example, attended a Congress public meeting in 1934 to hear about the illness of the recently appointed regent, Mshiyeni.² The Natal Congress secured for itself the position of 'party of royalty' in Durban, hosting a wide range of 'royal' functions, from meetings at the Point hostels to receptions at the Bantu Social Centre.³ One of the more notable incidents was a publicity event in 1935, complete with choirs and dancers, on the green lawns of the Campbell sugar estate just north of Durban. John Dube and sugar magnate William Campbell had arranged the occasion for the overseas delegates of the imperial press conference to meet Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu.⁴

Champion was effectively excluded from the 'royal' patronage linked to the Dube-Mshiyeni political network. But that did not deter the ICU yase Natal leader, who built up different chiefly sponsors and, unlike the Congress figures, tried to give Zulu

1. Vail, 'Ethnicity', pp.14-15.

2. CAD NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Sub-Inspector, CID, Durban to Deputy Commissioner, Natal SAP, 4 June 1934.

3. See for example, NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1: A.N. Ntuli to TC, 6 April 1935; A.Z. Mazingi to TC, 19 June 1935; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2: A. Mtimkulu to TC, 8 September 1936.

4. NA CNC 88, 59/6, N1/12/6(X): Campbell to Lugg, 18 February 1935; Natal Mercury, 12 March 1935.

ethnicity a commercial rather than just simply a political base. Champion's favourite chief, from whom he drew much political capital, was Mavutwa Gumede of the Qwabe clan. Gumede was a progressive hereditary chief who appointed Champion to launch a Qwabe co-operative scheme.¹ Champion arranged meetings at the ICU hall, where Gumede persuaded his 'subjects' working in Durban to subscribe to the co-operative. In 1934, and again in 1937, Champion called regional meetings of 'chiefs and traders' in Durban, where everything from land shortages to 'national funds' was discussed. In both cases, about three hundred people attended these alternatives to Lugg's official conferences. With a keen eye for the economic self-help schemes of Afrikaner nationalism, Champion became increasingly obsessed with the principle that 'All nations succeed by forming their own funds.'² At the 1937 conference, undeterred by the collapse of his Three Year Plan, Champion outlined 'a National Fund to compete with the trading power of other nations.'³ Natal was to be divided into districts where 'controlling committees' and 'headmen' would collect levies of one shilling per person. The funds would be banked in Durban and would be administered by an elected committee headed by Champion. This was an ambitious attempt to marry tribalism to the commercial aspirations of the African middle class. It came to naught, not least because of Champion's dubious past record as custodian of other people's money.

The ethnic initiatives of Congress and ICU yase Natal leaders in Durban showed what a malleable political resource tribalism was during the 1930s. Others also engaged in the construction of 'nations'. The Makhanya National Association was one example.

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1: Champion to TC, 8 June 1935; UNISA AAS1, 5, 11.2.2: Champion to S.M. Gumede, 24 June 1935; UNISA AAS1, 2, 3.1.2.1: E.R. Gumede to Champion, 24 June 1935 and 28 July 1935; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2: Champion to TC, 24 March 1936; Champion, uSihlanganisile, p.8.
 2. See the Three Year Plan letterhead in UNISA AAS1, 5, 11.2.2: Champion to S.M. Gumede, 24 June 1935.
 3. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner SAP, 12 October 1937.

It was formed during the late 1930s and although its epicentre was at Umbumbulu south of Durban, the Association held public meetings in the city.¹ The Makhanya Association represented a sub-ethnicity which had the potential to challenge and inform broader conceptions of Zulu-ness. From 1935, to cite a different example, annual Moshweshwe Day Celebrations were held in Durban.² In May each year, a few hundred Basotho workers marched and danced from the barracks of the Point area, where the vast majority of them lived and worked, to the Somtseu Road grounds. The ceremony drew inspiration from similar ones in Lesotho and in Johannesburg. As with the various strands of Zulu ethnicity, there were characteristic features. The moving figures were urban-based intellectuals who had some influence with chiefs. Among the key figures in the 'Moshesh Commemoration Society' were Silas Phashe, a trained teacher who worked as a typist for Johnson's Chemist, and Manesseh Moerane, a teacher and active member of the Bantu Social Centre.³ The organisers of the Celebrations commonly claimed to be 'relatives' of senior chiefs in Lesotho. The Native Welfare Officer actively sponsored the Moshweshwe Day functions, as well as the activities of the Zulu Society.

The Zulu Society's second annual conference, held in Durban during January 1938, was the most spectacular and significant display of ethnic mobilisation during the 1930s.⁴ The organisers of the conference were surprised by the crowds that attended.

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4: C.W. Tusi to TC, 15 November 1939 and 29 November 1939.
 2. For details see correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1-4.
 3. For Phashe's biographical details, see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1558, 315H, 5: TC to D.G. Shepstone, 20 June 1941; for Moerane, see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: Superintendent, BSC, to Executive Committee, BSC, 15 July 1936.
 4. Unless stated otherwise, this paragraph draws from: CAD NTS 7232, 137/326, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 2 February 1938; CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner SAP, 3 February 1938; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 2: W. Johnson to Executive Committee of Bantu Social Centre, 3 February 1938; NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3 NAB Minutes, 9 February 1938.

The two main items on the agenda were the campaign for recognition of Mshiyeni as a paramount chief, and discussion of ‘matters relating to the best in our Traditions, Folklore and comportment.’¹ These were hardly topics to attract mass participation. But four indoor meetings at the Bantu Social Centre pulled a total attendance of 6,500 people. Thereafter, Dube, Mshiyeni and W.W. Ndhlovu addressed an estimated crowd of 16,000 people at the Somtseu Road sports ground. Champion was no doubt highly envious of this public celebration of the Dube-Mshiyeni alliance.² Not only was the crowd huge; there were an estimated sixty chiefs present, as well as key municipal officials.

Why was there such a large turn-out? There is no doubt that Mshiyeni was a drawcard, that he was a symbol of ‘Zulu’ pride and belonging, and that this had meaning for the crowd which packed the Somtseu Road field. The Zulu regent stood for the known world of tribal hierarchy and rural patriarchy in a rapidly changing and uncertain urban milieu. The Zulu Society conference tapped into this ethnic consciousness at a popular level. But there was more to it than this. There had been other ‘Zulu’ events in Durban during the 1930s and they had not attracted this level of mass interest. We need to turn to two highly specific explanations. Between April and September 1937, there had been an unprecedented rash of strikes amongst African workers in Durban. This is not the place to analyze this worker action, except to say that it caused popular excitement and promises from employers and officials that wage grievances would be looked into.³ It was highly likely that migrant workers attended

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1697, 467C, 3: C. Mpanza to TC, 26 January 1938.

2. At an ICU meeting soon afterwards, one of the speakers jeered that Mshiyeni ‘would not be able to do anything for’ Africans. See CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner SAP, 30 March 1938.

3. See Chapter 4.

the Zulu Society meeting not only to affirm an ethnic view of the world, but to hear whether Mshiyeni, Dube and Ndhlovu, who had recently been elected to the new Natives Representative Council, had anything to say on the wages question. Secondly, the municipality had recently promulgated bye-laws against the carrying of large sticks by Africans in Durban.¹ This move was precipitated by a particularly violent recent clash between ingoma dance troupes, and by heightened white concern about the activities of amalaita gangs in central Durban. The new stick laws had implications for thousands of Durban residents, whether they were ingoma dancers, amalaita gangsters, or people who carried sticks out of habit and for protection. The laws impinged directly on 'tradition' and 'custom', the publicised terrain of the Zulu Society. A public meeting about the stick laws had been used by Congress officials to advertise the forthcoming Zulu Society conference.² At the same meeting, Champion had stormed the podium and, to 'tumultuous clapping', had lashed out at the new stick laws as the latest example of white oppression.³ As with the wage issue, then, ordinary people attended the usually erudite Zulu Society meetings to see if the unpopular stick laws were to be overturned.

The huge Zulu Society gatherings were one-off events; they did not develop into a 'movement'. This strengthens the argument for precise explanations of those events. Most of the time, during the 1930s, ethnic politics was restricted to the realms of petty bourgeois 'imaginings', and competition between politicians. There was little connection with popular consciousness. But the possibility of popularising ethnicity always remained. Although the Dube-Mshiyeni grouping was in many ways best placed

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3 NAB Minutes, 14 July 1937 and 18 August 1937.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1697, 467C, 3: A.P. Sibankulu to TC, 24 January 1938.

3. Sunday Tribune, 25 January 1938.

to achieve this, there was no one more alive to the possibilities than George Champion. During the 1930s, Champion spent a great deal of energy cultivating a leadership cult. He did so through political activities and through a number of substantial pamphlets, prepared by the ICU's print-setter, Jim London. Central to Champion's eclectic image was the tradition of 'blood and tears', the furnace of the ICU in which Champion's stature was moulded. But increasingly during the 1930s, Champion drew on an ethnic ideology, linked with the history of the Zulu royal house. Champion sought to immortalise his banishment by equating himself with Dingiswayo, the wanderer who returned from his travels and initiated the process of consolidation of the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century.¹ Champion fancied himself as a modern-day Cetshwayo (the last independent ruler of the Zulu kingdom). More so than the Dube-Mshiyeni alliance, which had a strong regional support network, Champion and the ICU yase Natal operated from a Durban base. A handbill issued by Champion in Durban in 1938 illustrates well his aspirations as an 'urban chief', straddling town and countryside.² It was probably an election manifesto in Champion's failed attempt to win a seat on the Natives Representative Council.

The first picture on the handbill showed Champion standing in the grandstand among the crowd which attended the large Zulu Society rally of January 1938. The caption stated that Champion was addressing 'the Zulu nation'. There is no evidence that Champion spoke at this meeting. It was highly unlikely that he did; but the import of the carefully staged photograph, complete with Champion holding speech notes, was to highlight the ICU yase Natal president as a 'Zulu' leader. The second and third

1. Champion, Dingiswayo, Preface, pp.2-3; Champion, uSihlanganisile, p.5-6.

2. UNISA AAS1, 2, 3.3.4.2: Nangu uMnu A W G Champion, 1938.

photographs showed Champion standing on a table, addressing a large crowd. The buildings of the city are in the background. Around the table stood Champion's guards, four men in light suits and wide-brimmed hats. This was the image of the popular, powerful urban leader. But the caption revealed more: it stated that this was a recent ICU meeting about cattle restrictions in the reserves. Champion was speaking in his new capacity as Secretary for Lands and Locations on the national executive of the ANC. He was a national politician addressing rural issues in an urban context. Reinforcing his national status and sentiments, the words 'Vuka Afrika' ('Wake Up Africa') were printed in bold across the handbill. A member of the national executives of both the ANC and the AAC, Champion was well aware of the seeds of a new African nationalism being planted by industrialisation and nurtured by exclusionary segregation. This nationalism was to gather momentum during World War Two, but that lay in the future. For the moment, Champion was pre-eminently a Durban 'boss' and a regional, 'Zulu' politician.

3.6. CONCLUSION

The 1930s were politically 'quiet' compared to late 1920s. This reflected three inter-related phenomena. First, there were new incorporationist tendencies in state and municipal policy towards Africans. Second, the African middle class politicians pursued a narrowly defined agenda of urban demands. Third, these politicians devoted a good deal of energy to constructing essentially conservative versions of regional ethnicity. There was a significant decline in mass participation in African politics. The language of resistance, and demands for equal political rights, were overshadowed by a narrower concern with material concessions and the manipulation of segregation. Attempts were

made to exploit new possibilities for political incorporation of an African elite through 'advisory' and 'tribal' channels.

The new policy openings, providing possibilities for the politics of accommodation and middle class advance, were crucial. So too was the willingness of the middle class leaders to distance themselves politically from the masses. The major politicians showed a striking unity of intent in following this road. This situation contrasted with that of the late 1920s, when a segment of the middle class explored a potentially radical social alliance in challenging municipal power. This same segment of leaders, clustered in the ICU yase Natal, continued to operate during the 1930s, but its mass base had been destroyed through organisational weaknesses, state repression and the economic hardships of the Depression. The ICU yase Natal leaders, themselves shaken by Champion's banishment, toned down their political radicalism. They shifted ever more firmly on to the terrain of the 'established' middle class, assembled around the Natal Native Congress. This produced parallelism and competition in the political marketplace. Through new machinery like the Native Advisory Board, the African middle class politicians, across the spectrum, were able to peer into the ambiguous workings of the local and central state. This not only moderated their demands, but raised hopes that lobbying white power might bear fruit, if only for 'urban insiders'.

The changing extent of 'incorporation' of African middle class leaders during the 1930s must not be over-exaggerated. There was much in municipal and government policy that still excluded Africans from urban rights and resources. All African leaders worth their salt realised that middle class lobbying strategies were insufficient. Consequently, there were a number of independent initiatives, especially in housing and commerce, which sought to bend the boundaries of exclusion. The politicians, in

addition, commonly claimed to speak for groups larger than their own narrow social strata. They did so in two main ways, both of which were heavily shaped by developments in state policy. First, they spoke for urban settlers, demanding a better deal from a reformed Durban System. Second, they helped to construct ethnic identities. In Natal, there was an abundance of raw material for this kind of politics, not least the history of the Zulu kingdom. The politics of ethnic mobilisation was significantly encouraged by the state's retribalisation policies, and by the rapid rate of change in the countryside which gave chiefs and ordinary people a vested interest in 'tradition'. In Natal, government officials sponsored a new paradigm for regional ethnicity and African chiefs and politicians responded with alacrity. Official designs were overwhelmingly rural in focus, and were little concerned with Durban. Nevertheless, Durban was used by African politicians as an important site of ethnic politics. Durban figures were involved in regional ethnicity, and in urban-based political competition revolving around ethnic strategies.

From the authorities' point of view, ethnic politics was a welcome distraction from far more threatening kinds of African politics, targeted more directly at white power. Ethnic politics, at most, was mildly usurpatory, demanding concessions from a segregationist order at the height of its development. Ethnic politics divided subordinate groups up into squabbling sub-groups, each competing for collective identity and influence. The largely rural idioms of the various strains of ethnicity drew attention away from specifically urban class conflict. During the 1930s it became 'safe', given the circumstances and the people involved, for the state to sponsor the ambitions of the Zulu royal house. Even Champion became a politician whom the authorities could live with.

In this chapter, the focus has been on the African elite and new processes of 'negotiation' with white power. Throughout the analysis the reader has been asked to accept the assertion that there was little political pressure 'from below' on the middle class leaders. This has only been partially illustrated, through the political behaviour of those leaders. It is now necessary to examine popular African experience and politics in more detail, thereby sketching in another crucial component of the 1930s. We need to identify undercurrents of oppositionist politics that might have existed, and to test the assertion that these were limited in extent.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIGHTING WITH BARE HANDS: RADICAL INITIATIVES, 1931-1939

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In 1931, John Dube sat in his Chevrolet and watched a group of handcuffed Communist Party supporters being marched through the streets of Durban.¹ They were going to court for burning their passes. Dube's apparent indifference to their plight provided yet more ammunition for communist invective against the 'good boys' of the African elite for reneging on 'the struggle'.² The Communist Party, although weak and divided, was to be the main source of organised radical dissent in the inauspicious conditions of the 1930s. The language and tactics of Party activists contrasted markedly with those of the middle class African politicians, who were largely drawn into conservative discourses of policy reform, narrow class advance and tribalism. Amidst the twists and turns of directives from the Comintern, communists perceived themselves to be the militant vanguard and defenders of the working class. What constituted this class in South Africa's race-conscious and partially industrialised society continued to be a matter of intense debate within the Party.³ A related question was the identification of those segments of the working class which carried the most potential for transforming capitalist society. Differences on these issues led to bewildering changes of tack that baffled dedicated Party activists. Like the middle class politicians, the radicals tended to operate as a select group which struggled to generate a mass

1. Umsebenzi, 20 February 1931, p.2.

2. See for example, Umsebenzi, 2 May 1930, 16 January 1931.

3. Simons, Class and Colour, Chap. 19.

following. From the authorities' point of view, their fighting talk was blatantly usurpatory. Unlike the middle class leaders, the communists were ideologically more committed to resistance.

How did the mass of Durban's Africans respond to the Communist Party? This depended, in the main, on two things. Firstly, there was the extent to which radical rhetoric resonated with people's grievances, their group identities, and their expectations of what could be achieved through militant collective action. Secondly, material conditions were a crucial influence. The hardships of the Depression brought passivity and defensive survival to the fore. In these circumstances the Communist Party battled to win converts to confrontationist strategies. The economic boom from the mid 1930s brought important changes. It enlarged the number of African wage labourers, created a tighter labour market, and informed a more animated popular mood. The communists latched on to these developments, and took the first significant steps in the unionisation of African workers. But communists had little to do with the two most usurpatory events of the period, the beer hall riot of 1936 and the strikes of 1937.

4.2. THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Depression, which lasted in Durban until 1934, stifled militancy. Harsh economic realities reinforced the political effects of the suppression of communists after the 1930 Dingaans' Day demonstration. Africans occupied the lowest rungs of the labour market and were most vulnerable to dismissal or wage cuts as capital sought to weather the recession. Hostel-dwelling migrants - still the majority of Durban's Africans - were particularly exposed, as they had less recourse to family support

networks than urbanised African and Indian proletarians. The economic pressures on Durban's migrants were intensified by drought and epidemic in the Natal interior. Rural crises increased the flow of work-seekers into Durban, placing further downward pressure on African wage levels. Cumulatively, these developments dampened popular political assertiveness among Durban's Africans.

Africans were hit hardest by the shrinking labour market. According to one official estimate, 5,000 Africans lost their jobs in Durban between 1929 and 1933.¹ But the number of retrenchments was almost certainly higher than this. Another source, for example, calculated that private manufacturing firms shed 3,150 African workers between 1930 and 1933, affecting one out of three Africans employed in that sector.² Manufacturing employed only about 20% of the African workforce. If figures for the far larger tertiary sector were available, they would no doubt reveal a retrenchment aggregate greater than 5,000. Those Africans fortunate enough to remain in waged jobs were virtually powerless to resist wage cuts and longer working hours. A large Maydon Wharf timber company, for example, chopped African wages by 17%.³ The South African Railways, one of Durban's largest employers, reduced African wages by 37% between 1930 and 1932, and extended the working week from 48 to 60 hours.⁴ A survey of African wages between 1930 and 1934 recorded an 89% increase in the lowest wage category which was less than 9 shillings 6 pence per week.⁵ Stagnant, and in some cases declining, prices offset wage cuts, but not sufficiently to prevent erosion

1. Edley, 'Population', pp.4-5.

2. Katzen, *Industry*, p.159. By contrast 20% of whites and 9% of Indians were retrenched in private manufacturing during this period. The employment of coloureds increased by 2%.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550:315E:1: Native wages conference, 3 September 1937.

4. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.173.

5. Smith, 'Labour Resources', p.412.

of real wages.¹

The economic position of Durban's migrant workers was further squeezed by developments in Natal's hinterland. During 1931-32 generalised crop failures in northern Natal and the reserve areas of Greytown, Msinga and Kranskop brought in their wake starvation, epidemics of malaria and dysentery, and huge livestock losses.² During late 1933 and early 1934 food shortages were reported in southern and northern Natal.³ Locust plagues brought added devastation. During 1935 drought again tightened its grip on many parts of the region, only letting up from mid 1936. Drought and recession threatened bankruptcy for many white farmers, resulting in drastic curtailment of African tenant rights.⁴ The 1932 Native Service Contract Act was widely supported in Natal.⁵ Squeezed by drought, disease, land shortages, and increased exploitation on farms, many country residents, especially young men, looked for work in the constricted labour markets of Natal's towns, and Durban in particular.⁶

There was little collective African resistance in Durban against deepening misery. The capacity to resist was undermined by the economic and political vulnerability of unskilled workers. In the saturated labour market of the Depression, migrancy was weakened as a strategy of countering capitalist work routines.⁷ Increasing numbers of African workers were now totally reliant on urban jobs, so withdrawal from wage labour declined as an option. The short strike by 1,000 African railway workers at the

1. For price details, see Edley, 'Population', pp.30-31; Katzen, Industry, p.155.

2. This paragraph is drawn from files in NA CNC boxes 94 and 95. For example, in the Mahlabatini district it was estimated that 1,000 people died from dysentery and malaria during 1932; during 1931, 30,000 cattle were lost in the Msinga district.

3. Ibid.

4. Hurwitz, Agriculture, p.18.

5. Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.263-279.

6. Edley, 'Population', pp.4-6.

7. Kelly, 'Durban's Industrialisation', Chap.2.

docks in April 1932 was the only major industrial action by Africans during the Depression.¹ The strike was a desperate reaction to the wage cuts and longer working hours imposed by the South African Railways. It was easily broken with replacement labour. Dock workers engaged in two 'go slows' the following year, protesting that they were being treated 'as if we are a people without souls', but these actions failed to reverse capital's assault on their working conditions.²

The majority of people coped with hardship in unorganised and apolitical ways. The middle class African politicians did little to turn the Depression into a political issue; they, too, expressed the sense of helplessness that permeated Durban's impoverished workforce.³ The Communist Party, by contrast, put much stake in the usurpationary potential of immiseration. The Depression was a profound crisis for world capitalism, one which should be exploited.⁴ In Durban, there was the added mobilising weapon of the Dingaan's Day killings and the commemoration of Johannes Nkosi as the 'First African Revolutionary Martyr'.⁵ During early 1931, communist activists seemed optimistic. The Party's general secretary proclaimed that in Durban '[w]e are entering a new period - a period of mass action and conflicts against the tyrannical laws, slave conditions and economic misery.'⁶ As many as 1,000 copies of the Party newspaper, Umsebenzi, were being sold weekly.⁷ Political classes were run nightly, and Party cells were formed. With the assistance of local activists like Philip Thompson, Mitchell Khubheka and Ruben Mlungisi, a Durban branch of the Dockers,

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.273-275.

2. Umsebenzi, 5 November 1932, quoted in Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.280.

3. See, for example, NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/1, NAB minutes, 23 September 1931, 11 November 1931, 13 January 1932, 9 March 1932, 13 April 1932, 11 May 1932, 14 December 1932.

4. Roux, Rope, pp.265-266; Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.264.

5. A. Nzula, Umsebenzi, 9 January 1931.

6. Umsebenzi, 16 January 1931, p.3.

7. Umsebenzi, 16 January 1931, p.2 and 6 February 1931, p.3.

Railwaymen and Transport Union was established.¹ This was affiliated to the Johannesburg-based African Federation of Trade Unions, and represented the first formal attempt to unionise Durban's fiery but independent dock workers. A second pass burning campaign was scheduled for 6 March at Cartwright's Flats, in defiance of the ban on all meetings there.² But by the end of February 1931 police suppression began to take its toll on the Durban Communist Party. The 6 March pass burning did not take place, except perhaps in one or two factories.³ The dock workers' union collapsed.

Nevertheless, the more desperate the situation became, the more intense was the Party's rhetoric. There were also some important changes in ideological stance. National Committee members Eddie Roux and Edwin Mofutsanyana were sent to Durban to salvage the local Party, by establishing underground structures if necessary.⁴ They planned a national strike on May Day, 1931, but all they could muster were a few small 'demonstrations'.⁵ They launched a local news-sheet, Indaba zamaKomanisi eTekwini (Durban Communist News). Alongside the 'Native Republic' slogan 'Mayibuye Afrika' ('Let Africa Come Back'), the Communist News strove for the 'united action of black, white and Asiatic employed and unemployed workers in Durban.'⁶ This new slogan signalled the Communist Party's move from the Native Republic thesis back towards more explicit class principles. Such re-thinking coincided with the shedding of the African membership of the Durban Party, and a new appeal to Indian workers.⁷ The shifting emphasis highlighted the intense debate between

1. Umsebenzi, 16 January 1931, 20 February 1931.

2. Umsebenzi, 20 February 1931.

3. Umsebenzi, 27 March 1931.

4. Roux, Roux, pp.250-254; E. and W. Roux, Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970), p.114; Interview by T.A. Nuttall with E. Mofutsanyana, Butha Buthe, February 1990.

5. Umsebenzi, 15 May 1931.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See Indaba ZamaKomanisi eTekwini, supplement to Umsebenzi, 24 May 1931.

theory and praxis in communist politics during the 1930s. The new slogan also emphasised the highly ambitious programme of the Communist Party: it sought not only to mobilise workers non-racially, but to unite the employed with the unemployed.

From 1931 until the mid 1930s the small band of communist activists dabbled opportunistically and widely, seeking publicity and influence. The Party failed to re-attract a following amongst Africans. The communists' position, in this sense, was similar to some of the middle class African politicians. But communists had no time for petition politics; they appealed always to the innate militancy of the 'toiling masses' and not the goodwill of the 'dictators'. By early 1932 both Mofutsanyana and Roux had been deported from Durban. Until 1934-35, when key Indian activists were recruited to the Party, most notably Harry Naidoo and George Ponen, a small core of white members, including Mike Diamond and Lazar Bach, sustained the Durban branch. They tried to capitalise on the industrial action of the African dock and railway workers during 1932-33, but these early union initiatives came to naught.¹ Meantime, as part of a nationwide protest, the Durban branch put up a black candidate for the Point constituency in the all-white 1933 general election.² The small group of white Party members in Durban became increasingly involved, from early 1934, in the Popular Front politics of the Anti-Fascist League, which was focused on white trade unions.³

A remnant of the African membership of the Durban Party continued to operate in the Pinetown district.⁴ Agitation was directed at rural issues. James Mbetse and E. Dhlamini, for example, were sentenced to hard labour for distributing leaflets in

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.269-280.

2. Natal Advertiser, 24 March 1933. I have not been able to discover who this person was.

3. UW DHP TUCSA, AH 646, Dd 12.2: Minutes of Anti-Fascist Conference, Durban, 25 January 1934 and 15 February 1934.

4. Roux, Rope, pp.267-269.

December 1932 calling for Dingaan's Day demonstrations against taxes and the confiscation of cattle.¹ In mid-1933, James Ncwangu was arrested at the Dassenhoek railway compound while distributing pamphlets against the Service Contract Act of 1932. Written in a mixture of Zulu and Xhosa, this hard-hitting pamphlet spoke of the history of land dispossession, the brutality of white farmers, and the political treachery of chiefs in the Pinetown district.² These Pinetown cadres maintained a shadowy presence in the official records, and little more is known about them. E. Dhlamini, for example, surfaced again in 1935 as a Durban organiser of the United ICU, a splinter group which sought to 'organise workers' and to collect money to send a delegate to the All African Convention.³

One sure sign of the paucity of Africans in Durban's Communist Party by 1935 was provided by the campaign against the worldwide celebrations of the jubilee of Britain's monarch. Eddie Roux and Josiah Ngedlane came from all the way from Cape Town to publicise the Party's anti-imperialist message.⁴ Their pamphlets skilfully appealed, with more than an echo of the now discredited Native Republic thesis, to Durban's Africans to boycott the 'Native' celebrations which were planned for Cartwright's Flats. Their main problem was that they had no-one to translate their propaganda into Zulu, so they asked George Champion!⁵ The irony of this was made richer by Champion's simultaneous membership of a City Council sub-committee which

1. Ibid.

2. NA CNC 90, 63/5, N1/9/3(37): Original version and official translation of Ezihlupekeni Zase Zabelweni Nase Mapulazini ('To the Suffering People on the Locations and Farms'), and Judgement of Pinetown magistrate in *Rex v. Ncwangu*, 25 July 1933.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1690, 467, 1: E.L. Dhlamini to TC, 27/2/35.

4. This account is drawn from Roux, Roux, pp.x-xi; Natal Mercury, 20 July 1935, 23 July 1935 and 31 July 1935.

5. Roux, Roux, pp.x-xi.

was planning the Jubilee celebrations.¹ Champion must have relished this act of secret subversion, especially as the Party's pamphlet indirectly highlighted his own political career:

'Workers and oppressed people of Durban! Do not be bluffed by this King George nonsense. Do not kiss the boot that kicks you. Refuse to worship King George: he is not our King but the King of our oppressors. Unite in protest against pass laws, liquor laws, and all other forms of oppression; demand freedom in our land of your Fathers. Refuse to go to Cartwright's Flats, the place where our martyrs were murdered in 1929 and 1930.'²

In the end, the anti-jubilee campaign did little more than gain Roux and Ngedlane some courtroom publicity, followed by hard labour sentences.³ A small victory was the transfer of the official celebrations from the symbolic Cartwright's Flats to a sports ground near the beachfront. The municipal festivities were very well attended. A crowd of 10,000 Africans gathered at the sports ground; and upwards of 3,000 went to events organised at the Bantu Social Centre.⁴ The Communist Party's radical republicanism, let alone the way in which Roux demanded 'freedom in our land of your Fathers', appealed little to the popular consciousness of Durban's Africans in the mid-1930s. The British monarch, though distant, was more likely to have been seen in a positive light. Thanks to state policy and 'royal' Zulu nationalism, the British king was symbolically attached to the Zulu king. Furthermore, the British crown had long been seen in African eyes as a more enlightened source of authority than South Africa's white rulers.

Unlike the anti-jubilee campaign, the Communist Party's agitation against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 had potential appeal amongst Durban's Africans.

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1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/2, NAB Minutes, 13 February 1935.
 2. Court document cited in Natal Mercury, 23 July 1935.
 3. UW DHP, TUCSA papers, AH 646, Dc2.8: Financial appeal, South African Labour Defence.
 4. Natal Mercury, 7 May 1935, p.13; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 1: Superintendent to Executive Committee, BSC, 14 June 1935.

Mobilisation around the Ethiopian issue combined anti-fascist and pan-African sentiments. The invasion was portrayed as an act of fascist aggression against a country which had so far remained independent of European colonial rule.¹ Between August and October 1935, the CPSA and the Anti-Fascist League attempted to organise a boycott against loading ships bound for Ethiopia. Some Africans joined the protest action. Hostel residents in the harbour area talked of travelling to Ethiopia to fight the Italians.² The dock workers, of course, were the key to the Party's campaign. The interchange of ideas that accompanied harbour traffic made these workers the most internationally conscious segment of Durban's African workforce. But the difficulties came in translating this consciousness into concrete action. After sixty African stevedores were summarily dismissed for refusing to load an Ethiopian-bound ship on 27 August 1935, the fledgling boycott campaign collapsed. The Party's structures were weak, and its influence amongst African dock workers was limited. Sympathies with faraway Ethiopia were overshadowed by the reality of Durban's large reservoir of casual labour, waiting to replace recalcitrant dock workers. Nevertheless, the willingness of some workers to participate in the boycott was a small indicator of Durban's economic recovery and perceptions of a tighter labour market. It was to be two years before African workers in Durban gave fuller expression to dissatisfaction with their share of the new prosperity. This came with the strikes of 1937. In the meantime, Durban experienced an event embedded in the city's political culture: the beer hall riot of April 1936.

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.286-290.

2. Natal Mercury, 6 July 1935 and 28 August 1935.

4.3. 'SHAYA AMABUNU' ('HIT THE BOERS'): THE BEER HALL RIOT OF 1936

On 1 April 1936 an African crowd and the police confronted each other outside the Victoria Street beer hall. This incident offers a glimpse into aspects of popular consciousness amongst Africans during the mid 1930s. The crowd sought spontaneously to exploit a political space opened up by municipal disagreement over who should control policing in the city. Developments in the politics of the dominant class were keenly observed from the subordinate class. The centrality of the police to the riot, both in its inception and its suppression, highlighted the coercive nature of the Durban System. Against this, the amalaita gangsters in the crowd that day represented an alternative source of collective power and force. The salience of municipal beer as a mobilising issue linked the events of 1936 to those of 1929, and signalled the prominence of the liquor question in popular experience. However, a major difference with 1929 was the absence of formal organisation. The inspiration for collective action flowed instead from a series of enticing rumours about the politics of policing.

The question of whether the municipality or the central government should control policing in Durban was guaranteed to raise heat in white politics during the 1920s and 1930s. The details need not concern us here, just the broad issues. Underlying the whole debate was the question of how best to control the growing black proletariat. At another, highly publicised level, Durban was determined to preserve municipal autonomy from Pretoria.¹ Ever since the 1860s the municipality had employed and financed its own police force. Municipal control of policing in Durban was jealously guarded against Pretoria's growing concern to influence and standardise local

1. This paragraph draws on Jewell, Police, Chap.9.

government in South Africa's burgeoning cities. By the mid 1930s, Durban was the last large city in the country where the South African Police (SAP) was not in charge of policing. This was despite repeated attempts by the Department of Justice to impose SAP hegemony there, including the sustained deployment of SAP personnel in Durban during the 1929-30 period.

Durban's resistance to the Department of Justice was both ideological and material. The SAP's designs were commonly rejected, in the press and at numerous public meetings, as an attempt to extend Afrikaner influence over a 'British' area of the country.¹ Pretoria's commissioner of police was disparagingly referred to as a 'Boer commandant'.² These utterances fed into the separatist mood in Natal's white politics during the 1930s.³ Defending Durban's 'British' civic pride was a popular ticket in municipal elections. But there was more to it than this. An SAP takeover threatened the symbiotic relationship between the local police, the municipal beer monopoly and Durban's Native Administration Department. The SAP's intervention would re-direct revenues away from the municipality, and would remove local control of a central prop of the Durban System.⁴ By the mid 1930s Durban's ability to resist Pretoria's designs was being eroded by divisions within the municipality, and more especially by the growing ability of the central state to have its way.⁵ The South African Police took charge of policing in Durban, with the exception of traffic control, from 1 April 1936.

The ubiquity of police interference in the daily lives of Africans made this a topical issue. Africans flocked to Durban's tax offices during March 1936 to clear their debts,

1. La Hausse, 'Struggle', p.291.

2. Quoted in Jewell, Police, p.153.

3. P.S. Thompson, Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa, 1909-1961 (Johannesburg, Southern, 1990), Chs. 5 and 6.

4. La Hausse, 'Struggle', pp.290-5.

5. Jewell, Police, pp.139-156.

fearing the advent of the SAP.¹ They remembered the determination and brutality of the SAP's Mobile Squadron in the tax raids of 1929-30. But fear of the SAP and their 'pick-up' vans mingled with hostility, creating fertile soil for subversive rumours. These seem to have emanated from certain city councillors and municipal officials who were hostile to the SAP,² but the gossip soon assumed a life of its own in the semi-literate subcultures of the hostels and domestic servants' rooms.

One rumour was that the SAP, as in 1929, would arrive in convoy from Johannesburg on 1 April 1936, and immediately deploy their pick-up vans and harsh methods to harass Africans.³ Others talked about how Marshall Campbell, the local sugar magnate and friend of John Dube, had disagreed with General Hertzog over the arrival of the SAP. As a result of this, the hearsay continued, Campbell had called 'all young men ... including the kitchen servants' to gather in Victoria Street on the day of the SAP takeover. Those who brought two sticks, signifying readiness to fight, would be rewarded with free beer. The large crowd would attract the attention of the SAP who, on arrival, would be 'beaten and driven out of Durban.' It was whispered that if the SAP ventured near the Point they would be attacked by dock workers, who (as they had done in 1929) planned to march in battle formation to the city centre on 1 April. A related rumour was that the free beer would come not from Campbell, but from Native Administration officials at the Victoria Street beer hall.

The content of these rumours reveal many insights into popular consciousness. They flowed from an acute perception of divisions in the white power bloc over the

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.291.

2. Jewell, Police, p.163; Natal Mercury, 16 May 1936.

3. The rumours are gleaned from NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1574, 323, 1: Evidence led before magistrate T.J. Conway, April/May 1936; Report of the Commissioner into Native disturbances at Durban on 1 April 1936 (hereafter Disturbances Report, 1936); Natal Mercury, 16 May 1936.

police question. Furthermore, the events of 1929-30 were still very clear in people's memories. The hearsay reflected a paradoxical sense both of power and powerlessness. There were exaggerated expectations of what ordinary people with sticks could do to the feared SAP, driving them away in one dramatic act. There were inflated hopes that English-speaking Durbanites, symbolised by Campbell, would sanction violence against 'Afrikaner' SAP imposters. The rumours were in one sense defensive in nature, seeking to preserve the status quo. In another sense, they were subversive of authority, urging a clash with the police who were guardians of private property and state power. The notion of free beer subverted the liquor laws and the municipal beer monopoly. Finally, the rumours were open-ended; they encouraged an assault on the police, but said little about the aftermath of this action.

It was with a mixture of fear, expectation and curiosity that a crowd of 3,000 Africans and a sprinkling of Indians gathered near the Victoria Street beer hall during the late afternoon of 1 April.¹ In front of the crowd two men led a dance of defiance and preparation for battle, rubbing their sticks on the ground. Members of the crowd, fortified by the utshwala still on sale at the beer hall,² raised their sticks in rhythm to staccato cries of 'Usuthu!', a Zulu call to battle. Others laughed tauntingly and waved their sticks, calling for the 'Boers' to arrive, so that 'we may hit them.' Officials later commented that there had been a sizeable 'lawless and criminal element' in the crowd.³ They were referring to the amalaita gangsters, and perhaps some ingoma dance groups,

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1. Unless stated otherwise, the details in the following two paragraphs are drawn from the references in the previous footnote, and from NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1574, 323, 1: Chief Constable to TC, 8 April 1936, enclosing reports from Sergeant Forbes and Inspector Smellie.
 2. Contrary to the rumours, there was no 'free beer' available. Magistrate T.J. Conway concluded in the court case after the riot that the NAD officials should have closed the beer hall. He found that their failure to do so signalled their complicity in the confrontation.
 3. Natal Advertiser, 2 April 1936, cited in Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.292.

for whom collective displays of stick-wielding dance were important expressions of social identity and power. The amalaita gangs, in particular, were an ubiquitous feature of central Durban. They were largish groups of domestic workers and hostel-dwellers, who defined their territories by beating off their opponents in semi-ritualised stick-fights. The amalaita pounced on and robbed unsuspecting pedestrians, especially those dressed in the trappings of the African middle class.¹ On 1 April 1936, a number of these gangs joined forces to 'beat' a common enemy, the South African Police.

The SAP had increased its personnel in Durban, but - contrary to the rumours - there was no formal 'arrival' of forces. Neither did the Victoria Street crowd attract a large contingent of policemen. Instead, a small posse of municipal and South African Police monitored the gathering. The Native Welfare Officer (NWO) moved on the fringes of the crowd, trying to persuade people to disperse. This was unsuccessful, and the throng grew. The NWO reported to the police that he had overheard excited talk of the Point workers preparing to march to the city centre. The police then arrested the two men who were leading the crowd. The second man was captured only after a dramatic chase through the beer hall complex had scattered stalls and overturned tables. Subsequently, the crowd began to throw sticks, stones and bottles at the police. Warding off these missiles, the officers at the scene sent for reinforcements. A large SAP contingent arrived with the district commandant, Captain Whittet; they were greeted with a shower of flying objects. The police replied with a sustained baton charge, and the crowd scattered in all directions. Thirty one Africans were arrested for 'public violence'. Soon afterwards, Whittet fired shots at a small group which was

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3, NAB Minutes, 9 September 1937; NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2, NLAB Minutes, 28 April 1937, 28 May 1937, and 30 June 1937.

engaged in a tussle with African SAP constables at the Victoria Street beer hall. The police patrolled intensively late into the night, but except for the stoning of one pick-up van, there were no further incidents. The march from the Point did not materialise. The Victoria Street riot had been a spontaneous, one-off event followed by strategic retreat under the force of police batons.

In a brief moment, two embodiments of physical power had clashed: the police and the stick-wielding African crowd. It was an unequal contest. The police had the state behind them, and the force of firearms if necessary. The crowd had only numerical strength, sticks, and exaggerated rumours. Yet Africans had participated in a collective action which had clear, if transient, usurpationary undertones. Nothing of this nature, on this scale, had happened in Durban for six years. Furthermore, apart from the two dance-leaders, each of whom was sentenced to two months hard labour, there were no obvious 'agitators' who could be 'blamed'. There was no organisation that could be pin-pointed by the authorities. The most that officials could discern was an 'uncertain and unsatisfactory Native feeling ... in this district at the moment.'¹ For this reason, as well as the alleged involvement of white notables in the propagation of anti-SAP rumours, a government enquiry was instituted. The published report of the commissioner, Johannesburg's chief magistrate, M. Page, scotched the idea of white incitement and justified the police use of force to disperse the crowd.² Confidentially, however, Page conveyed to the minister of Justice his suspicion of white complicity in the riot.³ Fascinating as this supposition was, it is not our main concern here. More topical was the way 'prominent natives' were called on by certain white politicians and

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1. NA DMC N1/9/2/2, Chief Magistrate to District Commandant, SAP, 3 April 1936.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1574, 323, 1: Disturbances Report, 1936.
 3. Jewell, *Police*, p.163.

officials to assist with the ‘maintenance of law and order.’¹

Within a week of the riot, senior government and municipal figures had held two meetings with about fifty African politicians, churchmen, Native Advisory Board members, and hostel indunas. The church ministers were requested to preach from their pulpits the virtues of abiding by the law. The middle class leaders were told to ‘respect’ the ‘law’ as a means of ‘protection’ from ‘the criminal class and scum of society.’² The African leaders were not convinced by these official initiatives at ‘pacification’; they stressed African grievances and criticised ‘the law’ as a form of political oppression. However, these criticisms were moderated by the opportunity to speak directly with senior officials (here was yet another instance of this during the 1930s). Officials and the African middle class were both concerned about the links between urbanisation and criminality. The African politicians, including Champion, showed little interest - before, during, and after the riot - in trying to exploit the political potential of the stick-wielding crowd of Victoria Street. The Communist Party, too, failed to give organisational momentum to the riot and its aftermath. In a disorganised and spontaneous fashion, the Victoria Street crowd injected a popular and potentially radical thrust into Durban’s political culture. The beer hall riot drew on many mobilising symbols in Durban’s recent past. The strikes of 1937, by contrast, hinted at new forms of struggle amongst the city’s African workers.

1. NA DMC N1/9/2/2: Deputy Mayor to all Native Ministers of Religion, 4 April 1936.

2. NA DMC N1/9/2/2: Minutes of meeting at Native Commissioner’s office, 7 April 1936.

4.4. AFRICAN WORKER STRUGGLES AND THE 1937 STRIKES

Durban, like the rest of the country, experienced an economic boom during the late 1930s.¹ Nationally, this buoyancy arose from the high gold price, the state's import-substituting policies, and the revival of world trade after the Great Depression. The epicentre of economic growth was the southern Transvaal; but Durban, with its harbour, cheap labour and ample water supply also attracted capitalist investment. The volume of cargo passing through the harbour nearly doubled between 1934 and 1938.² Tertiary activities continued to dominate the local economy, but manufacturing received a boost, creating roughly 13,000 more jobs - a 46% increase for that sector - between 1934 and 1939.³

How did African workers participate in the booming, changing local economy? Were there shifts from earlier employment patterns? In particular, was there a rise in African skill levels and job permanence? By 1940 there had been little substantial change in the skill and job positions of African workers. This segment of the workforce continued to be characterised by very high job turnover, and by unskilled labour on the lowest rungs of a racially differentiated labour market. African workers, as in the late 1920s, were concentrated in a structurally weak position, from which it was difficult to envisage organised, collective action against capital.

Against these continuities, the late 1930s saw some important new developments. These are crucial to understanding the fledgling union activity and the strikes amongst African workers during this period. There was a new fluidity in wages policy, as the central state and urban employers began to grapple with the labour requirements of

1. Katzen, *Industry*, pp.122-125.

2. O.P.F. Horwood, *The Port of Durban* (Durban, University of Natal, 1969), p.141.

3. M.H. Alsop, *The Population of Natal* (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1952), pp.79-80.

unprecedented manufacturing growth.¹ Arguments began to develop for the 'stabilisation' of segments of the African workforce, who would be paid urban subsistence wages and granted differential rights under influx control policies.² In Durban, these views were not strongly put, for local capital relied heavily on migrant and casual African labour, and could draw on stabilised and relatively cheap Indian labour for the new operative jobs of mechanised production.³ But the 'stabilisation' view did gain some influence. The Chamber of Commerce was Durban's most important capitalist proponent of African wage increases. The goal was to increase the purchasing power of urbanised Africans.⁴

Another source of 'stabilisation' thinking was the Department of Labour, which sought to standardise manufacturing markets by proclaiming minimum wage levels. Between 1935 and 1937, unskilled wage determinations were promulgated for the following industrial sectors in Durban: baking, glass, laundry, sweets, textiles, and the packaging of tea and coffee.⁵ The process of collective bargaining between registered unions and local firms also began to have a positive spin-off for African workers in some industries. From 1935 onwards, unskilled workers in the metal, engineering and furniture sectors had minimum wages and working hours set through Industrial Council agreements.⁶ White and Indian union members (Africans were legally excluded from registered unions) increasingly pushed for such arrangements to prevent undercutting by cheap (African and Indian) labour.

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1. See Annual Reports of the Department of Labour, 1935-1940.
 2. *Ibid.*; Hindson, Pass Controls, pp.46-48.
 3. Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.450-451, 455.
 4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Native wages conference, 3 September 1937.
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.497, 557, 608, 617.

The changes in wages policy, the wage determinations, and the Industrial Council agreements brought material benefits to some African workers. These developments conveyed some important general signals. Wages began to be investigated in new ways, and comparisons were formally made between factories and sectors. African workers gained points of reference beyond their immediate employers. These were but some of the features of a changing 'moral economy' in the workplace during the late 1930s.¹ Under boom conditions unemployment declined, work-rates accelerated, and production methods changed. These placed additional pressures on existing wage rates. The general price index rose by 8.6% between 1933 and 1938, eroding existing money wages.² Skilled white workers and semi-skilled white and Indian workers had engaged in strikes from as early as 1935 to claim a greater share of the reviving economy. These workers had also resuscitated craft unions and formed new industrial unions.³ For African workers, both options - strikes and unionisation - were more difficult.

Despite these constraints, African workers, many of whom had had their wages slashed during the Depression, began to express increasing discontent with their lot. Low wages were the key grievance. One survey of wages during 1936-37 concluded that 95% of Durban's African workers earned less than 19 shillings and six pence per week.⁴ In its recent hearings, the Wage Board had proposed minimum wages of 22 to 24 shillings for unskilled workers in some industries.⁵ Even this amount was considered insufficient to sustain a working class family in Durban during the late

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1. In another context, see T.D. Moodie, 'The Moral Economy of the Black Miners' Strike of 1946', Journal of Southern African Studies 13, 1 (1986), pp.1-35.
 2. Katzen, Industry, p.155.
 3. H.G. Ringrose, 'A History and Description of Trade Unions in Natal', M.Comm thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1948, pp.58-63.
 4. Smith, 'Labour Resources', p.412.
 5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Native wages conference, 3 September 1937.

1930s.¹ The demands of African workers were sharpened by a growing reliance on wage labour and the urban economy, even though the vast majority retained connections with homesteads in the Natal countryside. Signs of proletarianisation were more evident in some sectors of the Durban labour market than others. Perhaps the strongest expression of this was a Durban Chamber of Commerce survey of 94 firms in 1936. This research found that 80% of African workers in those firms regarded themselves as 'settled' in Durban, although they were still nominally migrants.²

Worker demands and early union organisation

One sign of African workers' dissatisfaction was the absorption of their grievances into the discourse of the middle class politicians. Late in 1934, for example, John Dube of the Natal Native Congress had called for a 'living wage' for the city's workers.³ The ICU leaders still liked to claim that they were the guardians of the workers. On a number of occasions during 1934-35 James Ngcobo and George Champion called for a round table conference of the municipality, employers and African political organisations to discuss raising African wages.⁴ In 1935, Champion even mooted the formation of a Dairy Workers' Union, but nothing came of this.⁵ The middle class leaders concentrated their energies on petitioning the authorities and employers for wage increases. This was consistent with their political tactics on other issues during the 1930s. They made little attempt to encourage worker organisation, leaving this field open for a new generation of Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) activists.

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Minutes of interview, Native Commissioner's office, 23 August 1937.

2. University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.384.

3. Natal Mercury, 25 December 1934.

4. See, for example, NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1148, 323A, 3: Champion to TC, 19 September 1934; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Champion to TC, 16 May 1935.

5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 1: Champion to TC, 24 September 1935.

The reviving Durban branch of the Communist Party of the late 1930s was different in nature from earlier structures. Radical African populism had disappeared from the agenda, as had the eclectic and desperate strategies of the Depression era. The CPSA spoke an explicit language of working class mobilisation, but this was overlaid with the racial and political divisions of Durban's society and labour market. Under the leadership of figures like George Ponen and Harry Naidoo, the Durban CPSA concentrated on trade union organisation and increasingly on issues in Indian community politics.¹ Communist activities found fertile soil in the growing ranks of Indian semi-skilled operatives in Durban's manufacturing sector. The recruitment of Indian workers into industrial unions was rapid during the late 1930s.² White workers proved largely unreceptive to the Party's message and so did African workers, for different reasons. Migrant labour, high job turnover, and unskilled work, in addition to the legal exclusion of Africans from registered trade unions, made African workers notoriously difficult to organise formally.

It was to the credit of CPSA activists that, after the abortive attempts to unionise dock workers in 1931-32, the first steps were taken to draw Durban's African workers into unions during the late 1930s. The handful of Party organisers operated on their own. Unlike the Rand, there was no Trotskyist or liberal intervention in this early unionisation; there were no figures like Max Gordon or Lynn Saffery.³ In Durban, the CPSA did not attempt to organise African workers per se, but in conjunction with

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1. See Interview with G. Ponen (sic), Morogoro, Tanzania, 1984, quoted in J. Pampallis, Foundations of the New South Africa (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1991), p.149.
 2. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, p.50; S. Marie, Divide and Profit: Indian Workers in Natal (Durban, Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, 1986), Part 2.
 3. B. Hirson, 'The Reorganisation of African Trade Unions in Johannesburg, 1936-42', in Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Vol.7 (London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1976), pp.182-195.

unskilled or semi-skilled Indian workers. The Party made a strategic division between white workers and 'non-European' workers. Between 1937 and 1939, for example, George Ponen and others organised May Day celebrations in Clairwood and in central Durban with the specific intention of jointly mobilising Indian, African and coloured workers.¹ These events were held separately from the May Day meetings of the white-dominated Durban branch of the South African Trades and Labour Council. In the workplace, Party activists deployed two sets of tactics in organising African workers. The first was to create unregistered unions of Indian and African workers. The second was to use registered unions to push for improvements for African workers. The first option sought to defy the racially exclusive nature of the Industrial Conciliation machinery; the second sought to operate within its confines.

The launch of the Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union (NISWU) at the Falkirk foundry in 1937 was a pioneering attempt to organise Indian and African workers in an unregistered union.² The union was led by two Communist Party members who worked at the factory, Harry Naidoo and P.M. Harry. By May 1937, the union had around 400 members, of whom a quarter were Africans.³ This non-racial initiative was fuelled by specific workplace dynamics at Falkirk. In February 1937 skilled white and coloured workers, who were members of the racially exclusive Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), had led a strike of all Falkirk workers in support of higher wages. The dispute had been settled in favour of the skilled workers; the rest of the workforce had been neglected.⁴ The formation of NISWU came soon afterwards. The

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2-3: G. Ponen to TC, 20 April 1937, 24 April 1938 and 20 April 1939.
 2. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.302-203; Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.64; Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, pp.89-90.
 3. Natal Mercury, 4 May 1937.
 4. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, p.89.

union sought recognition with Falkirk, but could not legally register with the engineering Industrial Council because Africans were full members of the union. The AEU was the sole union represented on the Industrial Council and, together with management, was hostile towards NISWU. Victimisation of NISWU members provoked a bitter strike in May 1937, the details of which will be examined below. The Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union broke new terrain by organising around common shopfloor experiences, and indicated the potential for building new forms of worker consciousness at factory-level. But there were too many obstacles against this kind of non-racial initiative. The other, more pragmatic option was to push for registered unions to 'represent' African worker demands.

The representation option contained many potential points of tension. As we have seen, registered engineering and furniture unions had obtained minimum wages for unskilled workers as a defensive measure to protect union members' jobs. This had a spin-off for African workers, but it was designed to contain rather than advance their demands. The communists, by contrast, sought to integrate African worker demands into the strategies of the registered union. This was not easy, for unionised white and Indian workers tended to look to their own interests first, rather than to the welfare of the workforce as a whole. Yet there were also new imperatives for semi-skilled workers to broaden the boundaries of social closure in the workplace. Unlike craft workers, machine operatives could not bargain with management on the basis of their monopoly of skills. Industrial unionism had a new logic, which was to aim at numerical strength on the shopfloor.¹ It was a logic which was slow to gain influence in Durban's

1. J. Lewis, Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924-1955 (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1984), p.4.

fledgling industrial unions. The first priority for these unions was to register under the Industrial Council machinery. The mobilisation of the transient African workforce was a matter of far less urgency.

There were only three registered unions during the late 1930s which made a conscious effort to incorporate African workers and their demands. Communists were influential in each them. The first was the Natal Sugar Industry Employees' Union, led by the same Harry Naidoo of NISWU.¹ This union attempted to organise both mill and canefield workers in the Durban region; it held open air meetings in the city which were attended both by Indian and African workers.² The union's demands made explicit reference to the conditions of African workers.³ The second union was the Durban branch of the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (Non-European) (SARHWU-NE). This operated in Durban from 1936, under the leadership of J. de Bruin and Philemon Tsele. The intention was to mobilise 'Africans, Indians and coloureds' in a 'continuous struggle for higher wages and better conditions of work.'⁴ Tsele, whose early biographical details are obscure, was probably Durban's first African to become an organiser of a formal trade union. If not a member of the Communist Party, he was closely linked to it. He was involved in 1938, for example, with Edwin Mofutsanyana's campaign to revive the African membership of the Party.⁵ The third union was the Natal Rubber Workers' Industrial Union, which was registered

1. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', pp.62 note 2 and p.67.

2. See for example, CAD NTS 7679, 150/332, 1: Deputy Commissioner, SAP (Natal) to Commissioner, SAP, 30 August 1941.

3. See, for example, UW DHP, TUCSA papers, AH646, Dd7.3: Memo on the Wages and Conditions of the Agricultural Workers in the Natal Sugar Industry, 1945.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2: J. De Bruin to TC, 15 September 1936; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4: P. Tsele to TC, 21 July 1939.

5. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3, Durban SAP to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Pietermaritzburg, 30 March 1938. For the debates over how to revive the African membership of the Party during the late 1930s, see Simons, *Class and Colour*, pp.484-485.

in 1938 and had 340 whites, 145 Indians and 25 Africans on its books by 1940.¹ Neither the Sugar Workers' Union nor the Railways and Harbour Union had much success, it seems, in gaining access to African workers at the workplace. They instead communicated their message of union organisation at public meetings. SARHWU-NE, in particular, held regular meetings at the Point football grounds between 1936 and 1940.² The Communist Party's fledgling union initiatives amongst African workers were just one facet of a new African worker assertiveness. The other was the unprecedented number of strikes in 1937.

The 1937 strikes

After rumblings of African worker discontent in early 1937, the period between April and September saw unprecedented strike action.³ Ten strikes, involving over 3,000 African workers, were recorded: in stevedoring firms, at the Falkirk foundry, amongst South African Railways (SAR) employees at the docks, timber loaders at the harbour firm of W.F. Johnstone, chemical workers at African Explosives, commercial fishermen, soap workers, box makers, and mill workers at the Illovo and Hulett's sugar refineries.⁴ By today's standards, the number of strikers was puny; by those of the late 1930s, the strikes were an impressive collective protest against cheap labour and exploitative working conditions. Until then, strikes had been sparse amongst Durban's

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1. Padayachee et al., *Indian Workers*, p.53; A. Sitas, 'Accommodation and Resistance: Industrial Discipline, Mass Production and Conflict in a Rubber Manufacturing Plant', unpublished paper, University of Natal, 1986, p.9.
 2. See correspondence by SARHWU-NE officials in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1696, 467C, 2.
 3. For the gathering incidence of wage demands, see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Report of Native Administration Manager to Native Administration Committee, 19 July 1937.
 4. Unless stated otherwise, the details of these strikes are drawn from Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.294-300; Ringrose, 'Trade unions', pp.64-5; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1 : Report of NAD manager, 19 July 1937, and Native wages conference minutes, 3 September 1937; correspondence in CAD NTS 2208, 359/280.

African workers, who had preferred accommodation, migration and informal resistance to workplace confrontation. Even the daily paid (togt) workers at the docks, the most strike-prone segment of the African workforce, had only struck work twice during the decade since 1927. It was a comment on the structural vulnerability of African workers that the strike wave of 1937 occurred a full two years into the economic recovery. The strikes were concentrated amongst the poorest paid workers who sought to return to their pre-Depression wage levels. Each strike reflected a particular juncture of grievance, mobilisation and opportunity, within the wider context of the tighter labour market and the changing wage policies of state and capital. The concentration on wage demands signalled perceptions of class consciousness amongst groups of African workers. The strikes were defensive, rather than usurpatory; yet collectively they offered a significant challenge to employers and municipal officials.

The largest strikes occurred amongst togt workers at the docks, where increased cargo traffic was the most obvious indicator of the new prosperity. Five hundred stevedores, employed in shipping firms, demanded a raise in Saturday pay from three to four shillings, the rate for the rest of the week. One thousand SAR togt workers, paid 3 shillings daily, struck for an extra shilling. The 400 timber loaders at W F Johnstone, who received an ultra-low 2s. 6d. daily, also sought parity with the 4-shilling stevedores. These wage demands by the lowest-paid harbour workers were notably limited, seeking merely to restore old wage levels. The know-how and strength of the togt labourers gave them a level of bargaining in the labour process of the harbour that was denied to the vast majority of unskilled workers elsewhere.¹ Togt

1. Dock workers were also prominent in contemporary strikes in other African ports. See R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.) The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action (London, Longman, 1975) and F. Cooper, On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987).

workers could also contemplate strike action more readily than most other workers; they were hired on a daily basis and to strike meant to boycott specified employers rather than break a work contract. This option was obviously most feasible when the harbour was busy. Most dock workers lived in large compounds near the harbour; their barrack-like living conditions and common work experiences created the potential for building solidarity around informal social networks.¹ This was an important reason for the concentrated timing of the strikes.

The Falkirk foundry strike set new standards in Durban's labour history.² It showed the potential for joint industrial action by semi-skilled and unskilled workers - Indian and African - in the increasingly integrated production processes of manufacture. This potential was enhanced at Falkirk by the exclusionary practices of the skilled workers in the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and by the bold initiatives of the communist-inspired Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union (NISWU). The Falkirk strike was the only dispute in 1937 where wage demands were not central, and where trade unionism played a key role. Four hundred Indian and African NISWU members struck work on two occasions in protest against employer victimisation of union leaders working at the factory. The dispute dragged on for over two months. The protracted, unsuccessful strike was fought using trade union resources and connections beyond the workplace.³

The other 1937 strikes involved only African workers, and were mobilised around internal workplace or compound networks. At African Explosives, for example, the

1. For a useful comparative study see T.D. Moodie, 'Moral Economy', pp.1-35.

2. This account is based on the following: Padayachee et al., *Indian Workers*, pp.89-107; Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.302-303; Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.64; I.L. Edwards, 'Recollections: The Communist Party and Worker Militancy in Durban, early 1940s', *South African Labour Bulletin* 11, 4 (1986), pp.72-73; and correspondence in UW DHP TUCSA papers, AH646, Dc8.30 during June 1937.

3. For a critical discussion of the strike's strategies, see Padayachee et al, *Indian Workers*, pp.94-107.

workers in the factory compound sent a deputation to management demanding wage increases; cash payments instead of food rations; and the dismissal of a compound manager who beat workers.¹ The failure of the deputation precipitated a strike, during which management and government officials addressed large gatherings of workers in the compound. It was at one of these meetings that the 400 strikers agreed to the return-to-work ultimatum. The railway strikers were led by their own committee, and seem to have had no contact with the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union. The accountability of the railway leaders was shown on one occasion during the strike: they broke off negotiations with the SAR system manager to consult with the crowd of strikers gathered outside the office, and then returned to report that the strike would continue.²

The most common employer response to the strikes was to call in the Zulu-speaking Native Affairs Department officials, who would then warn the characteristically 'orderly' strikers of the error of their ways, and threaten them with prosecution under the Master and Servant laws. All the strikers returned to work within one or two days, pending management promises to investigate wages. There were two exceptions: the Falkirk strike, which was unique; and the determined SAR strike, which lasted for two weeks until a drop in harbour traffic forced the strikers back at the old wage. Strikes were not easily sustained: strong union organisation was absent; employers could obtain scab labour; and unskilled workers occupied a weak bargaining position.

1. See correspondence in CAD NTS 2208, 359/280.

2. CAD NTS 2206, 353/280, 1: NC, Durban to CNC, 19 August 1937.

Despite this, the strikes provoked a collective response from local officials and capitalists. The Durban mayor convened two emergency meetings of employers and officials during the 1937 strike wave.¹ One flustered manager declared that ‘something had to be done’ soon or else there would be ‘strikes all round’.² The Chamber of Commerce, whose members stood to gain from increased African purchasing power, argued that ultra-low wages should be raised to the levels of higher-paying firms. The Chamber of Industries protested that Durban’s ‘competitiveness’, based on the lowest unskilled wage rates in the country, would be lost. The mayor’s meetings eventually decided to defuse the strike militancy by asking the government to implement a national minimum unskilled wage.

The Hertzog government refused to consider this request, but appointed a Wage Board to investigate unskilled wages in Durban.³ The terms of appointment were unusual, for the Wage Board characteristically operated on an industry basis. Its broader brief signified the extent of the strikers’ challenge to Durban’s wage structure generally. In the meantime, the municipality implemented a 10% across-the-board wage increase for its 3000 African employees. Some of the strike-affected firms nudged up the very lowest of their togt rates to 3 shillings. Under pressure from the Native Affairs Department, the SAR increased togt rates to 3s. 6d. during 1938.⁴ After a number of sittings, the Wage Board, ever cautious about antagonising capital, eventually published its proposals in December 1939: a minimum togt wage of 4 shillings per day, and a weekly minimum of 18 shillings. It was calculated that 11 995 unskilled African

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1 : Native wages conference, 3 September 1937.

2. Ibid.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Secretary for Labour to TC, 5 October 1937.

4. City council minutes, 21 Dec. 1937; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Native wages conference, 3 September 1937; CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Report of investigation into togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 October 1942.

workers (and 3000 Indians) would benefit.¹ Strong employer reaction delayed implementation of the ruling, so that it only began to be phased in from October 1940.

The 1937 strikes signalled new perceptions of worker consciousness amongst segments of Durban's African workforce. Strike action not only forced a response from employers and the state; it prompted a burst of public activity by the political leaders in the Natal Native Congress and the ICU yase Natal. Their response to the strikes reflected both a sensitivity to pressures 'from below', and a conscious attempt to gain political advantage by articulating popular demands. The wage agitation pushed the middle class politicians into their most radical utterances of that 'quiet' decade. The ICU's activists, for example, urged those who gathered in Cross Street on Sunday afternoons to start afresh, to rebuild the Union into an organisation of 'strong soldiers'.² Tom Gwala told the crowd: 'You are all in the mud if you do not follow. We throw a rope, take it and come after us.'³ John Duiker shouted: 'South Africa belongs to the black man ... tell the government that we want to be free.'⁴ The ICU called a public meeting on wages at the Bantu Social Centre on 9 August 1937.⁵ One thousand people attended. Railway workers were particularly vocal, and their low wages and rations - food 'fit for pigs' - were a central theme of many of the speeches.⁶ Champion linked exploitative wages and working conditions with white domination. John Dube proclaimed there was no other country where workers were so badly paid,

1. Annual Report of the Department of Labour, UG 45, p.37.

2. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner, 11 August 1937.

3. NTS 7670, 86/332/3: Sub-inspector, Durban SAP to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Pietermaritzburg, 27 October 1938.

4. Ibid.

5. Details of this meeting, and surrounding activities are drawn from the following: NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1697, 467C, 3: Champion to TC, 30/7/37; CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to D. Commissioner, Natal SAP, 11/8/37; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: A.P. Sibankulu to TC, 10/8/37 and 19/8/37, and Minutes of NC's interview with deputation of native employees, 23 August 1937.

6. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner, Natal SAP, 11 August 1937.

and that Durban's workers were not benefitting from the new prosperity. The thousand-strong gathering elected Champion and Dube to head a deputation to the mayor and employer organisations. The central demand was a minimum wage of five shillings per day plus accommodation and food.

Hemson has characterised the intervention of the political leadership as an attempt to capture and divert worker militancy for self-serving purposes.¹ It was certainly true that the politicians monopolised the role of mediating wage demands to the authorities; they opposed strike action as 'rash', and paid no attention to worker organisation. Dube articulated the conflicting interests of management and workers as 'misunderstandings' which could be ironed out through 'consultation' with the political leadership.² However, there are grounds for arguing that the political leaders added momentum to wage demands and perhaps even strike action. In the absence of alternative trade union organisations, they popularised the five shilling wage call, a wage level higher than that demanded by most strikers. The railway workers began their two-week strike on 10 August 1937, the day after the rousing Bantu Social Centre meeting which many of them had attended. The strikes provided the initial shock to employers, forcing them to consider wage increases. The incidence of strikes by African workers declined sharply during 1938 and 1939, but the political leaders continued to agitate around the wages issue.³

For the moment, the middle class leaders could still make largely unchallenged

1. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', p.303.

2. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: SAP, Durban to Deputy Commissioner, 8 September 1937; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1550, 315E, 1: Minutes of NC's interview with deputation of native employees, 23 August 1937.

3. There were only three strikes by African workers during 1933-39. See Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', pp.72-73; for the public meetings on wages, see CAD NTS 7670, 85/332/3: SAP Durban to Deputy Commissioner, 12 October 1937; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556-7, 315H, 2-3: W. Johnson to executive committee, BSC, 10 December 1937, 4 January 1938, and 12 April 1939.

claims to represent 'the workers'. In 1939, in response to the new African worker assertiveness throughout the country, and especially on the Rand, Pretoria's Native Affairs Department (NAD) mooted the administrative recognition of African trade unions. The NAD's officials in Durban concluded, amazingly, that Champion's ICU yase Natal was the only local body that might qualify for such recognition.¹ Champion, of course, was delighted that he was still regarded by officials as a trade unionist. The truth was that the numerically small ICU yase Natal subscribed to eclectic populism rather than workplace organisation. The strikes of 1937, and the faint stirrings of communist-led union organisation, laid the seeds for a growing challenge against the claims of Champion and others to speak on behalf of workers. This challenge was to grow significantly during the Second World War, as the next chapter will show. In taking up worker demands during the late 1930s, the middle class politicians themselves began to make the transition to new forms of urban-based African nationalism.

4.5. CONCLUSION

In the last chapter, the dearth of usurpationary African politics in Durban during the 1930s was explained as a consequence of new forms of political incorporation of the middle class leaders. African political organisations mounted a weak challenge against white rule; they failed to generate mass followings (except occasionally for a passive politics of ethnicity); and they largely accommodated themselves to urban and rural segregation. This chapter has looked at the 1930s from a different angle. It has sought to understand why there was so little usurpationary political pressure on the

1. NA CNC 93, 64/38, N1/14/3: Secretary for Labour to SNA, 9 May 1939; SNA to CNC, 6 July 1939; NC (Durban) to CNC, 11 October 1939.

African middle class leaders 'from below' - from subordinate African groups lower down the social hierarchy. Various kinds of collective action have been identified as being oppositionist in intent, but which, in practice, did not develop into anything which seriously challenged the dominant class. There were one or two 'moments' when the African middle class politicians responded favourably to expressions of potential popular radicalism. The organisation best placed and most inclined to do this, however, was the Communist Party of South Africa. Despite its many weaknesses, the Party maintained a radical stance even when this was at odds with popular consciousness amongst Africans.

The disjuncture between communist strategies and African perceptions was at its greatest during the Great Depression. Party activists believed that immiseration would spark off militant mass action. But few followed the Red Flag and its revolutionary language. The economic and political weaknesses of African subordinate groups precluded this option; by far the majority of people acquiesced in their hardship. The 'taste of freedom' of the late 1920s was replaced with a pragmatic and limited world-view. Visions of a changed order gave way under the harsh logic of the Depression and the political suppression which followed the pass burning campaign of 1930. Belief in the collective power of mass action was lost. The widespread decline of popular political morale amongst Africans could not be resuscitated by a divided and organisationally weak Communist Party.

Divisions within the white power bloc over policing policy in Durban prompted the first signs of a revival of popular assertiveness. The beer hall rioters of 1936 sought, in an unstructured and disorganised way, to exploit these divisions within the dominant class. The amalaita gangsters in the crowd offered an alternative source of physical

power to the police, whose coercive role was central to white rule in Durban. The crowd was attracted to the Victoria Street beer hall by exaggerated rumours of free beer and a decisive clash with the police. Such gossip was deeply embedded in the popular political culture of Durban's Africans. The usurpationary potential of this event evaporated quickly; it gained no sustainable political momentum, and it ended with a pragmatic retreat in the face of police power. Yet the beer hall riot hinted at a new political 'mood'. The rekindling of popular urban struggle arose, at least in part, from the twin processes of economic recovery, bringing a tighter labour market, and the growing numbers of Africans dependent on wage labour in Durban.

These socio-economic developments provided the context for early union organisation amongst African workers, and for the unprecedented strike action of 1937. Union initiatives came from the Communist Party which tried to draw 'non-European' workers together in struggles around common workplace experiences. There were many obstacles to this. There were the racial restrictions of industrial law, and the hostility of employers. The labour market was racially divided, and unskilled African workers tended towards informal rather than formal workplace strategies. The most successful Indian-African union was built at the Falkirk foundry, but this initiative was effectively broken by the industrial dispute at that plant in 1937. The rest of the strikes that year were fought without union organisation; they were co-ordinated around informal workplace leadership. The centrality of wage demands signalled a belated demand by African workers for a greater share of the reviving economy. The vulnerability and relative powerlessness of the African strikers were revealed in the short duration of the strikes, and in the limited nature of the wage demands. Yet the strikes also indicated new forms of worker consciousness, and collectively they evoked a worried response

from local employers and the municipality. The strikes extracted significant wage increases for the lowest paid of Durban's workers. Segments of the African workforce had made their collective demands felt.

In sum, to understand the relatively 'quiet' nature of African politics in Durban during the 1930s, we have looked - in the previous chapter - at middle class politics, and - in this chapter - at proletarian experiences. Trends in both these arenas, and the interaction between them, resulted in the absence of usurpationary pressure on the dominant class. This was particularly so during the first half of the decade. In the second half, there were signs of a new assertiveness. This found some expression in the idioms of Zulu ethnicity, but more particularly in the demands of urban dwellers for wage increases and a larger share of the resources of the city. The fledgling unions, the strikes, and the championing of wage demands by the middle class politicians, signalled the early stirrings of new forms of urban politics that were to develop during the Second World War.

CHAPTER FIVE

'DO NOT ACCEPT KAFFIR STANDARDS': AFRICAN WORKERS AND WORLD WAR TWO IN DURBAN¹

5.1. INTRODUCTION

During World War Two social and economic change accelerated in Durban. The speed and scale of this change resulted in a qualitatively different post-war city, and new manifestations of consciousness, identity and political activity. As elsewhere in the continent of Africa, the war was a turning point.² In Durban's case, focusing on Africans, three intersecting themes are crucially important. Each was rooted in the context of war-time flux. First, African worker action and organisation developed in new directions and with new intensity. Second, the politics of black unity - or, as contemporaries called it, 'non-European' unity - took on new forms, both in the workplace and in the community. Third, African nationalism underwent the beginnings of a paradigmatic shift, which reflected the strident Africanism of a younger generation of intellectuals, the stirrings of worker organisation, and the emergence of new kinds of populist leaders in Durban's burgeoning shantytowns. In sum, the Second World War period was something of a crossroads. This chapter concentrates on the first theme, namely, the workplace struggles amongst Africans. These reflected the demands made on the urban economy by Durban's increasingly self-conscious African proletariat. The second and third themes, relating to community politics, are held over

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1. The quotation is from Herbert Dhlomo's play 'The Workers', written during the 1940s. See N. Visser and T. Couzens (eds.), H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985), p.223. A version of this chapter was presented at the South African Historical Society conference, Pretoria, January 1991.
 2. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone, 'Introduction' in their Africa and the Second World War (London, Macmillan, 1986).

to the next chapter.

The significance of World War Two for South Africa's, and indeed Africa's, black working class has long been stressed.¹ The claimed 158,000 membership of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions is often quoted to illustrate the dramatic impact of the war.² The huge mine workers' strike in the Transvaal in 1946 has been seen as indicative of the black proletariat thrusting itself into a new centre-stage position in South African politics.³ The bulk of the literature on black worker history focuses on the Witwatersrand, the industrial heartland of South Africa. What of Durban? In less dramatic and in regionally specific ways, the war years saw significant advances in African worker consciousness and organisation. The strikes of 1937 were forerunners of intensified workplace struggles during 1941-42. Symbiotically, union organisation took root amongst African workers. Informal coping and workplace resistance strategies were superseded as workers generated more direct and organised challenges against capital. The rise of worker militancy and organisation requires explanation, but so too does the failure to perpetuate it. In the post-war period, workplace battles, though they certainly did not disappear, were to be overshadowed by various forms of urban populism.

There is a valuable body of research relating to worker history in Durban during the 1940s. Hemson's study provides an important starting point.⁴ It focuses on the crucial struggles of dock workers and provides a penetrating commentary - but few details - on worker action elsewhere in the local economy. Ringrose provides a

1. See, for example, Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp.17-20; Cooper, 'Urban Space', pp.35-57.

2. S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1987), p.22.

3. D. O'Meara, 'The African Mine Workers Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 8, 2 (July 1975), pp.146-173.

4. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', chap. 5.

contemporary picture and useful details, but in the form of bald narrative.¹ Padayachee et al concentrate on the unionisation of Indian workers during the 1930s and the 1940s.² They highlight comparative themes for the study of African workers, and they examine instances of joint Indian-African action. Pickover and Tichmann provide a generalised overview based on secondary literature.³ Hirson provides a fascinating but sketchy recollection of the experiences of Durban unionism in the 1940s, drawn from interviews with Masabalala Yengwa.⁴ Sitas and Marie write with the empathy and insight of union activists.⁵ Drawing on this work, this chapter uses new archival evidence to show how worker identities, antagonistic to capital and jostling with other self-definitions in African society, became more prominent and widespread during the war than ever before. Through strikes and early unions African workers disputed, and in some cases confronted, the terms on which resources were distributed in the workplaces of Durban's economy.

5.2. AFRICAN LABOUR AND THE WAR-TIME ECONOMY

By the mid 1940s the harbour city had a population totalling nearly 375,000, divided roughly three ways between Indians, whites and Africans, and containing a small coloured minority.⁶ The total population in 1946 was 41% greater than that of 1936, and accounted for about 65% of Natal's urban population.⁷ On the basis of

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1. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions'.
 2. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers.
 3. M. Pickover, 'The Development of Black Trade Unions in Durban during the Second World War', BA Honours essay, University of Natal, Durban, 1980; P.O. Tichmann, 'African worker action in Durban, 1940-1960', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983.
 4. B. Hirson, 'A Trade Union Organizer in Durban: M.B. Yengwa, 1943-44', paper to Institute of Commonwealth Studies seminar, University of London, 20 January 1989.
 5. Sitas, 'Accommodation and Resistance'; Marie, Divide and Profit.
 6. Burrows, Population, pp.24-25.
 7. *Ibid.*, pp.81 and 89.

Simkins' adjusted census figures, the number of Africans in Durban increased from 73,260 to 124,480 between 1936 and 1946, an increase of 70%.¹ Migration to Durban, rather than natural urban population growth, accounted for the lion's share of this increase.²

How did the Durban economy absorb this rapidly growing immigrant population? We saw in the last chapter how Durban's African workers were concentrated, almost without exception, at the bottom of a racially segmented labour market, shaped by a double colour bar. This structurally vulnerable workforce faced innumerable obstacles in waging organised, collective struggles against capital. Did this situation change during the war-time boom, created by the buoyant demand for consumer goods, equipment, munitions and machinery? One indicator of Durban's economic growth was the 7% average annual increase of real industrial output between 1938/39 and 1944/45.³ South Africa had the industrial base to assist the Allied war effort, and to substitute for imports in a disrupted world market. As a port serving the North African and Eastern theatres of war, Durban was well placed, both to produce war goods and to service war traffic in ships, troops, and exports. The economic growth of the late 1930s underwent a significant spurt during the early 1940s.

Table 1 indicates an increase in overall African wage employment from around 40,000 to around 68,000 between 1936 and 1946. The table also highlights a changing ratio of secondary versus tertiary sector jobs. Did the changing balance towards manufacturing employment bode well for the unionisation of African workers? Did skill levels amongst African workers improve, bringing increased bargaining power? At least

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1. Simkins, 'African Urbanisation', p.5.
 2. Ibid., p.12.
 3. Katzen, Industry, p.12.

in some industries, such as engineering¹, the war saw the spread of mechanised production. The changing labour processes of machino-facture demanded new workforces of cheap semi-skilled operative workers.² One would have expected those employers who were developing 'scientific' mass production techniques to have turned to African workers, historically the cheapest and politically the weakest. With this in mind, one possible interpretation of Table 2 is that rising African manufacturing employment occurred in part through displacement of white and Indian workers. But available evidence indicates that this did not occur on a wide scale. The use, from 1942 onwards, of African operatives at the Dunlop rubber factory was a consciously pioneering venture. Only a few other industrial firms, such as Bakers and Lever Brothers, followed the Dunlop path.³ For the rest, employers continued to regard African workers as 'unreliable', and 'unsuited' to anything other than unskilled tasks.⁴ The fully urbanised Indian proletariat was considered a far better source of cheap operative labour.

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1. E. Webster, Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985), pp.55-59.
 2. Lewis, Industrialisation, pp.47-52; Webster, Racial Mould pp.12-14, 85-86.
 3. University of Natal, Department of Economics, The African Factory Worker (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1950); I.L. Edwards, 'Nurturing the Soil to Protect You From Politics: the African Proletariat in Durban in the Early 1950s', paper to South Africa in the 1950s conference, University of Oxford, 1987, p.14; personal communication, Ari Sitas.
 4. Department of Labour Report 1940, UG 45 (1941), pp.34-35; Katzen, Industry, p.128.

Table 1. Secondary and tertiary sector employment of Africans, Metropolitan Durban, 1936-1946

	Male	% econ active	Female	% econ active
Secondary				
1936	12-15 000	24-30	117	2
1946	25-30 000	33-40	418	3
Tertiary				
1936	27-30 000	55-61	5 696	87
1946	38-43 000	50-56	12 420	80

Sources: see note ¹

Table 2. Growth of manufacturing employment in Durban, by racial groups, 1934/35 - 1944/45

Year	Africans	%	Whites	%	Indians	%	Coloureds	%	Total
1934/5	10 887	39	10 634	38	5 647	20	978	3	28 146
1939	17 528	43	13 565	33	8 450	21	1 531	4	41 074
1944/5	28 878	50	15 251	26	11 549	20	2 195	4	57 873

Source: see note ²

Increased employment of Africans in manufacturing is better explained by stressing the labour-intensive production processes of Durban's largest industrial sectors: chemicals, clothing and textiles, metals and engineering, food and drink, and construction.³ Growing war-time firms required large unskilled workforces for maintenance tasks, repair work, or handling bulk raw materials and finished products.⁴ There was also a huge demand at the harbour for unskilled African workers to repair

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1. The figures are compiled from the 'industry' and 'occupation' tables of the Population Census, from the Census of Industrial Establishments, and from Burrows, Population, pp.150-152, 164. The various census estimates of males differed, hence the range of figures. The census categories used for the secondary sector are manufacturing, construction, and quarrying. Those for the tertiary sector: transport/ communication, commerce/finance, personal service, public and general service.
 2. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, p.33.
 3. Burrows, Population, pp.179, 183.
 4. T.J.D. Fair, 'Secondary Industry in Natal', Commerce and Industry 11 (1952), p.148; C.G. Hands, Industrial Survey 1968: A Survey of Manufacturing Industry in Durban (Durban, City Engineer's Department, 1969), p.4; Katzen, Industry, pp.57-66, 71, 163, 175, 177; D.J.L. McWhirter, Industry in Greater Durban, Part II: Raw Materials as a Factor in Industrial Location (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission. 1959), p.11.

ships and to convert civilian vessels into armed ones.

Despite the buoyant and changing economy, then, Africans continued to occupy a very weak position in capital-labour relations. At the same time, however, more and more Africans came to rely continuously on the urban economy. Many were coerced by deepening rural poverty and the transformation of the Natal countryside, but others moved to Durban on a more voluntary basis.¹ Whatever the motives for seeking work in Durban, the possibilities of migrants opting out of wage labour began to narrow. Striking dock workers expressed this well in 1942, when warned that they would be 'sent home' if they did not end the strike. They replied: 'The government must show us where to go because our homes are here in Durban.'² Strikes, as we shall see, were to be one expression of proletarianisation, but they were the exception rather than the rule. More common was another feature of African worker behaviour: high job turnover. During the 1940s, Durban's Native Administration officials coined the phrase 'job-hopping' to describe the endless queues of workers at the pass office, coming to change jobs at the end of monthly contracts or even 'in midstream'.³ In the mid 1930s, job turnover rates had largely been a function of unskilled labourers migrating between town and countryside. By the end of World War II, rapid movement between jobs increasingly reflected processes within the urban economy. Unskilled workers moved incessantly from job to job, from sector to sector, seeking the highest possible wages or the best possible working conditions in a relatively tight labour market.⁴

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1. E.H. Brookes and N. Hurwitz, The Native Reserves of Natal (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1957); Burrows, Population, p.82, estimated that there was an absolute efflux of 38,680 Africans from white farms in Natal, 1936-51. In Natal during the 1940s, unskilled African industrial wage rates were six to ten times greater than farm wages. Smith, 'Labour Resources', p.288.
 2. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Meeting, Native Commissioner's office, 11 March 1942.
 3. Edwards, 'Nurturing', p.14.
 4. Edwards, 'Nurturing', p.16; Smith, 'Labour Resources', p.417; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1552, 315E, 3: Native labour officer to Foreman of works, 17 January 1946.

We can conclude that despite the dramatic growth of the Durban economy during the war, the vast majority of African workers remained in unskilled jobs. The buoyant economy encouraged high job turnover which, together with strategies such as deliberately slowing down the work-pace or pilfering goods at the point of production,¹ signalled informal coping with cheap labour policies and unpopular employment. High job turnover simultaneously militated against sustained working class organisation. Yet the growth of an African proletariat in conditions of relative labour scarcity, war-time inflation, and food shortages was to generate increased workplace conflict.

5.3. NEW FORMS OF WORKER ACTION, CONSCIOUSNESS AND ORGANISATION

A precise set of circumstances must be outlined if we are to understand the strikes among African workers during 1941-1942.² The 1937 strikes had highlighted the wage demands of some of the lowest-paid workers. Afterwards, aided by the economic upswing, employers had nudged up wages. The Wage Board determination of 1940 brought further increases. By this time, however, war-time inflation had seriously begun to erode African wage levels. The general price index, having increased by roughly six per cent between 1936 and 1940, shot up by 13.8 per cent between 1940 and 1942.³ Durban's retail food price index jumped 22.5% between 1939 and 1942.⁴

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1. I.L. Edwards, 'Swing the assegai peacefully? "New Africa", Mkhumbane, the co-operative movement and attempts to transform Durban society in the late 1940s', paper to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987, pp.27-28; H.S. Alverson, 'Africans in South African industry: the human dimension', in Morse, S.J. and Orpen, C. (eds.), Contemporary South Africa: Social Psychological Perspectives (Cape Town, Juta, 1975).
 2. Johannesburg was the other main strike centre. See Hirson, Yours For the Union, pp.86-89.
 3. Katzen, Industry, p.155.
 4. I.G. Halliday, 'Durban's Food Supplies: A Detailed Study of the Marketing, Distribution and Consumption of Certain Farm Products in Durban', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1942, p.107.

Lagging real wages were one source of worker grievance; another was the introduction of new work arrangements and changed production methods. Beyond the workplace, the early war years were an anxious time for the authorities. The Allied forces reeled under advancing Axis armies. During 1942 Japanese attacks on Durban were a distinct possibility.¹ Pro-German saboteurs were active in Durban and elsewhere.² Subversive rumours were rife amongst Natal's Africans.³ In these uncertain times, state and capital were perceived to be vulnerable, on the defensive. During the second half of 1941, Durban's African workers struck at the docks, and in the cigar, milling, tea, coffee and chicory, and construction industries. During 1942, strikes were recorded in the brick and tile, paper, laundry, quarrying, engineering and textile industries.⁴ These years also saw large strikes on sugar estates north and south of Durban.⁵ In October 1942, Durban's divisional inspector of labour reported 'that dissatisfaction amongst the natives at Durban was rife and strikes or threatened strikes sometimes occurred two or three times in a week.'⁶

The details of many of these strikes are obscure. We can, however, gain valuable insights from Herbert Dhlomo's contemporary play, The Workers.⁷ A local journalist, Dhlomo comments incisively on the working and living conditions of African labourers in Durban during the 1940s. In the play, he articulates their consciousness and dramatises their anger at their poverty and low wages (sickness and death stalk close behind); their sense of exploitation; their solidarity (as workers and as Africans); their

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1. For the Japanese invasion scare, see Natal Mercury, 21 August 1942.
 2. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1315, 246H, 1.
 3. For details of these, see Chapter 6.
 4. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.77.
 5. For details, see CAD NTS 7679, 150/332, 1; CAD NTS 7680, 161/332, 1.
 6. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Report into togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 Oct. 1942.
 7. Published in Visser and Couzens (eds.), Dhlomo, pp.211-227.

informal communication networks; their belief that wage increases would be won through strike action; their impatient enthusiasm for union organisation; their flash-like militancy; and their willingness to use violence against management, the *indunas*, and even the police who are called to crush the strike.

The validity of Dhlomo's portrayal is reinforced by available evidence of the strikes at the docks and at the Dunlop rubber factory. These two industrial conflicts are worth examining in some detail. Approximately 1,500 *togt* stevedores went on strike at the docks for two days in August 1941, and a slightly higher number embarked on a week-long strike in July 1942.¹ The dock strikes provide important insights into non-union worker leadership and collective mobilisation. The 1941 strike demand, arising from the dramatic increase in war-related harbour traffic, was for a wage increase from four to eight shillings daily. The strike ended a day later with the promise of 'investigation'. The war-time Controller of Industrial Manpower raised *togt* wages by 6 pence, but this and subsequent negotiations with employers failed to satisfy dock worker demands. They struck again over the 8 shilling demand in July 1942. They stayed out for a week before a special War Regulation empowered the police to evict any worker from Durban who refused work at current wage rates. Confronted with police batons, the dock workers went back to their jobs.

The remarkable worker-leader, Zulu Phungula, was prominent in the dock strikes. A migrant *togt* worker from the Ixopo district, he had been elected in 1939 to lead the residents of Bell Street hostel, the largest concentration of dock workers. What perplexed government officials was that, unlike many hostels and firms where the *induna* was a man of chiefly blood, Phungula was not a 'natural' leader but a

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.326-335.

‘commoner’.¹ An incident during the 1942 strike reveals Phungula’s popularity, and the symbols of leadership in Natal’s past on which he could draw. Having been arrested earlier as the strike leader, he was taken by the police to Bell Street to address the strikers. As one report put it, Phungula got out of the police car and ‘greeted the people in the style of Shaka, "beti Zulu".’² Phungula had allegedly agreed to the police’s demand that he call off the strike, but he seized this opportunity to do the opposite: ‘We better fight and die for what we want until we get it. I do not know what will be the outcome ... as they have now even taken our country. ... What makes them not give us enough money to feed our children?’³

The dock workers showed acute awareness of their exploitation as low-wage workers. They also perceived their bargaining position in the busy docks. Both perceptions informed their persistent demand for 8 shillings a day, an increase of 100%. Before the 1942 strike, Phungula said that the workers’ sights were in fact set beyond 8 shillings (the wages of Cape Town stevedores). They aspired to earn 25 shillings, the wages of the white dock workers whose only tasks consisted of ‘sitting down reading newspapers ... [and] recording the names of the labourers.’⁴

Phungula and his committee showed notable discipline in leading the dock workers. They pursued every possible avenue of petitioning and reasoning with employers and officials. In February 1942, five months before the second strike, the dock leaders had a rough time persuading an angry Bell Street meeting that immediate strike action would be premature.⁵ It was only after four more months of waiting for a government

1. CAD Industrial Legislation Commission K18, 34, NK3, 37: paras. 2961-2.

2. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: I. Walker to SNA, 21 August 1942, enclosing Inkululeko article written by Wilson Cele.

3. Ibid.

4. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Minutes, Native commissioner’s office, Durban, 11 March 1942.

5. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Memo by J. Nabamvu [a Durban Native Affairs spy], 2 February 1942.

reply that a mass meeting at Bell Street finally decided on strike action. The scales were tipped in July 1942 with the introduction of a war-time blackout and daylight saving measures to guard against Japanese air attacks.¹ Daylight saving effectively shortened the break between afternoon and evening work shifts at the docks, leaving tired workers less time for supper and rest. Here was yet another strain on the already over-stretched moral economy of work in the harbour. The strike began the morning 'daylight saving' was introduced.

Phungula expressed a fascinating blend of themes, illustrating the consciousness of the militant dock workers. The following extract is drawn from a speech of his to 2,500 workers, gathered to hear the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) on day three of the 1942 strike. The extract illuminates the dock workers' sense of misery and exploitation; the invoking of biblical imagery; the appeal to 'Zulu' identity; and the awareness created by the large number of troops passing through the docks. The CNC had told the gathered crowd that their wage demands would not be considered unless they listened to their 'father' (the CNC) and returned to work. Phungula replied:

'Although [the CNC] says how much he loves us he is not sorry that we are driven into Hell ... If we go back to work before these promises are fulfilled we are still in Hell ... Does not the government see that we should also have a share in the milk and honey that abounds in this country? Huge sums of money are being made by the white man and we have no share in it ... The Zulus have been loyal [to the war effort] but they have not been given fair pay ... Our stomachs are empty and we feel that we are left to starve. Even strangers and soldiers coming from other countries are surprised at the state of affairs when they see how we are starving. Our people are treated in a manner comparable to Hell, while the employers are in Heaven ... Even the leaves in the trees are proclaiming [our] slavery.'²

1. Ibid., Report into togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 October 1942, pp.10, 23, 29-30.

2. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Notes of meeting, Bell Street barracks, 29 July 1942.

During the 1941 and 1942 strikes both the Durban Communist Party and the National Union of Distributive Workers offered organisational assistance to the togt workers. The dock workers kept these offers, and the overtures of George Champion, at arm's length.¹ The Party was ambivalent towards the strikes, regarding them as detrimental to the war against fascism.² The dock workers did not easily fit the communists' conception of factory-based trade unionism; one Durban Party member recalled Phungula as an unruly 'peasant'.³ However, when the 1942 strikers were literally beaten back to work by the police, the communists, among others, issued angry protests.⁴

During September 1942, the dock workers attracted interest from another trade union quarter.⁵ Officials of Cape Town's Stevedoring and Dock Workers' Union travelled to the city to establish a local branch. Having convinced port employers and officials of the benefits of 'stabilising' the dock workers through 'constitutional' unionism, they were allowed to hold a series of meetings at Bell Street. The strike-weary togt workers were persuaded that formal unionism might open up new terrain for their wage demands. The Durban Stevedoring Union was established, with Phungula as organiser and Abel Mhlongo as secretary. Phungula gave expression to the strategic shift: pledging 'better understanding', he asked the manager of Durban's Native Administration to recruit members into the new union. But with the other hand the union wrote to the Department of Labour in Pretoria demanding wages ranging from

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1. Ibid., H. Lugg to D. Smit, 20 August 1941, and Report into togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 October 1942.
 2. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.332.
 3. I. Edwards, 'Recollections: the Communist Party and Worker Militancy in Durban, Early 1940s', South African Labour Bulletin 11, 4 (1986), pp.73-4.
 4. The Guardian, 27 Aug.1942.
 5. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.333-5; CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Report into togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 Oct. 1942.

8s. 3d. to 18s. for day shifts, and from 21s. to 30s. for night shifts.¹ The militant wage demands had not been silenced. The official Committee of Investigation set up after the 1942 strike considered these demands laughable. It concluded that private sector stevedore wages should be increased by 6d. plus a 1s. war-time cost of living allowance, to a total of 6s; and that togt wages for railway workers be increased to 5s.² These were declared fixed for two years under the war regulations. Phungula was called before the committee in November 1942 to be informed of the ruling. He replied that the dock workers' wage demands still stood, and he pledged that after the two years was up they would renew their struggle.³

The Dunlop strike of December 1942-January 1943 differed from the dock strikes in a number of ways.⁴ It was the most prominent example of joint action by Indian and African workers, alongside other instances of inter-racial solidarity in the paper, laundry and textile strikes of that year.⁵ The Dunlop strike reflected a commonality of workplace interests that overshadowed racial divisions. The strike was led by a formally constituted trade union, which sought support beyond the workplace. During 1942, Dunlop had begun to substitute cheaper African workers for Indian workers, in both unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Furthermore, a company union for white workers was launched in a bid to undermine the multi-racial Natal Rubber Workers' Industrial Union (NRWIU), which had been organising at the factory since 1938.⁶ Reaction to these developments finally came to a head in December 1942 when 148 Indian and 291

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1. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 21 October 1942, and Report on togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 October 1942.
 2. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Report on togt labour strikes, Durban, 7 October 1942.
 3. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Minutes of meeting with stevedores, 20 November 1942.
 4. The fullest account of the strike occurs in Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, pp.107-115.
 5. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.336.
 6. Sitas, 'Accommodation', p.9.

African members of the NRWIU struck work. Despite Dunlop's attempt to divide the strikers racially by prosecuting them under different laws, the strike remained remarkably solid. Native Affairs officials visited the hostels to 'talk' with the African strikers, but were spurned. These officials were perplexed when the strikers insisted that only the Rubber Union should speak on their behalf.¹ The union had successfully challenged official paternalism.

Dunlop bussed in migrant workers from beyond Durban early in January 1943, to re-start production. NRWIU pickets were arrested when they tried to stop the new workers entering the factory. The sacked strikers received the support of the Communist Party, sections of the Durban Trades and Labour Council, and African trade unionists such as Philemon Tsele, Gladman Nxumalo, Zulu Phungula and Grenford Mafeka.² A protest meeting of 4,000 workers was held in the city hall in January 1943. This impressive show of worker unity ended with the singing of Nkosi Sikelele and the Internationale.³ But Dunlop stood firm and the strike was broken. The workers' defeat was an important setback for this fragile common front.⁴ From then on, the incidence of strikes amongst black workers declined significantly.

The strikes of 1941-42 illustrated a distinctive consciousness amongst African workers. The decision to strike was a last resort for workers who had little bargaining power, and who had developed a number of informal responses to wage exploitation. The unprecedented number of strikes during this period pointed to two things. African workers were increasingly reliant on wage labour, and opted to push for better working

1. CAD NTS 7681, 167/332, 1: NC Durban to CNC, 31 December 1942.

2. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, pp.112-113.

3. Azad (pseudonym), 'How the Militants Came To Power in the Indian Congress', The African Communist 47 (1971), p.103.

4. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p.337.

conditions in their existing jobs rather than move on to another one. Secondly, the specific circumstances of the early war years were crucial. African workers perceived that state and capital were on the defensive. War-time inflation eroded pay, yet workers knew that the buoyant economy gave employers leeway to increase wages. Increases would not come automatically; they needed to be extracted, especially by the lowest paid of all Durban's workers. In these circumstances, African workers combined in new forms of usurpationary action.

From 1943 employers mounted a counter-attack. The government's punitive anti-strike measures of December 1942 were used to prosecute African strikers, and to reassert coercive authority in the workplace. The militant dock workers, in particular, were targeted, and Zulu Phungula was expelled from Durban for five years under the Urban Areas Act. Indicating how seriously local capital viewed the strikes and worker assertiveness, the Natal Industrial Employers' Association was formed in 1943 to coordinate wage and labour-supply strategies.¹ Management regained the initiative, bolstered by renewed confidence in the Allied war effort. Concern to prevent strike action was a unifying force. Disputes involving white and Indian workers could be absorbed into the Industrial Council machinery. Strikes by Africans, who were barred from this machinery, were invariably wildcat ones, disruptive and unpredictable. These were the features that worried employers, rather than the capacity of African strikers to cripple production. Apart perhaps from the togt dock workers, African workers did not have this capacity. Most of the strikes were little more than a desperate warning that enough was enough. They were nevertheless a defiant challenge by superficially

1. Hemson, 'Class consciousness', pp.336-339; Industrial Employers' Association (hereafter IEA), Annual Report, 1944-45.

'docile' workers against the paternalism or autocracy of management. The offensive posture of Durban's employers resulted in a decline in African strikes, but wage trends showed that numerous firms succumbed to demands for pay increases. Employer sensitivity to the wage demands of African workers was another important reason for the decline of strikes. The Department of Labour played no small part in urging wage increases from reluctant employers. A general Wage Board determination for Durban in 1945 raised the lowest unskilled wage levels.¹ Between 1939 and 1945 the average real wages of African industrial workers rose by 51% in the Durban-Pinetown area.²

At the end of the war, Durban's employers were primarily worried about challenges from 'organised labour', that is, from white, coloured and Indian workers who were unionised. They feared that post-war aspirations, and the real wage increases which had been won during the war, would seriously threaten capital's profitability.³ Coupled with this was an even more worrying, but less immediate, 'danger': the unionisation of African workers. Between 1943 and 1946 this was an issue which commanded much attention in the boardrooms of Durban's capitalists. The potential collective power of a unionised African workforce threatened not only employer interests, but held out prospects of providing organisational muscle to African political struggles against racial exclusion. We turn to examine trade unions amongst Africans as the second main feature of black labour history during the Second World War.

In the early 1940s trade unionism grafted itself with difficulty on to the struggles of African migrant workers and new proletarians. Two main union-types developed: 'parallel' structures for African workers within registered unions; and African-only

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1. Government notice no. 2403, 7/12/45, determination no. 130.
 2. Katzen, *Industry*, p.25.
 3. IEA, *Second Annual Report 1944-45*, pp.21-22, 28-32.

unions acting 'independently' from registered unions. These emergent unions reflected the constraints and opportunities thrown up by the changing political economy of the 1940s. Crucial variants included the position of African workers in Durban's labour market, and the legal status of Africans within the state's labour relations machinery. The following section outlines the context of the early unions, examines the various kinds of unions, and then assesses the nature of leadership, ideas and organisation in the fledgling movement.

The first union activity amongst African workers on any significant scale flowed from the same social processes and political circumstances that prompted the war-time strikes. The intensifying dependence of African workers on urban wage labour was an important pre-condition for unionisation. But aspirant organisers of African workers faced tremendous obstacles. The labour market position of the vast majority of African workers militated against formal workplace unionism. Reinforcing these obstacles was the Industrial Conciliation (IC) Act of 1924, which barred Africans from membership of legally recognised unions. But to understand the emergent unionism we must consider the new opportunities that developed amidst the constraints. The new unions exploited the smallest of openings that were generated by structural changes and the impact of struggle. The strike waves of 1937 and 1941-2 revealed the capacity for collective confrontation with capital over the wage-relation. The strikes created space for unions to engage in further bargaining. Crucial here was the buoyant and changing economy, which gave employers some latitude. In the country as a whole, the changing labour needs of a rapidly industrialising economy led certain employer and state interests to favour 'stabilised' rather than migrant labour.¹ Integral to this was a

1. Department of Labour Reports, 1935-1940; Hindson, Pass Controls, pp.46-48.

changing attitude towards Africans as potential union members. For some elements of manufacturing capital, the unionisation of African workers offered greater regulation of production and more predictable workplace relations amidst the evident militancy of the war years.

The vexed question for state and capital was just how far union rights should be extended to African workers. Each option - nil, partial or full recognition - contained undetermined political and workplace consequences. There was a tendency to sidestep the question by intervening administratively with piecemeal reforms. From 1937, Department of Labour officials were empowered to represent African workers on Industrial Councils, and the Wage Board sought to improve and standardise African wage levels.¹ In 1939, plans were mooted for administrative registration of approved African unions.² Throughout the 1940s the Smuts government toyed with this issue, culminating in the 1947 Bill for limited and separate recognition. The recognition issue provided important space for African union organisation. It became a rallying call at union meetings. It enabled some unions to gain unofficial recognition from individual firms, to lobby the Department of Labour, and to appear before the Wage Board. After two years of internal consultation between 1944 and 1946, Durban's capitalists in the Industrial Employers' Association threw their weight behind the limited and 'supervised' recognition of African-only unions.³ Some employers supported the IEA stance to secure more productive, stabilised labour; most were interested primarily in imposing control before unions grew any stronger among African workers.

Employer advocacy of African-only unions revealed a fear of the inter-racial

1. Department of Labour Reports, 1935-1940.

2. NA CNC Box 93, 64/38, N1/14/3: Secretary for Labour to SNA, 9 May 1939.

3. IEA, Second, Third and Fourth Annual Reports, 1944-1947.

mobilisation of workers. The mechanisation and growing size of factory units reinforced the 'logic' of industrial unionism: the bargaining power of skilled workers was diluted, and there was greater potential for a convergence of interests between semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The most obvious way for the latter two groups to increase their workplace leverage was to combine in strength of numbers.¹ This was the thinking which had informed the formation of the non-racial Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union (NISWU) by communists in Durban in 1937. Forces favouring non-racial industrial unionism were however confronted with a racially organised labour market and with racist labour law, which banned Africans from membership of registered unions. There was too much stacked against initiatives like NISWU, and communist trade union organisers opted pragmatically to organise African workers in structures 'parallel' to registered unions. The first steps in this direction were taken during the late 1930s in the railway, sugar and rubber industries.²

During the war the organisation of 'parallels' expanded significantly. This occurred at the hands of both communist and non-communist trade unionists in the Trades and Labour Council. By mid 1943, fifteen parallels were operating, in the following industries: furniture, textiles, tin, food and drink, rope and mat, twine and bag, chemicals, leather, liquor and catering, and box making.³ The growth of parallels reflected the industrial ferment of the early war years, the assertiveness of African workers, and the logic of industrial unionism in sectors that were mechanising fast. Registered union members, like employers, increasingly saw African workers as more than nameless labour units. In general, there were two main reasons why registered

1. Lewis, Industrialisation, p.4.

2. See Chapter Four.

3. Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.507-510; CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: NC Durban to CNC, 15 Mar. 1943, and CNC to SNA, 14 June 1943; Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, pp.52-55.

unions established parallels. The first was to mobilise shopfloor strength as widely as possible. Communist unionists, with their emphasis on working class struggle, were most closely associated with this motive. The second reason, and one which often had racial overtones, was to formalise 'African' wages and so prevent wage undercutting by cheaper African labour.

The racially specific experiences and structural position of African workers, and the negative motives behind some 'parallel' unions, created space for African-only, or 'independent' unions. As with the parallels, the strikes of 1941-42 were a crucial stimulus to the birth of independent unions: up to twenty three were active in Durban by mid 1943.¹ They operated in the following sectors: milling, coal, meat, construction, timber, metals, baking, hotels, hospitals, chemists, tea and coffee, cartage and distribution, brick and tile, the docks and the municipality.² The 'independents' were not explicitly outlawed, but they could not obtain formal recognition in labour law. Employer organisations, as we have seen, favoured African-only unions as a means of maintaining racial division; but local capitalists were alarmed by the 'uncontrolled' nature of the independent unions, and their growth potential. Hence the call for strict operating and registration procedures for African unions.

The above sketch has highlighted the important early steps in union activity amongst African workers during the war. We can take this matter further by asking three questions. What was the social and political nature of union leadership? What ideas informed these early unions? How were the unions organised?

A minority of the full-time African union leaders had been unskilled or semi-skilled

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1. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: Dep. Commissioner SAP to Commissioner, Pretoria, 14 November 1942, and NC Durban to CNC, 15 March 1943; Race Relations News 5, 7 (July 1943), p.7.
 2. This list is drawn from scattered correspondence in NA 3/DBN files.

wage labourers. The two most prominent worker-unionists were the docker, Zulu Phungula, and the engineering worker, Philip Thompson. We have already come across Phungula, in the course of the dock strikes. Thompson hailed originally from the Orange Free State. He was expelled from Durban in 1930 for Communist Party activities, but then re-emerged in the late 1930s and the war years as an independent trade union organiser. Thompson and Phungula were barely literate and could speak little English. By contrast, most of the African unionists of the 1940s were located higher in the class hierarchy and had at least a smattering of formal education. Their background was that of the mission station and the aspirant urban or rural petty bourgeoisie. Sydney Myeza and Arthur Sililo, for example, were municipal clerks; Sililo and Christopher Mbonambi were members of families 'exempted' from 'Native Law' on grounds of education level or property ownership; Wilson Cele was a budding journalist; Masabalala Yengwa was a brilliant young matriculant; and Jacob Nyaose was, according to newspaper photographs, a well-groomed man who, among other things, belonged to the sedate Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Africans. There were good reasons why such figures emerged at the head of many unions: literacy and English skills were essential for dealing with officials, employers and white and Indian unionists.

In the case of Masabalala Yengwa, one of the few unionists about whom we have some biographical details, it was a matter of chance that, on leaving school, he became a 'parallel' organiser in 1943 for the Liquor and Catering Trades Employees' Union (LCTEU) and not a clerk in the Native Affairs Department.¹ His pay would have been roughly the same in either job. Yengwa's real ambition was to become a book-keeper

1. Hirson, 'Trade union organiser', pp.9, 14-15.

in the union's main offices, but when successive vacancies were filled over his head by Indian and coloured people, he left the union to set up a private book-keeping agency. Sydney Myeza, an energetic independent unionist during the war years, saw his union work as that of a 'labour lawyer'. He was not formally qualified, but drew a fee for each case he took up. Other war-time unionists who operated on an agency basis were Hubert Sishi, who organised hotel and catering workers, and J.J.D. Manzi, who represented building, hospital and government workers.¹ Myeza and his colleagues showed entrepreneurial flair. Worker assertiveness during the war provided opportunities for articulate individuals to make a living. It was a precarious livelihood, however, for both fees and success rate were low.

Few 'agency' unionists survived until the end of the war. Myeza, for example, moved into squatter politics, becoming a key figure in the Natal African Tenants' and Peasants' Association. Sishi became an announcer on the new Zulu radio service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.² By contrast, figures such as Gladman Nxumalo (iron and steel), Philemon Tsele (railways), Jacob Nyaose (bakers), and Christopher Mbonambi (commercial and distributive) were long-standing, committed unionists. They came from differing union traditions, but their common concern was to develop an ideology of worker rights and to build formal union structures.

Differing tendencies emerged around the possibilities of jointly mobilising African and Indian workers. Since its inception, the Communist Party had always grappled uneasily with its commitment to working class unity in a society where racial and other non-class identities loomed large. During the 1940s the Party's main concern, according

1. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1551-2, 315E, 2-3 and 4/1/3/1698-1700, 467C, 4-6.
 2. Hirson, 'Trade union organiser', p.10.

to national leader Jack Simons, was with 'organising the unorganised worker', the majority of whom were 'semi-skilled and unskilled ... non-European workers.'¹ The Party was committed to the 'unity of all workers' and worked hard to 'win the sympathy' of white workers 'for the struggles of the non-European workers.'² The secretary of the local Trades and Labour Council in Durban during the war years was a Party member, Errol Shanley. He organised among both white and black workers. Others in the Durban Party concentrated on Indian and African workers. They included George Ponen, Harry Naidoo, P.M. Harry, Gladman Nxumalo, Philemon Tsele, Mannie Peltz, Wilson Cele, Grenford Mafeka, Billy Peters, and L. Ramsunder. Gladman Nxumalo's statement in November 1942 was a pertinent example of the Party's organising principles during the early war years: '[I]mprovement can alone come from organised workers in a trade union movement. The policy of segregating the African workers from other workers is the root of low wages paid to Africans up to now. ... All workers irrespective of colour are affected. They must have a common front.'³

These sentiments contrasted sharply with the views of Jacob Nyaose. He was the chief ideologue of the view that the experiences of African workers were distinct, justifying organisation on an 'independent' - racially separate - basis. At the November 1943 launch of the Natal Federation of African Trade Unions, an early attempt to co-ordinate the activities of the independent unions, he ridiculed the parallel unions which, he said, 'belonged to Europeans and Indians'.⁴ Nyaose was indicting the exclusion of

1. Guardian, 20 February 1947.

2. Ibid.

3. Ilanga, 14 November 1942, cited in Pickover, 'Black trade unions', p.34.

4. Cited in Hirson, 'Trade union organiser', p.5.

Africans from the industrial relations system, but also highlighting the paucity of Africans in the leadership of the Durban Communist Party. There was no equivalent in Durban of a Moses Kotane or a J.B. Marks. By the end of the war, two stalwart African communists and pioneers of non-racial unionism in Durban, Philemon Tsele and Gladman Nxumalo, had shifted to organising 'independent' unions. As a result of tensions within the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (Non-European), Tsele led an African breakaway group in 1944.¹ In 1945 the Natal Iron and Steel Workers' Union, of which Nxumalo had been a long-standing organiser, split into 'registered' and 'independent' branches.² The difference between the two unionists was that while Tsele began to drift away from the Party, Nxumalo remained a firm adherent. By the mid 1940s, in consequence, the Party's influence was no longer restricted to parallel unions; some 'independents' shared office space with the CPSA, and appeared on public platforms with communists.

Left-leaning unions generated opposition not only through their attempts to mobilise workers on as many fronts as possible, but through their links with radical politics. More conservative elements in the Trades and Labour Council were suspicious of left-wing intentions. In the garment and furniture industries, where the registered unions were led by the well-known unionist Jimmy Bolton, communist attempts to gain influence in the parallels were strongly repulsed.³ Amongst some independent unionists there was also a strong aversion to left-wing unionism. Hubert Sishi, for example, rejected both the non-racialism and the radicalism of the Communist Party. In a revealing letter to the town clerk in 1943, where he strongly distanced himself from the

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1700, 467C, 6: Tsele to TC, 2 October 1945.

2. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.156; CAD K18, 105, NK30, file 59.

3. CAD K18, 105, NK30, 65(a) and (b).

communists, Sishi wrote: 'Our trade unions are charity organisations, and [we will] see that workers' meetings are not led to political chaos by irresponsible people.'¹

An interesting aspect of the early unions was their organisation along industrial lines. A lone exception was the Natal African General Labourers' Union (NAGLU) set up by Philip Thompson in the mid 1940s. One might have expected high job turnover amongst African workers to have encouraged general unionism, operating across sectors and seeking to unite workers behind a strong political message. This had been the model of ICU politics in the late 1920s, but a similar phenomenon failed to gain momentum during the 1940s. In 1948 NAGLU continued to function, but its organiser operated from a box on the pavement in the Indian commercial centre of the city.² The rest of the war-time unions operated within industries. They drew on common work experiences in particular sectors. The unions were also pushed in an 'industrial' direction by labour law. Legally recognised collective bargaining could only take place within industries, and the Wage Board operated similarly.

Beyond their common operation on industrial lines the various union types were organised in diverse ways. Some parallels, for example those in the garment and furniture industries, were practically inactive. Others, for example in the chemical industry, were highly active.³ On the whole, with the backing of the registered unions, parallels gained easier access to the shopfloor and to stop-order subscription facilities than the independent unions. Access to factories or compounds required the approval of management and indunas ('boss-boys'), whose autocratic rule was threatened by active union organisation. As a result of restricted access, many of the independent

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5: H.S. Sishi to Mayor, 23 Nov. 1943.
 2. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.105.
 3. Ilanga, 13 Apr. 1946 and 22 June 1946.

unions held public meetings in town rather than at work. In 1942, for example, Myeza and Thompson launched the Natal African Iron and Steel Workers' Union (NAISWU) by setting up a table on a street corner in central Durban.¹ The more successful unions held regular monthly meetings at the Bantu Social Centre or the Methodist Institute. Two 'independent' unions with a notable record of such meetings were the African Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union (ACDWU), and especially the African Bakers' and Confectioners' Industrial Union (ABCIU). The ACDWU was organised initially by G. Zungu and D.G. Mahluli, but after an embezzlement scandal in 1944 Christopher Mbonambi was sent to Durban from Johannesburg to run the union.² The ABCIU, led by Jacob Nyaose and Duke Ngcobo, was particularly active.³ It was able to supplement regular branch meetings with workplace victories. After a series of threatened strikes in 1944-45, for example, this union secured substantial wage increases - over 100% - for the lowest paid bakery workers.⁴ But it was an uphill battle, which started with the sheer difficulty of collecting subscriptions in a context where employers were hostile, workers cautious, and resources scarce.

Union organisers had to work extremely hard, and deliver material benefits, to attract African workers into new practices of collective discipline and mobilisation. Durban's African workers were more accustomed to fighting capital by moving from one job to another, or by engaging in wildcat strike action. They took a lot of persuading to join unions which were relatively weak, legally unrecognised, and usually

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4: Chief Constable to TC, 30 June 1942.

2. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698-1700, 467C, 4-6; CAD K18 36, NK3, 46: paras. 3611-3632, and K18, 105, NK 30, 59.

3. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698-99, 467C, 4-5; 'Busy Bee', *Ilanga*, 16 December 1944; CAD K18, 35, NK3, 40: paras. 3091-3122, and K18, 104, NK 30, 12.

4. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5 and CAD NTS 7684, 210/332; *Natal Mercury*, 3 October 1944; *Inkundla*, 28 February 1945; *Ilanga*, 6 April 1946.

led by middle class figures rather than those who had risen through the ranks of manual labour. Even if African workers could be persuaded to join, their meagre pay placed tight limits on union resources. Alfeus Mfeka, a 'parallel' section organiser for the Rope and Mat Workers' Union, captured the essence of African trade unionism during the 1940s when he said: 'If you plant a crop you have to sweat first, and then if you get a crop it is alright.'¹

5.4. CONCLUSION

In the volatile conditions of the early war years, African workers participated in intense workplace struggles. New forms of worker consciousness, identity and organisation were generated through these encounters. Conclusions on these developments, however, must remain tentative, for the analysis of this chapter has focused on worker-leaders and trade unionists, rather than on ordinary workers. Paucity of evidence has forced the rank-and-file into a rather passive role, and there is always the danger of transposing the expressions and activities of leaders on to workers more generally as a group. Yet for the first time in Durban's history we can begin to discern, through the collective action of strikers and union members, signs of a distinctive 'worker' consciousness amongst Africans across a wide range of jobs in both the secondary and tertiary sectors. Industrial strife during the war signalled a heightening of class conflict, focused on wage exploitation and working conditions. Increasingly reliant on wage labour, experiencing erosion of real wages, and perceiving the vulnerability and prosperity of the dominant class, African workers embarked on strike action and union organisation to counter their subordination. They forced employers

1. CAD K18, 34, NK3, 39: paras. 3032-3054.

and the state to respond with new strategies for defeating and neutralising this challenge. Strategic counter-reactions from within the dominant class successfully stifled the momentum of African worker struggles from 1943 onwards. Yet some of the union initiatives survived; and Jacob Nyaose convincingly claimed in 1944 that the unions were more influential vehicles of African demands and aspirations than any other political organisation at that time.¹

The activities of non-racial, parallel and independent trade unions during the war challenged employers in ways that strikes did not. Strikes caused disruption, and production losses; union initiatives were feared more for what they could become.² Furthermore, these unions confronted and exploited the registered unions' neglect of African interests. In response, some employers and some registered industrial unions were, for differing reasons, not averse to the unionisation of African workers, as long as this occurred in a controllable way.

Who dominated the emerging organisations of African workers was therefore a vital consideration. Non-racial unionism carried the greatest potential threat to both employers and more privileged workers. But there was just too much stacked against mobilising workers inter-rationally. Those parallel and independent unions which emerged directly from the worker assertiveness of the early war years reflected the logic of a racially segmented workplace. With varying degrees of success these two kinds of unions worked against numerous obstacles to lay the foundations of organisation amongst African workers. Much depended on the commitment and ideological persuasion of the small number of union leaders. Most of the independent unions did

1. 'Busy Bee', *Ilanga*, 16 December 1944.

2. CAD NTS 7670, 86/332/3: NC Durban to CNC, 15 March 1943.

not last beyond the war years; the parallels had a better success rate. A band of committed unionists continued to operate amongst African workers into the late 1940s. This chapter has focused on worker struggles; it is now time to situate these within the broader picture of African politics during the Second World War.

CHAPTER SIX

ON THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW WORLD? THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND AFRICAN COMMUNITY POLITICS

‘We live in stirring times. We see falling all around us bastions that have stood the test of time for generations. We realise we are on the threshold of a new world.’

Don Mtimkulu addressing a conference of African teachers,
Durban, 1942.¹

6.1. INTRODUCTION

African worker struggles were part of a broader ferment of war-time community politics, three aspects of which are addressed in this chapter. Firstly, the war effort injected a distinctive dynamic of loyalty and subversion into the politics of Durban’s subordinate class. An offshoot of this was the cultivation of a fragile ‘Non-European’ unity politics, which sought to draw on the commonality of oppression suffered by Indians and Africans. The issue of African-Indian relations, addressed from a number of angles, was to become an increasingly prominent theme in African politics during the 1940s. Secondly, the war period saw intensified assertions of urban citizenship by African leaders. This occurred as the over-stretched Durban System was being superseded by new racial zoning schemes which had drastic implications for the already restricted access of Africans to urban rights and resources. At the same time, African urbanisation accelerated, squatters occupied new urban space, and Africans made growing commercial and material demands on the city. All this fed into new and

1. ‘Teachers and the People’, Ilanga, 18 July 1942.

distinctive forms of urban African political culture, redefining the notions of 'community' and 'nation'. The third section of the chapter focuses on the shifting ideas and practices of African nationalism in Durban. A younger generation of intellectuals and activists popularised a different world-view from the dominant ethnic paradigm of the 1930s. By the mid 1940s, the main forms of African politics in Durban reflected the moral climate of the war, the growth of an urban proletariat, and the gathering rejection by the African middle class of segregation as a form of economic and political exclusion.

6.2. RESPONSES TO WAR: LOYALTY, SUBVERSION AND BLACK UNITY

The issue of African participation in the war effort provided an important public platform. From mid-1940, the government publicised plans to recruit Africans, as in World War One, for unskilled and unarmed military tasks.¹ In June that year, George Champion drew around 1,000 people to a Durban meeting on this issue, prior to attending a national conference of the African National Congress (ANC).² In keeping with other ANC leaders, Champion demanded that Africans should participate in the war only if they were to be armed and accorded equal status with white soldiers. Africans, he believed, wished to 'deal with Hitler', but only if they were entitled to 'fly aeroplanes and shoot cannons.' The meeting voted to boycott recruitment, as long as Africans were disarmed and restricted to unskilled military labour. Even the moderates on the Native Locations Advisory Board (NLAB) held this view.³

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1. M. Roth, "'If You Give Us Rights We Will Fight": Black Involvement in the Second World War', South African Historical Journal 15 (1983), pp.92-93.
 2. The following details and quotation are from NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4: Champion to Mayor, 25 June 1940; NTS 7606, 49/328, 1: Det. Constables Etheridge and Sanders to Officer in Charge, C.I.D., Durban, 2 July 1940; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1558, 315H, 5: W. Johnson to Executive Committee, BSC, 4 August 1940.
 3. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2 NLAB Minutes, 26 June 1940.

Until 1943, when recruiting ceased, Natal provided only 7,000 volunteers out of a total of 80,000 African recruits countrywide.¹ Most came from rural areas, driven by the drought of the early war years. Lack of political interest in the war was reinforced by the meagre pay offered to African soldiers, which was roughly the same as that paid to migrant workers on the gold mines.² Natal's scant contribution to the Native Military Corps angered government officials. The Native Affairs Department had put great store in the recruiting power of Mshiyeni kaDinizulu, the Paramount Chief of the amaZulu and head of a 'nation' with a proud military history.³ With this in mind, Mshiyeni was accorded special status in the Native Military Corps, but he proved a reluctant and ineffectual recruiter, apparently deliberately.⁴ Figures for African military recruitment in Durban are not known. But it seems that the response was minimal. This was certainly true for the volunteer Civilian Protection Services which patrolled Durban's streets during the blackout of 1942-43.⁵

From the beginning, there were exceptions to African antipathy towards the war. Some Durban workers and hostel residents made donations to the War Fund - how voluntarily it is not clear - through employers and hostel officials.⁶ Some pledged loyalty to the British king, in an anachronistic throwback to colonial benevolence.⁷ Perhaps most intriguing was the Bantu Women War Workers' Association, established

1. Roth, 'Give Us Rights', p.94.

2. Ibid., p.96.

3. L. Grundlingh, 'The Recruitment of South African Blacks for Participation in the Second World War', in D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (eds.) *Africa and the Second World War* (London, Macmillan, 1986), pp.188-190.

4. Roth, 'Give Us Rights', p.94; *Natal Mercury* 24 July 1942; CAD NTS 248, 78/53/2, 1: NAD memo, 'Succession to the Late Chief Solomon', 1 June 1945.

5. CAD NTS 7732, 262/333: Report of Crime Committee, January 1943, evidence of A.I. Kajee and C.O. Thompson.

6. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2: NLAB Minutes, 27 November 1940 and 11 December 1940; Undated (probably 1940/41) *Natal Mercury* reports in Killie Campbell Newscippings, Book 35, p.147.

7. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2 NLAB Minutes, 27 September 1939.

by Sibusisiwe Makhanya in 1940, and supported by Daughters of Africa stalwarts like Angeline Dube, wife of John Dube.¹ This body was an offshoot of Makhanya's Bantu Youth League, a community project fostering thrift and handicraft amongst African women. The main aim of the War Workers' Association was to 'knit and sew ... comforts' for African soldiers.² Predictably, this project received extensive coverage in the white press. The Association was granted window-space in a large department store in West Street; passersby could peer at African women knitting garments in front of a South African flag and a Union Jack.³

Overall, however, Makhanya's Association provided but cold comfort for the authorities. Widespread indifference to African recruitment in Natal was compounded by subversive rumours.⁴ During 1940, fearing invasion, a 'large number' of Durban's Africans talked of leaving their jobs for rural homesteads, while others rushed to the post office or the banks to withdraw their savings.⁵ Others drew courage from the hearsay that the Zulu king, Dinizulu, exiled from Natal after the 1906 Bambatha uprising, was alive and well in Germany. He would return to distribute the land and houses of Natal's whites to Africans.⁶ According to another rumour, Hitler would pay African workers ten shillings a day (more than twice the current pay of dock workers). White Durban expressed alarm that the ubiquitous, docile 'kitchen boy' might believe such 'fantastic' stories.⁷ During 1942, with Japanese attacks on Durban a distinct

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1. Details are from Natal Mercury and Ilanga articles from late 1940 and early 1941 in Killie Campbell Newsclippings, Book 35, pp.14, 136 and 150.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. See undated Natal Mercury photograph, Killie Campbell Newsclippings, Book 35, pp.136.
 4. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3 NAB Minutes, 11 June 1940; NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2 NLAB Minutes, 26 June 1940.
 5. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/2 NLAB Minutes, 26 June 1940.
 6. A similar rumour did the rounds during World War I. See Cope, 'Origins of Inkatha', p.432.
 7. Natal Daily News, 18 April 1940 and 1 May 1940; Natal Mercury, 24 May 1940; Couzens, New African, p.208.

possibility, there were reports of support for Japan as a liberating power.¹

In a semi-literate society, gossip was a powerful force. The authorities had to counter it. Soon after war broke out in September 1939, Durban's Native Commissioner instituted fortnightly propaganda meetings with 'representative Natives' and with 'indunas from big firms and compounds'.² Interest in these gatherings soon diminished. The Native Affairs Department then produced a war news bulletin, five hundred copies of which were distributed fortnightly. Far grander things, however, were on the mind of Hugh Tracey, a senior employee of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and an enthusiastic ethnographer. Hitherto, Africans had been a neglected target audience of the SABC. Now, radio offered a propaganda solution to subversive rumours. It could act as a 'newspaper for the illiterate'.³ It could also provide a novel medium for Tracey's other hobbyhorse: the propagation of Zulu 'tradition' as a bulwark against 'detrribalisation' and cultural integration in the city.⁴ Tracey found a suitable ally in the Zulu Society. Not only did the Society see eye-to-eye with Tracey on re-creating 'Zulu custom'; its stance on the war was pleasingly loyal to 'King and Government'.⁵

The first Zulu broadcasts were made at the end of July 1940.⁶ Tracey controlled content; King Edward Masinga and, for a while, Herbert Dhlomo, were the announcers. The daily programme was an hour long, and consisted of pro-British war news, comment (often by a Zulu Society official on matters of 'Zulu Heritage') and

1. Natal Mercury, 21 August 1942, p.7; Azad, 'Militants', p.92.

2. Natal Mercury, 5 February 1940.

3. Couzens, New African, p.210.

4. CAD NTS 4514, 585/313, 2H: Memo by H.T. Tracey to Smit Committee (1941).

5. See for example, CAD NTS 7232, 137/326, 2: C.J. Mpanza to H. Lugg, 30 May 1940, and Note on Zulu Society by C. Faye, 6 June 1940.

6. Natal Mercury, 30 July 1940.

music.¹ The paucity of radio ownership among Africans presented a logistical problem, however. The programmes were therefore relayed by cable to the Bantu Social Centre and to communal areas in about sixty hostels and factories. Employers were asked to lend radios to their domestic servants at specified times when the Zulu programme was broadcast.² Without further research, the impact of the radio on African politics and consciousness during the war is difficult to gauge. The radio became just one of many sources of new ideas generated during the war. Certainly, the authorities believed in radio's effectiveness: at the height of the Japanese invasion scare in mid-1942, the service was extended to Sunday mornings.³

Prospects for radical non-racialism?

One can be sure to find, in the radio programmes between 1939 and 1941, more than passing reference to the activities of the Non-European United Front (NEUF). The Front pungently opposed participation in the war; and it sought to mobilise around black unity. Both features were potentially very threatening to the authorities. A Durban branch of the Cape-based NEUF had been launched in 1939, a move which attracted keen interest from the police.⁴ In strident terms, with a Marxist language shaped by the revival of the Durban Communist Party, the Front preached its gospel of 'non-European' struggle against segregation and mass poverty.⁵ Its proposed tactics included

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1. Couzens, New African, pp.208-9; Ilanga, 25 October 1941.
 2. Couzens, New African, pp.208-9; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1558, 315H, 5: W. Johnson to Executive Committee, BSC, 4 August 1940.
 3. Natal Mercury, 24 July 1942.
 4. See G. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), pp.179-192; and correspondence in NA CNC 93, 64/35, N1/9/3 and NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4.
 5. See C.I. Amra's letter to Ilanga, 10 May 1941.

strikes, boycotts and resistance campaigns.¹ The key figures in the local organisation were young Indian professionals, students and workers, including D.A. Seedat, H. Naidoo, C.I. Amra, M.D. Naidoo, and M.Gandhi. They were frustrated by the merchant-dominated politics of the Natal Indian Association. They saw their political base in the Communist Party and in the trade unions that had begun to organise Indian workers.² From its inception, the United Front also strove to attract an African following and to influence African politics. Left wingers Philemon Tsele, C.B.I. Dhladla and Stephen Dhlamini were elected on to the Durban committee.³ Some of the Front's Indian activists attended the national ANC conference held in Durban in December 1939, and broached joining the Natal ANC.⁴ United Front handbills were printed in English and Zulu, and both Indians and Africans attended its meetings.⁵

These were unprecedented developments in black politics in Durban. They carved out a new terrain, far removed from the mutually exclusive worlds of the Natal Indian Association and the Natal ANC or the Zulu Society. Mirroring some of the war-time unions, Indians and Africans (admittedly, in a minority) were united in a common organisation. This came at a time when the outcome of the war was unclear, when destabilising rumours were rife, and the loyalty of Africans and Indians to the war effort was highly questionable.

The NEUF spoke out strongly against black participation in the war effort. The tone and content of this message differed from the African nationalist stance, which -

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1. U. Mesthrie, 'Indian Responses in Natal to Non-European Unity Moves, 1927-1945', paper to Workshop on Natal in the Union Period, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, October 1988, p.9.
 2. Ibid., pp.5-6; Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, Chs.3 and 5.
 3. Mesthrie, 'Indian Responses', p.13.
 4. T. Karis and G. Carter, 'South African Political Materials Microfilm', Reel 7a, 2, DA14, 30/3: J. Calata's Minute book of ANC activities, 1937-1943.
 5. See NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: United Front handbills, and Chief Constable to TC, 27 February 1941.

although critical - saw the war ultimately as a fight for freedom and as a moral bargaining tool against the South African state. The Front viewed the war as a clash between rival, capitalist imperialisms. Consequently, the black masses had no interest in this struggle and should boycott it.¹ The NEUF's programme had the potential to tap into African hostility towards the war.

To propagate its ideas of non-European unity and rejection of the war, the Front called numerous public meetings. This contrasted with the ANC and the ICU, whose public activities were infrequent during the early war years. The United Front's main gatherings were in Nicol Square, soon dubbed 'Red Square' by its followers. Meetings were also held in parks and public places throughout central Durban.² This aggressive public politicking was accompanied by tactics not used in African politics to date. Loudspeakers amplified speeches, banners proclaimed slogans.³ Music was played over the public address system to attract passersby; and lorries drove around Indian and African residential areas publicising meetings. Unlike the African organisations, which had little money for politics and customarily relied on handbills and the pull of a speaker's name to attract a crowd, the Front had access to skills and resources amongst wealthier Indians and white communists. Each meeting was treated as a media event. The tempo of organised black politics was intensified.

The authorities were divided over how to react.⁴ The municipality had strict

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: Chief Constable to TC, 27 February 1941; Ramsamy, 'Communist Party', pp.85-89.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: H.A. Naidoo to TC, 24 November 1941.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: Chief Constable's report on mass protest meeting, Nicol Square, 13 January 1941.
 4. This paragraph draws on NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: Chief Constable's report on mass protest meeting, Nicol Square, 13 January 1941; Mayor to Minister of Interior, 5 February 1941; TC to SAP, 17 June 1941; Major A.J. Smart to Mayor, 19 June 1941 and 16 July 1941; Memorandum to Town Clerk by W. Howes, 24 June 1941; Mayor to Major Smart, 26 June 1941; Chief Constable to TC, 13 August 1942.

bylaws governing African public meetings; those for Indians and whites were more flexible (and said nothing specifically about inter-racial gatherings!). Control of 'subversive' movements was ultimately taken out of municipal hands during the war. It was vested in the Minister of the Interior, who seemed curiously hesitant to take action against the United Front in Durban. As a result the authorities were inconsistent, and the Front exploited this to the full. During 1940 the widespread circulation of a militant anti-war pamphlet resulted in the arrest of D.A. Seedat in Durban and Yusuf Dadoo in Johannesburg.¹ But the Durban municipality allowed protest meetings against these arrests - one such gathering drew around 3,000 people.² During 1940-41, many meetings in public parks were proscribed, but those at Nicol Square proceeded unhindered even though they were usually the largest of all.

The municipality's quandary in responding to the United Front's anti-war campaign was resolved from an unexpected quarter. Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 forced the Communist Party, and the NEUF with it, to change its stance.³ Virtually overnight, the Party became a vocal supporter of the Allied forces, which now included the Soviet Union. It was a turnaround which tested the loyalty of Party members, let alone those who had heard the war being denounced at United Front meetings.⁴ Damaging perhaps in the short-term, this change of tack also brought benefits to the Communist Party. Municipal and police attitudes shifted from hostility to acquiescence and even support. In 1941-42, support for the Soviet Union even

1. Mesthrie, 'Indian Responses', p.14.

2. Roux, *Rope*, 308-9; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: Handbills about jailing of Dadoo and Seedat, 26 February 1941 and 11 May 1941; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: Chief Constable to TC, 27 February 1941.

3. Azad, 'Militants', p.92. From this time the United Front effectively dissolved. Its leading figures now concentrated their energies in the revived Communist Party, in the trade union movement, and in the Nationalist Bloc of the Natal Indian Congress.

4. Ramsamy, 'Communist Party', pp.85-89.

became fashionable in some ruling class circles. The Party entered a new phase of open operation in its mostly clandestine history. A key figure in these developments was the lawyer Rowley Arenstein, who had moved to Durban from Johannesburg.¹ The Party's change of mind on the war, which was indicated most clearly in its 'Defend South Africa' campaign of 1942, brought it greater respectability and a larger following. Notwithstanding the pro-German rumours and the earlier propaganda of the NEUF, the Party was able to play on both black and white fears of a German victory in North Africa and Europe, and of a Japanese invasion of South Africa. It was indeed ironic that the Communist Party's high profile during 1941-42 may have derived, at least in part, from the propaganda of Tracey's radio service.

The Communist Party joined the war effort primarily to defend Soviet socialism, and so ensure a 'progressive solution to the war.'² Party organisers staged a 'Red Army' dance and sold pro-Soviet lapel badges to raise funds.³ But the Indians and Africans who attended the Party's public meetings were attracted more by other aspects of communist politics: the commitment to trade union organisation, the critique of segregation, the affirmation of non-racialism, and the demand for universal suffrage. In a structural sense, the Party's popularity represented a growing class identity amongst Indian and African workers. This was more the case for the stabilised Indian industrial proletariat than for high-turnover African workers. In a political sense, the Party attracted followers by campaigning for a range of workplace and community issues, with a vigour unmatched by any other liberatory organisation at the time.

Active in trade unions and in the NEUF since the late 1930s, communists gave

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1. Interview with T.H. Gwala by T.A. Nuttall, 13 September 1990.
 2. Ramsamy, 'Communist Party', pp.85-89.
 3. Edwards, 'Recollections', pp.70-71.

their Party an unprecedented public profile during 1942. They effectively exploited the political space that had been opened up by the Party's patriotic, pro-war stance. Meet the Communists was one of the cheaply priced Party pamphlets, printed in English and in Zulu, which did the rounds at this time.¹ But most impressive were two rallies staged during the year: a May Day celebration and a Defend South Africa march. Since 1938, communists - George Ponen in particular - had organised May Day celebrations for 'non-Europeans'. In 1942, the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) took over the event, and communists in the TLC organised 'the biggest May Day demonstration that had ever taken place in Durban.'² Durban was 'plastered' with May Day posters. Indian, African and even white workers marched from Red Square to the City Hall, where 'revolutionary songs' were sung in support of worker solidarity and the war against fascism. Just over two months later, the Party organised a large and explicitly pro-war march, followed by a City Hall rally which was attended by 3,000 people. Marching workers carried banners proclaiming "'Open Second Front in Europe"; "Air Raid Shelters for All"; "Death to Fascist Invaders"; "Arm Non-Europeans"; "Down with Colour Bar"; "For a Hundred Percent Trade Unionism"; and "Skilled Training for All".'³ Outside the City Hall a soldier sang 'stirring songs'; inside were sketches of famous South African and foreign communists. The rally was addressed by Harry Naidoo and Wilson Cele of Durban, and by George Findlay and Edwin Mofutsanyana from the Transvaal. Another war-related meeting at Currie's Fountain in September attracted an African and Indian crowd of 3,000 people.⁴

1. Ibid., p.80.

2. Ibid., p.81, quoting from an interview with a Party member active in the 1940s; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 134, 2: E. Shanley to TC, 27 April 1942.

3. Natal Mercury, 6 July 1942. See also Edwards, 'Recollections', pp.81-2; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 134, 2: A. Israel to TC, 9 June 1942, and R. Arenstein to TC, 11 June 1942.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 134, 2: Chief Constable to TC, 29 September 1942.

Through events such as these the Party raised the momentum of organised politics to new heights. The communists caught the mood of uncertainty and expectation that the war created during 1942. From the end of that year, however, there was a noticeable decline in the size of the public events sponsored by the Communist Party. Campaigns like the Defend South Africa one were very difficult to sustain, and once the corner of the war had been turned in 1943 the authorities imposed tighter restrictions on left-wing meetings. Major Soviet victories over the Germans during 1943 also took the urgency out of pro-war campaigning. During the late war years, nevertheless, the Party maintained an impressive record of public meetings, either at Nicol Square, or in Durban's central parks, or in vacant lots in the industrial areas.¹ Local and visiting Party members - usually from the Transvaal - had many opportunities to hone their oratory. These meetings, which were commonly advertised by mobile loudspeakers, seldom attracted crowds of more than a hundred or so.² The Party itself remained vanguardist in nature; it did not court mass membership. Recruits were carefully scrutinised; they served a probationary six-month period, attended regular political classes, and performed allocated organisational tasks.³ By the end of 1943, Party membership countrywide totalled just 1,500.⁴ In Durban, in addition to public campaigning, the small core of Party activists worked through cell networks to increase their influence in trade unions and community organisations.⁵

As in previous periods, the Durban Communist Party faced the vexed issue of building working class politics in a racially divided society. In the early 1940s, Party

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1. See correspondence during 1943-1945 in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 134, 2, and in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5; Inkundla, 17 September 1944.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 143, 2: Acting Chief Constable to TC, 12 October 1945.
 3. Ramsamy, 'Communist Party', pp.85-89.
 4. Simons, Class and Colour, p.538.
 5. Edwards, 'Recollections', pp.78-79; Simons, Class, p.538.

activists pioneered Indian-African initiatives in the workplace and in communal responses to the war. From 1943 these non-racial initiatives were increasingly difficult to sustain, due to the salience of 'race' in Durban society and to specific dynamics within the Communist Party. The message of the Party was still sufficiently broad to continue attracting both Indians and Africans to meetings, including African domestic servants.¹ Yet there were few communal issues around which joint 'non-European' mobilisation could occur. One of the more promising was the experience of war-related food shortages.² During 1944 the communist-inspired People's Food Council, together with a very active Durban branch of the Housewives League, petitioned the municipality to take action against food profiteers and to distribute essential foodstuffs to the urban poor.³ Yet social experiences and identities in Durban were so strongly refracted through a racial prism that Party activists increasingly operated in parallel and distinct ways amongst Indians, Africans and whites.⁴ During the later war period, for example, the Communist Party called meetings specifically to demand the legal recognition of Africans as trade union members, and to fight for the cessation of the pass laws.⁵ These were explicit 'African' preoccupations.

The increasing predominance of 'Indian' communal campaigns on the agenda of

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1. See for example NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5: R. Arenstein to TC, 1 November 1943, and C. Mccunu to TC, 9 November 1943; Inkundla, 17 September 1944; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/572, 143, 2: Sergeant W.J. Payne to Chief Constable, 1 September 1944; Acting Chief Constable to TC, 12 October 1945; Major Smart to TC, 13 October 1945.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1055, 180H, 1: A.K.M. Docrat to TC, 28 April 1942.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/324, 47 sj, 1: Secretary, People's Food Council to Mayor, 14 April 1944. See same file for numerous petitions from the Housewives League for public meetings on the food issue. See also Inkundla, 31 July 1944.
 4. For the increasing importance of differential racial incorporation and experience during the 1940s, see Chapter Seven.
 5. On trade union recognition see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5: R.I. Arenstein to TC, 8 October 1943 and 22 October 1943. On the pass laws, see Arenstein to TC, 20 May 1944 and 30 May 1944. Durban was only marginally involved in the national anti-pass campaign of 1944. The Communist Party's Philemon Tsele was the only representative from Durban, and Natal, at the anti-pass conference held in May 1944. See Inkundla, 17 May 1944 and 31 May 1944.

the Communist Party reflected both the racial nature of Durban's society and the strong presence of Indians in the local Party. From 1942 onwards, Indian communists devoted increasing energy to fighting the municipality and the government over the assault on Indian residential and property rights in Durban. This was at once a populist struggle against segregation, and a political mobilisation of Indian workers as the most advanced segment of Durban's black working class.¹ In the process, prospects grew of capturing the Natal Indian Congress from the merchants, making it all the more imperative to engage in Indian community politics.² African members of the Communist Party were a definite minority and were not influential enough to counter the logic of these developments. In addition, two of the most prominent African communists, Wilson Cele and Philemon Tsele, were themselves heavily committed to African community politics. In other words their activities as communists were strongly shaped by their political experience as Africans. Within the Party, then, there was a continuing and dynamic tension between theory and political praxis. This occurred within a broader political and cultural context, where war-time experiences had the potential to change the ways in which ordinary people saw their lives.

War and popular consciousness

We have already touched on aspects of popular experience, when looking at the subversive rumours of the early war period. These provoked particular responses from

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1. Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, Ch.5; Edwards 'Recollections', pp.71-72.
 2. For developments in Indian politics see M. Swan, 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics, 1891-1948', in Marks, S. and Trapido, S. (eds.), The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa (London, Longman, 1987), pp.182-208; F.N. Ginwala, 'Class Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans, 1860-1946', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974; E. Pahad, 'Indian opposition movements in South Africa, 1927-46', DPhil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1972; D.R. Bagwandeem, 'The Question of Indian Penetration in the Durban Area and Indian Politics, 1940-1946', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983.

the state, and informed the cultural context of opposition politics. The rumours were part of a broader war-time experience in which social horizons were widened. New opportunities arose for assertiveness within the city. The war eroded some of the norms of colonial, white domination, and brought new levels of anxiety to the ruling class. An African domestic worker in Durban recalled, many years later, how her employers took to praying next to their beds during the war.¹ In myriad small ways, Africans perceived a new fluidity in social relations. The dominant class was vulnerable, and on the defensive. The prospects for usurpationary ideas and practices grew accordingly, if only in incoherent and unstructured ways.

One of the most important influences on popular experience was the large number of troops who passed through Durban on their way to North Africa or the East. Between 1940 and 1942 an estimated one and a half million soldiers docked there.² As many as 30,000 men were disembarked at any one time; their physical presence was matched by rising levels of drunkenness and lawlessness. Business for ricksha pullers was brisk as foreign soldiers broke 'white' social conventions by patronising black prostitutes and shebeens.³ The presence of large numbers of soldiers was a clear signal to Durban's underclasses that something momentous was taking place in the world. Not only did the soldiers undermine unwritten social mores, but they provided Africans with new reference points.⁴ During the dock strikes, for example, African workers described how visiting soldiers had been shocked at their working and living conditions.⁵ Massed ingoma dancing took on a new social role as entertainment for

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1. KCAV 308: Interview with J. Hadebe, 26 April 1981, translated by E.R. Dahle.
 2. CAD NTS 7732, 262/333: Report of Crime Committee, January 1943.
 3. CAD NTS 7732, 262/333: Report of Crime Committee, January 1943, evidence of A I Kajee; NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/3 NLAB Minutes, 29 April 1942 and 23 December 1942.
 4. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', p.16.
 5. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 1: Notes of meeting, Bell Street barracks, 29 July 1942.

foreign troops. On 31 May 1942, for example, 8,000 troops watched a special display of dancing, thanking the dancers afterwards with 'three cheers'.¹

Visiting soldiers were victims of, and participants in, an unprecedented crime wave which hit Durban in 1942.² The incidence of robbery and assault rose to such levels that the police launched an official enquiry. In so far as theft was a form of direct action to alleviate impoverishment, it can be located in the same set of circumstances which precipitated the 1942 strikes. The high crime rate also indicated a breakdown of control. In the Jacobs area in 1942, for example, the poorly armed white volunteers of the Civilian Protection Services were regularly beaten up by Indian or African gangsters.³ In the Overport district, fortified with liquor and aided by the blackout, off-duty African domestic workers strolled the streets and attacked 'just anyone they see'.⁴ Durban's understaffed police force fought a losing battle against drunkenness and crime. Anxiety and uncertainty amongst the city's rulers was matched by confidence and assertiveness amongst rank and file Africans.⁵ Early in the war, when the Native Commissioner held meetings to explain the conflict, one person present boldly requested that the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, address the city's Africans via radio.⁶ Later in the war, a police anti-crime drive amongst Africans led to the confiscation of a range of awesome homemade weapons, ranging from a full-length sword to ornately carved knives and spears. When asked why they carried such weapons, Africans commonly replied that they, like white soldiers, should be armed

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1694, 467, 5: NWO's report, 12 June 1942.

2. CAD NTS 7732, 262/333: Report of Crime Committee, January 1943.

3. Ibid., evidence of C O Thompson.

4. Ibid., evidence of A G Wills.

5. Edwards, 'Recollections', p.67; H.D. Kannemeyer, 'The New Bantu Society in Natal - its Civilisation and Culture, 1810-1942', D.Litt. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1946, p.807.

6. Natal Mercury, 9 February 1940.

for 'protection'.¹

The effects of the war on the popular consciousness of Africans were not all of the militant sort. In 1944, the city's Africans flocked in their thousands to the municipally-organised Thanksgiving Cavalcade through central Durban. The 'Bantu section' of the crowd - it was racially segregated - pushed £1,800 worth of pennies into collection tins.² Officials were pleased at this 'loyal' signal from the city's Africans. But the Cavalcade can be interpreted in another way. The African crowd there represented the heightened awareness and expectations that had built up during the war. The Communist Party's pro-war campaigns, the impact of visiting soldiers, and the war propaganda of the SABC, among other things, had drawn Africans into an issue of worldwide significance. Africans in the Cavalcade crowd were claiming their share of this significance, with all the ambiguities that entailed.³ During the victory celebrations a year later, Herbert Dhlomo, Durban's premier contemporary African poet, captured these ambiguities of hope, assertion, bitterness and exclusion:

'Not for me the Victory celebrations!
Not for me,
Ah! not for me.
I who helped and slaved in the protection
Of their boasted great civilisation;
Now sit I in tears 'mid celebrations
Of a war I won to lose,
Of a peace I may not choose.'
...

'Now that the war is ended,
Begins my war!
I rise to fight unaided
The wrongs I abhor!'⁴

1. *Natal Daily News*, 14 February 1942.

2. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/3, NLAB Minutes, 6 September 1944.

3. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 19 August 1944.

4. Two extracts from Dhlomo's 'Not for Me', reproduced in Visser and Couzens (eds.), *Dhlomo*, pp.376-77.

The Second World War, then, generated a mixture of loyalty and subversion in Durban. This occurred at the level of organised politics and in the fluid medium of popular consciousness. Amongst political activists, communists tried hardest to turn the war issue into one of mobilisation, first by campaigning against participation and then, once the Soviets joined the fray, by urging support for the Allies. These campaigns were run according to non-racial principles and tactics. Yet the racially-ordered nature of Durban's society, and the changing conditions of the war after 1942, made this strategy difficult to sustain. Thereafter, war-related issues tended to merge into the nebulous world of popular culture, where ordinary people gained international perspectives and developed a new assertiveness. In the meantime, Durban's urban crisis had intensified further, giving rise to another set of developments in African politics.

6.3. ASSERTIONS OF URBAN CITIZENSHIP

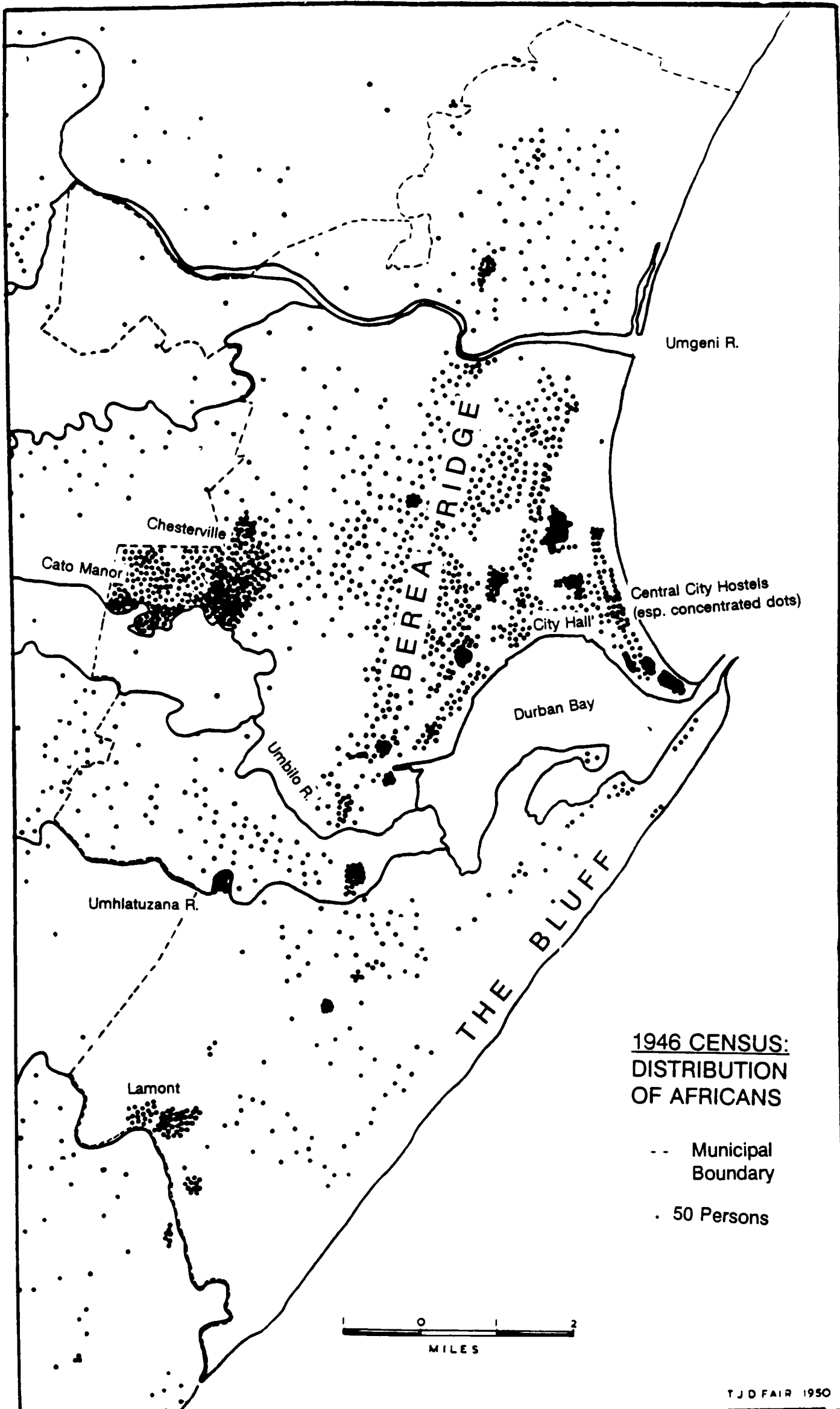
World War Two saw rapid demographic and economic growth, with important implications for the over-strained 'Durban System'. In comparison with other cities, Durban experienced similar signs of urban crisis, especially the shortage of housing among the poorer strata. With the exception of the war-time strikes, however, Durban saw little of the intensive African politicking around urban social reproduction that characterised, for example, the urban areas of the Transvaal.¹ In Durban, strategies of resistance and accommodation remained informal and dispersed; they did not easily cohere into collective, organised action. If we look, in the absence of alternative evidence, at those educated figures who claimed to lead, or speak for, Africans, we

1. Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp.11-30; P.L. Bonner, 'The Politics of Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-52', paper to South African Historical Society conference, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.

gain important insights into popular African perceptions and aspirations concerning the city. Unlike the 1930s, and reflecting the changing socio-political climate, these leaders were less willing or able to concentrate on elitist demands; they spoke more generalising languages of populism and nationalism. Elitism did not disappear, but it was absorbed into widening perceptions of 'class' and a deepening sense of collective struggle over the resources of the city. The middle class African leaders expressed these developments in two main ways. The first was to assert the 'right' of Africans to 'urban citizenship'; the second was to fight for a 'national share' of the urban cake.

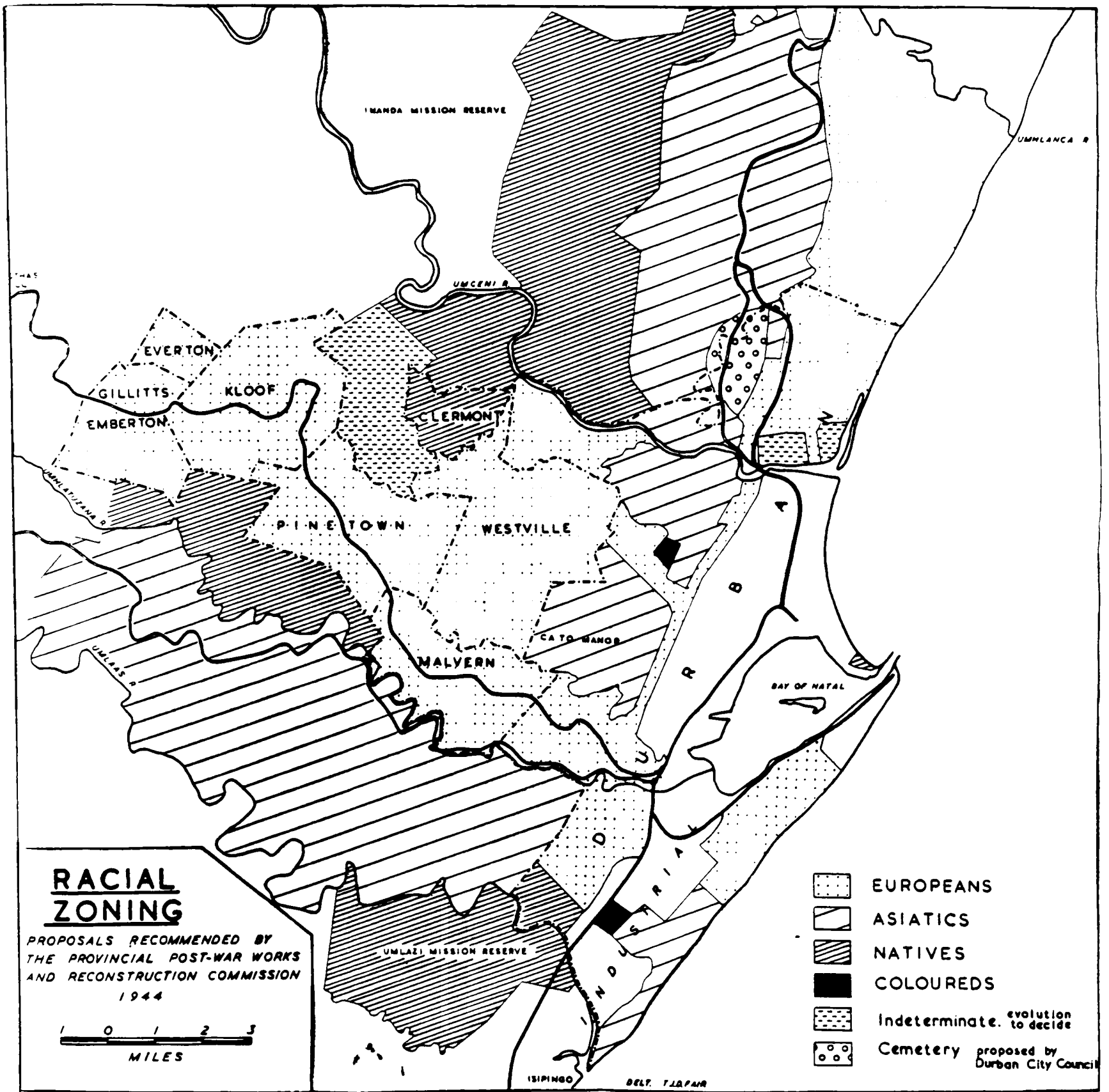
The Second World War generated an urban storm which finally shipwrecked the floundering Durban System. The town planners' response to the 70% growth in Durban's African population between 1936 and 1946 was disorganised and inadequate, even if one takes into account the constraints of war. Native Administration officials acknowledged a growing core of 'permanent' Africans in Durban, but the municipality remained wedded to providing minimal formal housing.¹ Between 1944 and 1946, 1,265 municipal houses were built at the new township of Chesterville.² With the exception of 500 rooms added to municipal hostels, this was the only official African housing built since the extensions to Lamont in 1938. One result was that municipal and private hostels became crammed beyond capacity (see Map 4). By 1943 at the Somtseu Road hostel, for example, there were ten to twelve men per room, 'their faces almost touching while they slept'.³ A second consequence was the mushrooming of shanty settlements to the north, west and south of the Berea ridge. African squatters made a

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1. CAD NTS 406, 915/56, 1B: Native Affairs Commission hearing in Durban on Umlazi Mission Reserve, 10-13 December 1945; P. Maylam, 'The "Black Belt": African Squatters in Durban, 1935-1950', Canadian Journal of African Studies 17, 3 (1983), pp.420-421, 424-425.
 2. University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.352.
 3. NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/3 NLAB minutes, 31 March 1943.



Adapted from: University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1952), Map no.5.

Map 5. Durban, Racial Zoning Proposals, 1944



Source: University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1952), Map no.9.

roof for themselves wherever one could be made, preferably close to town and to work, and usually in areas unserved by the municipality. Map 4 indicates how widely dispersed African settlement was. In 1939 there were an estimated 1,000 African-occupied shacks in Durban; by 1946 this figure had climbed to 5,000.¹ Umkhumbane, the Booth Road district of Cato Manor, became the densest site of African squatting (see Map 4). As one official graphically put it, the shacks were 'built cheek by jowl, forming veritable rabbit warrens'.² In 1939 there were an estimated 2,500 African squatters there; in 1943 a municipal survey conservatively put the total at 'over 17,000'.³ Close to the city centre, to the southern industrial areas, and to the kitchens and gardens of white Durban, this shantytown was well-placed. Practically all the shacks were on Indian-owned land, parts of which were still cultivated by market-gardeners. There were other important concentrations of African squatters in the Clairwood area to the south, and in Durban North. The hostels system remained, but it was outstripped by the scale of African urbanisation. Officials vainly applied the pass laws to stem urban influx. The Pretoria government did not help matters by suspending these contentious regulations during the anxious months of 1942, when the course of the war hung in the balance.⁴ Durban was quick to re-implement the pass laws in 1943-44, in conjunction with new initiatives to 'peg' squatting in areas like Umkhumbane, making the occupation of unpegged sites illegal.⁵

But by then these ad hoc responses were being overshadowed in the official mind,

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1. Maylam, 'Shackled', p.15.
 2. CAD NTS 7732, 262/333: Report on Natives at Cato Manor and Newlands, June/July 1943, by C.A. Heald and T.J. Chester.
 3. University of Natal, Housing Survey, p.303.
 4. T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1987), pp.339-349, 540; Hindson, Pass Controls, pp.55-56.
 5. Maylam, 'Black Belt', p.423; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: City Council's draft memo to Broome Commission, 1947, sections 7.3-7.10; CAD NTS 7732, 262/333, NC Durban to CNC, 22 February 1944.

both at the municipal and the provincial levels, by radically new race zoning plans (see Map 5).¹ This 'group areas' thinking was at once an entrenchment of the Native Urban Areas Act, and an elaboration, extended to include Indians within its oppressive provisions. The motive was legally to preserve prime residential areas for whites, restrict Indian land purchases to designated areas, and - the provincial commission did not mince its words - 'eliminate ... the Native Slum at Booth Road'.² It was also proposed that Africans would be moved from the new township of Chesterville, as this now fell in an 'Indian' area. Indeed, all Africans in the western areas were earmarked for a massive relocation to a giant township at Umlazi south of Durban.³ Comparing Maps 4 and 5 indicates the implications for Africans of the proposed 'white corridor' from the city centre to Kloof. Indian property-ownership and residential presence was to be contained; Africans were to be hounded to the periphery where they could be better controlled.

For Indians, these proposals became legislative reality with the 1946 'Ghetto' law, the Indian Land and Tenure Act. In the process, Natal Indian Congress politics was radicalised.⁴ For Africans, the proposed 'solution' was far more momentous and costly; yet undecided, for it was subject to intense bureaucratic wrangling during the mid 1940s. By 1945, the legal status of Africans in Durban was increasingly insecure, despite all the evidence of African 'occupation' of urban space. Rapid urbanisation, the collapse of the Durban System, and the indeterminate birth of more oppressive zoning

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1. See University of Natal, Housing Survey, pp.405-409 for a summary of the war-time recommendations of the Durban Post-War Development Committee and the Provincial Post-War Works and Reconstruction Commission.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.408; Torr, 'Social History', pp.115-121.
 3. This idea had been mooted as early as 1941. See CAD NTS 4511, 585/313, 1, O: Memo of the City of Durban to the Smit Committee, 1941.
 4. Simons, Class, pp.551-552; Swan, 'Ideology', pp.202-204.

proposals, created a highly volatile situation. This was the context in which politicians advanced African claims for a greater stake in Durban's political economy.

Urban citizens and human rights

The notion of 'urban citizenship' gained currency as a way of asserting that Africans were fully-fledged Durban residents, entitled to land, houses, jobs and services. This was a political expression of the workplace struggles of the early war years. Reflecting the moral justifications of the War against Fascism, opportunities for accumulating urban skills and capital were increasingly perceived as a 'human right', not a privilege given or taken away by white officialdom.¹ There were many forums, both old and new, in which such claims were advanced. The more important of these included the Native Location Advisory Boards, government commissions (of which there were many), church assemblies, the Bantu Social Centre, the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, the Durban Native Traders' Association, the Natal Bantu Parents' Association, and the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union. There were also lively debates and demands in the columns of local newspapers like Ilanga lase Natal and Inkundla ya Bantu. Both established figures and newer arrivals on the political stage gave expression to African demands for full incorporation into Durban's civil society. Among the former were Advisory Board figures like George Champion and Arthur Sililo, both of whom gained seats on the Natives Representative Council during the war. Among the latter were the journalists Herbert Dhlomo, Jordan Ngubane, and Wilson Cele; the trade unionists Jacob Nyaose and Philemon Tsele; the teachers Don Mtimkulu, Manesseh Moerane and Selby Ngcobo; and the businessman, Cuthbert

1. 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 11 December 1943.

Motsemme.

The 'human rights' paradigm embraced a vision beyond segregation. It was a 'one city' approach which demanded racially unfettered opportunities for middle class and working class Africans in the local political economy. It drew on the universal sentiments of liberty, self-determination and human dignity embodied in the Atlantic Charter which was signed by the Allies in 1942. These ideas provided new reference points for an increasingly assertive urban discourse amongst African opinion-makers. Demands for the material and political advance of the African middle class were absorbed into populist idioms which claimed to represent the urban masses. The 'human rights' framework called into question all laws specifically designed for Africans, particularly the pass laws and the whole gamut of the Urban Areas Act.¹ Policy neglect of African housing, and the low-wage structure of African workers, were subject to mounting criticism.

Assertions of urban citizenship ranged from bringing Africans within the ambit of social welfarism to giving Africans direct political representation in municipal government. The demand for social welfare measures and for social services met with some sympathy in ruling class circles. Officials and liberals alike were alarmed by the potential political radicalism of urban poverty and hardship among a marginal African underclass. The important inter-departmental government commission during 1941-42, chaired by the secretary for Native Affairs, Douglas Smit, sought to provide socio-economic palliatives for the gathering crisis in many South African cities.² In 1943 the Natal branch of the Institute of Race Relations organised a special conference on the

1. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 19 May 1945.

2. CAD NTS 4509, 585/313, 1E, D. Reitz's speech, opening new Bantu Social Centre, 13 September 1941.

'urban African'. The keynote speaker was George Heaton Nicholls, who had recently been appointed Administrator of Natal. A key point made by Heaton Nicholls was that his earlier rural, 'tribal' solution to the region's class and race conflict needed to be reinforced with urban social welfarism. Such developments, he urged, were essential to counter the 'untraditional Nihilism' and 'unpredictable forces' of irreversible urbanisation.¹

By the time segments of officialdom came to endorse the necessity of socio-economic reforms, African leaders, including moderates on the Advisory Boards, had begun to make explicitly political demands. The central proposal was for direct African representation on the city council.² This demand had lain dormant since the heyday of the ICU during the late 1920s. In the 1930s more limited political objectives had predominated. The fluid conditions of war-time Durban resurrected and heightened African political aspirations. A key influence here was the African National Congress's African Claims, a document produced in 1943.³ A number of Durban figures, including Selby Ngcobo and Don Mtimkulu, helped to draft it. This charter unequivocally rejected the ideology of segregation, and comprehensively re-stated the demand for incorporation of Africans into South Africa's body politic.⁴ The insistence on direct municipal representation for Africans in Durban reflected a vision of a different social order, but also disillusionment with the entrenchment of urban segregation via racial zoning schemes. Indeed, by the mid 1940s, despite the high hopes

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1712, 467F, 1: Report of Natal regional conference of SAIRR, Pietermaritzburg, 2 August 1943.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/345, 49A, 8: NLAB memo to Native Affairs Commission, 30 November 1945; Inkundla, First fortnight, November 1945; CAD NTS 4540, 662/313, 1: Durban Joint Council executive committee report for 1946.
 3. African Claims in South Africa, reproduced in Karis and Carter, Protest, vol. 2, pp.209-222.
 4. A.W. Stadler, Political Economy of Modern South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), pp.148-9; Thompson, South Africa, p.182.

and the assertions of 'human rights' amongst urbanised Africans, daily experience and future prospects remained harsh, racial, and uncertain. In consequence, more narrowly nationalist assertions of urban citizenship also had a place in war-time Durban.

Urban citizens and a national share

The Second World War saw important developments in local variants of urban African nationalism. Sometimes, depending on the circumstances, the same individuals and organisations expressed both nationalist and humanist sentiments. Humanism tended to be the ideal, the vision. Nationalism tended to be the reaction, the defensive response, which mobilised around common experiences of exclusion and oppression. Struggles over urban space (land, housing) and commercial markets (trade, purchasing power) were the arenas most prone to nationalist overtones. When middle class politicians urged Africans to defend or fight for a 'national share' of the city, the focus of attention was usually on these two issues. In mobilising around such sentiments, Durban's African leaders targeted not only white rule, but increasingly pitted themselves against materially privileged Indians in the landowning and commercial class. A distinctive urban African nationalism, as well as an increasingly shrill tone of racial ethnicity had taken root in Durban by the mid 1940s.

The authorities' zoning scheme for a massive township at Umlazi struck at the heart of African access to urban space in the city proper. This had alarming implications for tens of thousands of Durban residents, and for the African farmers and tenants of the Umlazi Mission Reserve. Opposition to the proposed removals was spearheaded by African landowners, political leaders and Advisory Board members in Durban, and by the 'improving' farmers, entrepreneurs and clerics of the Natal Mission

Reserve Association. The key figures in the campaign were the Association's president, Albert Luthuli from Groutville; the Durban trader Henry Ngwenya; and three church ministers, Alfeus Zulu, Gideon Sivetye and G.C. Mdhladhla. Their utterances revealed a fascinating ideological mix.¹ They appealed to the segregationist paternalism of the Native Affairs Department in Pretoria, saying that the Umlazi Reserve had been granted in 'trust' to Africans for their 'own development'. Durban should not be allowed, they argued, to turn Umlazi into an 'urban slum'. Furthermore, the African 'nation' was entitled to land in the city itself. Durban should not rob Africans of the scarce land they already had; it should buy 'white' or 'Indian' land to solve the African housing crisis. The authorities were blamed for the crisis, but increasingly Indian land ownership was targeted as an obstacle to African 'progress'. A common refrain was that the zoning proposals divided the city up between whites and Indians, leaving Africans out.² Perceptions of racial competition were heightened and the growth of anti-Indianism was one consequence. Bound up with this were the elitist class perspectives of the African leaders, their fear of the urban masses and their demand for property rights. But middle class sentiments struck a wider chord too, expressing urban identities and interests within the burgeoning squatter communities. The campaign against shantytown removals spoke for thousands of the city's residents, insisting that Africans should maintain and extend their presence in the central city.

Similar ingredients for a parochial African nationalism developed in the commercial field. The consumer demands of the growing urban population offered many attractive

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1. Details and quotations in this paragraph are drawn from Natal Daily News, 12 December 1945; CAD NTS 406, 915/56, 1A: Memo from residents of Umlazi Mission Reserve to Native Affairs Commission, 28 November 1945, and Memo from Natal Mission Reserve Association to Native Affairs Commission, 28 November 1945; CAD NTS 406, 915/56, 1B: Native Affairs Commission hearing in Durban on Umlazi Mission Reserve, 10-13 December 1945, pp.33-47; Guardian 13 March 1947.
 2. See for example, 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 22 January 1944 and 29 September 1945.

opportunities for aspirant African traders. The Native Affairs files of the early 1940s bulged with licence applications from Africans for trading sites in the city centre.¹ The applicants wished to expand their operations beyond the small stalls of the municipal markets. It was, however, exceedingly difficult to break into formal, larger-scale trading. The Urban Areas Act and municipal bye-laws restricted African access to trading venues, licences, and capital; and Indian merchants had long dominated 'African' trade in Durban. As we have seen in previous chapters, aspirant African traders consistently failed to enlarge their businesses. The buoyant economy and fluid social context of war-time raised their aspirations to new levels. The Durban journalist, Herbert Dhlomo, expressed this well. He wrote of the centrality of the 'economic weapon' to the 'national struggle', and he urged that '[c]ulture, education and progress can only develop and sprout and flower out on the soil of economic strength. ... Money is Power, is god.'² Diverse meanings flowed from such pronouncements, but they coalesced around African 'national' advance. Successful African traders, in Dhlomo's eyes, were 'giants and patriots of the Race', even if wealth had come through exploitation.³ African traders readily deployed the logic of segregation in arguing that only Africans should trade in 'African' areas.⁴ Newspapers urged consumers to 'buy African'.⁵ Comments like these lent implicit support to ideas of racial zoning.

Like the contemporary 'economic movement' within Afrikaner nationalism, the ideology of 'national' advance entailed more than the success of large traders.⁶ What

1. See records of applications in CAD NTS 5756, 29/313L, I.

2. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 4 March 1944, 4 August 1945.

3. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 4 March 1944.

4. CAD NTS 585/313, 2H: A.W.G. Champion's memo to the Smit Committee (1941).

5. *Inkundla*, 17 November 1944, p.3.

6. D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948 (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), Parts 2 and 3.

was needed was a broad assault on the 'economic slavery' of the 'African race'.¹ Central to this was the demand for wage increases for African workers and semi-professionals. George Champion, for example, boldly told the Smit Committee in 1942 that 'the root of evil in Durban is low wages.'² This illustrated how sensitive community leaders were to the war-time strikes. But the stress on the earning - and hence the spending - capacity of Africans had commercial implications too. This was well understood not only by the larger traders, but by the hundreds of petty, often illegal, traders in the municipal markets and the shantytowns. Increasingly, people spoke of circulating and re-circulating money within the social boundaries of the 'African race'. The fullest institutional and political expression of this was to be found in the expanding co-operative movement.

African co-operatives during the war years were qualitatively different from those of the 1930s. Their essentially petit-bourgeois nature began to take on a more popular character, promising not only savings and accumulation, but economic transformation. A key representative of these developments was William Mseleku, the co-operative pioneer of the 1930s, who was to become the main apostle and facilitator of 'Co-operation' in the 1940s. During 1939 and 1940, with the assistance of the Adams College principal, Edgar Brookes, Mseleku completed a diploma in Co-operation Studies at Manchester, England.³ He returned to Durban in 1941, brimful with ideas of how South African blacks, like British workers and African Americans, could improve themselves through co-operative savings groups, buying clubs and stores.⁴ By

1. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 26 May 1945.

2. CAD NTS 585/313, 2H: A.W.G. Champion's memo to the Smit Committee (1941). Emphasis in original.

3. Rhodes House, Mss Afr.s.1427, LGAA Papers, 1, 1, ff.210-220: 'Friends of Africa: Southern African activities', May 1939; correspondence in CAD NTS 2717, 323/301: 1;

4. 'Open Letter to Africans', *Ilanga*, 5 April 1941. Subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

pooling meagre resources, he urged, 'the masses' could gain greater control over what, where and from whom they purchased everyday goods. Co-operatives offered a realisable strategy for politically weak and economically vulnerable proletarians, especially women who were largely excluded from wage labour, to increase their stake in the urban economy. Adversity and alienation were to be met with 'brotherhood and mutual help'. Co-operatives stood by 'little men' against 'big dealers'. They were vehicles for grassroots democracy, if run on the lines of 'one man, one vote' and without regard to 'race, creed or class.'

Mseleku's universalist rhetoric aside, co-operatives took time to root themselves, and they did so as ethnic phenomena within a racially organised local economy. The intended beneficiaries of co-operatives were rightly suspicious of such schemes, which could easily - and had in the past - become a front for aggrandizement by co-operative organisers. Yet by the end of 1944, Mseleku's evangelical zeal was paying dividends. His Natal Bantu Co-operative Advisory Council was hosting Durban meetings for up to thirty co-operatives and fifteen buying clubs.¹ In 1945, the 'co-operative movement' published a twenty four page celebratory magazine, Ukubambanisana (Working Together).² The cover, painted by local artist Gerard Bhengu, portrayed African aspirations, achievement and progress. The co-operatives had developed into a key economic strand of African national consciousness and collective action. Mseleku and his co-worker, C.J. Nakasa, epitomised a new generation of intellectuals and activists who achieved prominence during the war. The final section of this chapter examines this group and its political significance.

1. 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 25 November 1944.

2. See a copy of this in CAD NTS 7242, 168/326, 1. See also 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 7 April 1945.

6.4. YOUNG NATAL AND THE SHIFTING PARAMETERS OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM

During 1941 a number of letters and articles in Durban's newspapers called on 'Young Natal' to launch a political offensive against racial discrimination and ineffectual 'old guard' African leaders.¹ It is almost certain that the instigators of this campaign, writing under the pseudonym 'Open Conspiracy', were the Ilanga journalists Herbert Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane.² They were two of the most important local ideologues of a new war-time African Nationalism, or 'Africanism' as its proponents called it. In essence, this developing philosophy stressed African-led mass-based resistance against segregation and white domination. Africanism expressed the specific interests of a young and militant segment of the middle class, whose intelligentsia drew on a broad ideological heritage ranging from social democracy to the grassroots nationalism of the shantytowns.

Youthfulness was just one of the criteria of the social group appealed to by 'Open Conspiracy'. Furthermore, the definition of 'youth' was a fluid one. Dhlomo was thirty eight years old in 1941 and Ngubane was twenty four. Level of education and political stance were more important social boundaries of 'Young Natal'. Some members of the group had 'tails behind their names', to quote Rolfes Dhlomo's inimitable description of university graduates.³ All had matriculated at mission schools in Natal and elsewhere. They were a self-conscious educated minority, who designated themselves as 'intellectuals', a short-hand description for 'those who grapple with issues and try

1. Ilanga, 12 April 1941, 30 August 1941, 6 September 1941 and 8 November 1941.

2. For Dhlomo's biographical details, see Couzens, New African, chaps. 6 and 7; on Ngubane, see K.A. Eales, 'Jordan Ngubane, Inkundla Ya Bantu and the African National Congress Youth League, 1944-51', BA Honours essay, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1984, pp.15-16.

3. 'Rolling Stone', Ilanga, 12 May 1945. Rolfes was Herbert's brother, and editor of Ilanga.

to change the world around them.’¹ Politically, they were frustrated by the legacy of the 1930s: the organisational inactivity, and the compromises with segregation.² They were also spurred on by the moral climate of the war, and the apparent crisis in segregation caused by rapid African urbanisation.

The context of the war was crucial in generating clearly formulated challenges by ‘youth’ against ‘elders’. To be ‘youth’ was to confront racial discrimination, not find leverage within segregation. The call to ‘Young Natal’ was made in the forceful language of national liberation. This political message had more in common with the heritage of the ICU than the petitionary and accommodationist style of the African National Congress. An equal, rather than a subordinate, place for Africans in a future South Africa was a guiding demand of this re-formulated African nationalism. Defined both socially and politically, this small section of African ‘youth’ felt the pressing burdens of history on their shoulders. With all the self-assurance and conviction of a skilled yet frustrated young elite, the adherents of ‘young Natal’ believed themselves to be the true ‘patriots and protectors of the people.’³

What was the impact of ‘Young Natal’ on local politics? Clearly, much depended on their ability to exert organised pressure. Their ideas had been honed in the fledgling youth and student associations of the 1930s. As early as 1934, six hundred pupils, from African high schools in and around Durban, held a ‘conference’ at the Bantu Social Centre.⁴ Between 1936 and 1939, the Inanda Young Men’s Society, the Groutville Youth Movement, the Natal Bantu Students’ Association, the Durban Students’

1. Interview by T.A. Nuttall with T.H. Gwala, 16 August 1990.

2. *Ilanga*, 5 August 1939.

3. ‘X’, *Ilanga*, 24 April 1943.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/2/1142, 315H, 1: BSC Executive Committee minutes, 19 July 1934.

Association, and the Ex Fort Hare Students' group all held meetings at the same venue.¹ The first attempt to co-ordinate these initiatives into a wider thrust came with the formation of the National Union of African Youth (NUAY) during 1938-39.² The key figures were Jordan Ngubane, who had just matriculated from Adams College, and three Durban teachers, Manesseh Moerane, Simon Ngubane and Hawthorne Dhlomo. Ngubane recalled later:

'We often met in my mother's apartment in [the] Married Quarters, Durban, because we were too poor to afford the fees charged by the people who owned halls in the city. Our aim was to define our struggle in terms which had valid meaning in the lives of the masses of our people; to develop new methods of struggle and to involve our people in the fight against White domination in ways which would enable them to make effective use of their reserves of power: their numbers, labour power and, even, purchasing potential. We wanted a basis for co-ordinating action ... to start marching against race humiliation from where the generation of our fathers had been stopped.'³

There were many obstacles to launching a new organisation. Resources were scarce, and organised African politics was generally inactive. Despite its bold ideas and its national ambitions, the NUAY did not survive.⁴ Subsequently, Durban's African youth leaders made the strategic decision to invigorate the African National Congress as the vehicle of Africanism.⁵ Youthful agitation resulted in the formation, during 1943, of a Reconstruction Committee within the Natal African (formerly Native) Congress.⁶ Many young 'intellectuals' were co-opted on to this thirty-person Committee, an initiative which earned John Dube much praise in 'youth' circles. Yet the Reconstruction Committee proved ineffective, and disillusionment grew with the

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1556, 315H, 2: J.E. Stubbings to BSC Executive Committee, 13 October 1936; W.E. Johnson to BSC Executive Committee, 10 December 1937, 4 January 1938, 6 July 1938 and 10 August 1939.
 2. Walshe, *African Nationalism*, p.342.
 3. Ngubane, 'Collapse', pp.246-247.
 4. Ngubane, 'Collapse', pp.246-247; Eales, 'Ngubane', pp.16-17.
 5. See 'Intelligentsia Forms a New Party', *Ilanga*, 23 October 1943.
 6. Ibid.

elder politicians.

The Natal Congress Youth League (CYL) was formed in Durban in May 1944, as part of a countrywide drive to organise youth politically.¹ The following were elected to the first committee: Manesseh Moerane, Cuthbert Motsemme, Wilson Cele, Herbert Dhlomo, Selby Ngcobo, Jordan Ngubane, M.B. Mbatha and A.T. Habedi. Little is known about the last two people; Moerane and Ngcobo were teachers, Motsemme was a businessman, and Cele, Dhlomo and Ngubane were journalists. At the time of the launch, Moerane proclaimed that a 'revolution' had begun.² He called on 'teachers and nurses, clerks and workers, communist and Christian, to roll up, there is room here for all true sons and daughters of Africa.' Such populist language defined wide social boundaries for the CYL, but in reality the League's followers were a small and select social group. Moerane himself expressed this a few weeks later when he wrote of how the 'cream of the nation' had gathered to usher in a 'New Era' in Durban's politics.³

This pioneering claim was only partly true, for the Youth League failed to develop organisational momentum. The educational authorities soon revealed their dislike of the CYL's politics, when they threatened to fire Moerane and Ngcobo.⁴ The two teachers toned down their active involvement. Of the other key figures in the League, only Wilson Cele had much experience of active organisation, through links with the trade unions and membership of the Communist Party. Herbert Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane waged their political campaigns in the columns of *Ilanga* and *Inkundla ya Bantu*. The Natal Youth Leaguers operated more as individuals than as a cohesive group. Indeed,

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1. For national developments, see Bethuel Mnguni to editor, *Inkundla*, 17 March 1944 and 31 March 1944, recruiting for the African Youth League; 'Khanyisa', *Inkundla*, 31 May 1944, p.3; For details of the CYL launch, see 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 6 May 1944 and 3 June 1944; Eales, 'Ngubane', pp.23-25.
 2. 'Calling Young Natal', *Inkundla*, 29 April 1944.
 3. *Inkundla*, 17 May 1944.
 4. Editorial, *Inkundla*, 17 July 1944, p.2.

while their compatriots in Johannesburg were experiencing their first taste of mass politics in the squatter, education, and transport struggles of the late war years, Durban's activists were preoccupied with revamping the Natal Congress.¹ They played an important role, as we shall see later, in the Congress leadership battle of 1944-45. Otherwise, their organisational impact was limited.

This conclusion should not allow us to overlook the ideological impact of the Youth League. It was as intellectuals, primarily, that Durban's handful of Youth Leaguers made a vital contribution to changing the parameters of African nationalism during the war years. They set a new pace and charted new directions. Their Africanism was a complex amalgam of generational politics, class ambition, human rights principles, and racial-cultural mobilisation. To illustrate this, we shall focus on the writings of Herbert Dhlomo and to a lesser extent of Jordan Ngubane. They were the two most prolific ideologues of the Youth League position during the early to mid 1940s. Of the many themes that could be selected for analysis, two are particularly pertinent for our study: the relations between Africanism and 'Non-European' unity, on the one hand, and between Africanism and Zulu ethnicity, on the other. Both were critical issues in Durban's African politics at a time of rapid social and political change.

Africanism and black unity

The notion of 'the African' provided a central ideological buttress for Dhlomo and others in his group.² The idea was not so much a pan-African one, although that

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1. For details of Youth League politics in the Transvaal, see Couzens, New African, pp.257-260; Eales, 'Ngubane', pp.10-15; B. Edgar, 'A.P. Mda: The Making of an African Nationalist, 1935-1944', paper presented to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, February 1990, pp.12-16.
 2. The themes and quotations of this paragraph are drawn from H.I.E. Dhlomo, H.I.E., 'Racial Attitudes: An African View-Point', The Democrat, 17 November 1945, p.19 and 'African Attitudes to the European', The Democrat, 1 December 1945, p.21.

element was there. The essential point for Dhlomo was that 'the African' experienced racial oppression uniquely in South Africa, as a distinct 'race' or 'colour group'. Through a vortex of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, ever larger numbers of Africans - especially those in the urban areas - were being drawn into common experiences. In the process, the economic, political and cultural bases were being laid for a countrywide African nationalism, led by an enlightened middle class and given numerical weight by an organised working class. This phenomenon was qualitatively different from the essentially elitist and incorporationist discourse of earlier generations of African nationalists. It also differed from the segregationist mutations of ethnic politics that had gained currency during the 1930s, which Dhlomo and others now labelled as 'anachronistic'.

Only African leaders and intellectuals, Dhlomo argued, could 'know' and 'represent' African demands.¹ This swipe was aimed both at Native Affairs officials, and at white liberals and communists. It was up to Africans themselves to construct a national identity, born of racial oppression, and with its own 'legitimising ancestry'.² This was a task to which Dhlomo himself had devoted a great deal of energy in his plays, poems and newspaper articles since the late 1930s.³ The destiny of the African intelligentsia was to 'read the pulse of the masses', and to direct the 'real and palpable state of War between Black and White' into a national struggle against segregation and colonialism.⁴ It was to be a struggle not only against socio-economic deprivation and exploitation, but against the denial of civil rights and political power. The exclusion of

1. Dhlomo, 'Racial Attitudes', p.19.

2. Couzens, New African, p.201.

3. Couzens, New African, Chs.5-7; 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 2 June 1945.

4. Dhlomo, 'Racial Attitudes', p.19 and 'African Attitudes', p.21; 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 29 July 1944, 12 May 1945 and 2 March 1946. The quotations in the rest of this paragraph are drawn from these sources.

Africans was to be fought with 'organised, intelligently led mass action.' Energetic, innovative and youthful leadership was to combine with 'workers' strikes; organised boycotts; [and] mass defiance of injustice.'

Dhlomo was an astute analyst; he did not merely trot out the new rhetoric of Africanism, but grappled with its difficulties and challenges. We will mention just two of these: the problems of building an 'African nation', and the question of whether such a nation could include 'non-Africans'. On the first issue, Dhlomo stressed the organisational weakness of the African National Congress and the All African Convention; the potential for vacillation and corruption among petty bourgeois leaders of 'mass movements'; the coercive and co-optive power of state and capital; and the growing social differentiation amongst Africans in an industrialising society.¹

On the second issue, the inter-relation between Africanism and 'Non-European' unity, Dhlomo was equivocal. The cultural and political notion of 'the African' could not easily be expanded to embrace Indians and coloureds. For Youth League ideologues Africanism was primarily a political weapon against white domination. But a second consideration, often not far removed from the first, was the expression of middle class antagonism against the Indian landowning and trading class. Dhlomo's and Ngubane's newspaper columns were replete with snide, critical and hostile commentary about 'the Indian' and, on a smaller scale, 'the Coloureds'.² Anti-Indianism within African politics was a growing phenomenon, reflecting the increasingly multi-layered social struggles of a city being transformed. This theme was briefly addressed above when we examined African middle class responses to the new racial zoning proposals. The full

1. Ibid.

2. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 6 May 1944.

expression of anti-Indianism occurred in the post-war period, and so a detailed examination of the phenomenon is best held over to the next chapter. Here, we focus particularly on Africanist responses to 'Non-European' initiatives for joint Indian-African campaigns against white oppression, and for the combined workplace mobilisation of Indian and African workers.

As we have seen, such initiatives did emanate during the war from the Non European United Front, the Nationalist Bloc of the Natal Indian Congress, the Communist Party, and some trade unions. Conservative African nationalists like the Natal Congress leaders and George Champion ignored or rejected such initiatives. They made political mileage with white authority by distancing themselves from such 'radical' politics.¹ They pandered to African stereotypes of Indians by ridiculing the apostles of unity politics. However, if the younger, more militant African nationalists were to be true to some of their new ideas they could not fall for such opportunist responses. In their call for mass protest action and boycotts the 'unity' politicians were using similar language and tactics to the Congress Youth League. Even if only tactically, joint campaigns held out the prospect of advancing 'the African' cause. Ideological unity was more difficult to conceive of. But perhaps the international war-time culture of human rights and democracy provided a common platform? Was it not possible to broaden the parameters of Africanism to include all those oppressed by white domination?

Within the Durban Youth League, there were strongly expressed negative answers to these questions.² But two seminal articles by Dhlomo in The Democrat in 1945

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699, 467C, 5: Champion to Mayor, 5 June 1944 and 21 June 1944.

2. 'Jo the Cow', Ilanga, 25 May 1941; 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 1 July 1944 and 16 December 1944; Eales, 'Ngubane', pp.83-84. For similar sentiments on the Witwatersrand, see Edgar, 'Mda', pp.9.

signalled another tendency. He wrote that 'progressive thinking African intellectuals and leaders' (he saw himself as one) looked towards 'a social order where every South African will be free to express himself and his personality fully, live and breath freely, and have a part in shaping the destiny of his country; a social order in which race, colour and creed will be a badge neither of privilege nor of discrimination.' Forward-looking nationalists, he continued, were 'prepared to work with members of any and every racial and colour group who believe in a sane and civilized philosophy. Issues and values, not race and colour, are [of] prime concern.'¹ The emphasis on non-racial freedom, rather than African liberation, pushed the Africanists into broadening the boundaries of social closure. The Democrat, a left-liberal publication, was an appropriate place to espouse such sentiments. In other forums, most notably the columns of Ilanga and Inkundla, with their largely African readership, Dhlomo, Ngubane and others continued to express a range of anti-Indian sentiments. Of all Durban's war-time Africanists, Dhlomo probably tried hardest to confront the ambiguities of his position on the question of 'Non-European' unity.² In doing so, he swam courageously against the gathering currents of African nationalism in Durban.

Zulu ethnicity eclipsed

If Africanism and black unity politics were uneasy partners, how did Zulu ethnicity fare? The war period saw tribal mobilisation decline from its prominent position in Natal's mainstream politics; the organised regional ethnic alliances of the 1930s effectively collapsed. Changing political circumstances eroded ethnicity as a mobilising

1. Dhlomo, 'Racial Attitudes', p.19 and 'African Attitudes', p.21.

2. 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 16 December 1944.

tool; national rather than regional issues predominated. Ethnicity and nationalism were not diametric opposites, but different points on a spectrum of cultural mobilisation. The formulations of Youth League ideologues were crucial in putting nationalist sentiments firmly on the regional agenda.

At the end of the 1930s regional Zulu ethnicity was well entrenched; its decline was not easily predictable. Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu was fêted, for example, during the ANC's 1939 national conference, held in Durban.¹ Speaking in a debate on how to regenerate the moribund national ANC, Mshiyeni's prognosis was stunningly simple. He told the Durban conference: 'The Educated people do not follow their Chiefs. Hence the [African] Nation is dead.'² But during the war the ANC national leadership developed an alternative vision of the 'the nation'. The organisation's adoption of the 'human rights' document, African Claims, in 1943 was a firm step towards the eventual framing of the Freedom Charter in the 1950s.³ Organised ethnic politics, by contrast, became enmeshed with apartheid.

In Natal, the decline of Zulu ethnic politics during the war years flowed from the weakening of the Lugg-Dube-Mshiyeni axis⁴, and the pressure of new ideas and political forces. Lugg left his post as Chief Native Commissioner in 1940, Dube became progressively incapacitated from 1943 as diabetes and old age took their toll, and Mshiyeni resigned prematurely in 1944 as Zulu regent. No-one of like calibre and commitment replaced these key figures in the complementary roles of tribal administrator, Zulu nationalist, and royal leader. Mshiyeni became estranged, and the

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1. KCM Reel 7a, 2, DA14, 30/3: J Calata's Minute book of ANC activities, 1937-1943.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Reproduced in Karis and Carter, Protest, vol. 2, pp.209-222.
 4. See Chapter Three.

Zulu Society fatally embroiled, in the bitter dispute over which of Solomon's young heirs was to succeed him as Zulu king.¹ Both the Zulu regent and the increasingly ineffective Zulu Society backed Tandayipi, the unsuccessful candidate to the succession. The eventual appointee, Cyprian, was young and non-conformist. When his appointment was announced in 1945, he was not accorded paramount chief status, like Mshiyeni, and was an unlikely focal point for sustaining the ideology of Zulu royal ethnicity. The structures of tribalism remained intact, but they became less important as a framework for a political movement.

The weaknesses of Zulu ethnic politics during the Second World War were compounded by the new ideas and social forces underpinning Africanism. Was there any place for Zulu ethnicity in the Durban Youth League's struggle for National Liberation? For the trade unionist, Jacob Nyaose, there was a clear link between low wages, migrant labour, and Natal's tribal policies. This was reason enough for rejecting Zulu ethnicity and asserting other identities among urbanised African workers.² Jordan Ngubane criticised Natal's ethnic ideologues for their 'stupid sentimentalism and shallow patriotism that delighted in venerating even [the] most odious and inglorious, if shameful and retrogressive relics from the Ancient Past!'.³ The 'Natal African', Herbert Dhlomo commented wryly, 'is assured that his chiefs, customs and laws are wonderful and is encouraged to stay tribal; who when he comes to town is allowed, nay encouraged to address and in turn is addressed by his boss in Zulu, ... and encouraged to dance his old tribal dances amid cheering and jeering crowds of the "superior

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1. For details see correspondence in CAD NTS 248, 78/53/2: 1-2; CAD NTS 7232, 137/326, 2; Ilanga, 16 October 1943, 22 January 1944, 16 March 1946.
 2. 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 16 December 1944.
 3. Ilanga, 5 August 1939.

race".¹ Elsewhere, Dhlomo lambasted modern chiefs as 'puppets' who acted as 'police over their tribes, informers and henchmen of the Native Commissioner.'² It seems, then, that the Youth League intellectuals had no place for segregation-tainted Zulu ethnicity in their portrayals of national oppression and liberation.

A more detailed look at the writings, once again, of Herbert Dhlomo indicates that this is too superficial and hasty a conclusion. Dhlomo recognised the phenomenon of 'Zulu-ness'. In 1944, for example, he praised A.W. Dhlamini, president of the Zulu Society and headmaster of Durban's Loram Secondary School, as 'dignified and courteous, cultured and truly Zulu'.³ More interestingly, Dhlomo's journalism indicated how closely interwoven nationalism and ethnicity were, especially in their reliance on similar histories. Dhlomo realised how historical justifications of African nationalism relied to some extent on regional histories. In Natal, the strength and achievements of the pre-colonial Zulu kingdom were an obvious source of historical interest for nationalist ideologues. Here was an admirable example of nation-building, and of militant resistance to colonial domination. The problem for the nationalists of 'Young Natal' was that this Zulu past had already been appropriated for distinctly ethnic purposes. Dhlomo's answer was not to deny this past, but to reconstruct it. In 1944, for example, he boasted of 'the greatest line of successive kings that the world has seen - Senzangakona, Dingiswayo, Shaka, Dingana, Mpande, Cetywayo (sic) and Dinizulu'.⁴ Two points can be made about this quotation. Firstly, Dhlomo's perspective was a worldwide one. He cherished the Zulu past within an international

1. Dhlomo, 'Racial Attitudes', p.19 and 'African Attitudes', p.21.

2. 'X', *Ilanga*, 24 April 1943.

3. 'X', *Ilanga*, 22 July 1944.

4. 'Busy-Bee', *Ilanga*, 8 January 1944

framework rather than a segregationist one. He was preoccupied with 'nation', not 'tribe'. Secondly, Dhlomo stopped with Dinizulu, who died in 1913 and was the last of the Zulu kings linked with military resistance against colonialism. Dhlomo was not concerned to trace a lineage of Zulu rulers to the ethnic present, as Zulu nationalists and white segregationists did during the 1920s and 1930s. Instead, he looked for nationalist inspiration in Zulu leadership during the nineteenth century pre-colonial and resistance phases of the region's history.

For the period since about 1900, Dhlomo drew on a different set of heroes for his nationalist pantheon. These were the 'New Africans', the progressive professionals and politicians of a racially defined group suffering 'national' oppression. Dhlomo's newspaper articles - his most popular medium - reveal an acute consciousness of the need to record and remember African achievements in the modern world. It was a project which Ngubane joined with alacrity. Together, in *Ilanga* and *Inkundla*, they wrote numerous biographies about African leaders in politics, economics, culture and trade unionism.¹ The ideological aim was to construct a lineage of heroes for the nationalist struggles of the 1940s.

The imperatives of nationalism influenced even the more conservative and ethnically oriented elements in Durban's African politics. In 1941, Sibusisiwe Makhanya's Bantu Women War Workers' Association was inspired by 'the feeling that those on [military] service are [our] sons - irrespective of whether they [are] Zulus, Xhosas or Basuthos'.² During the war, Durban began for the first time to send delegates to annual meetings of the Location Advisory Boards' Congress, where they

1. These ranged from small snippets to long feature articles. An instance of the former was the short piece on Jacob Nyaose by 'Busy Bee', *Ilanga*, 16 December 1944. Good examples of the latter can be found in a series of articles in *Inkundla* between February and August 1946.

2. *Ilanga* 1 February 1941.

rubbed shoulders with veteran nationalists like R.H. Godlo.¹ Perhaps most interesting was the adaptation by Durban's two most influential African politicians, John Dube and George Champion. Dube uttered sentiments which had some resonance with his early twentieth century career, but which had been muted during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1941, for example, he urged a Durban conference of the Daughters of Africa to supersede tribal identities by developing 'an African' identity, which sought 'to teach the people to unite and to strive for freedom.'² The key influences in Dube's nationalist revival seem to have been his membership of the Natives Representative Council (NRC) from 1937 onwards, and his reintegration, as an honorary president, into the national structures of the ANC. A similar point can be made for Champion's career. His occupation of a key post (Secretary of Lands) in the ANC national executive from 1938, and his eventual success, in 1942, in being elected to the NRC, ensured that Champion's vision could be wider than that of ethnic politician or urban boss. The adaptability of these two key leaders, each with their network of followers, ensured their continuing dominance of local politics, as well as a lively rivalry between the two camps. Their respective political bases straddled both town and countryside; they played to both nationalist and ethnic audiences. It was no wonder, then, that when illness forced Dube to retire from active politics in 1944, a political storm brewed up over who was to succeed him in the leadership of the Natal African Congress.

The Congress leadership dispute

The intense agitation around the election of the provincial committee of the Natal

1. See for example NA 3/DBN 1/2/13/1/3, NLAB minutes, 17 October 1945.

2. Ilanga, 1 February 1941.

Congress during 1944-45 was symptomatic of the late war period. The leadership dispute highlighted the organisational challenges of responding to the social and political changes of the early 1940s. In one sense, the election issue brought nationalism and regional ethnicity face-to-face. The electoral contest was part of the countrywide revival of the African National Congress, yet it also reflected local political relationships in Natal. More specifically, Durban-based activists played a crucial role. Events came to a head in 1944 with the retirement of John Dube, who had been president of the Natal Congress since the late 1920s. He appointed Durban's veteran priest-politician, Abner Mtimkulu, as acting president. Sensing the growing significance nationally of the ANC, George Champion announced that he would run for president. From as far back as the late 1920s, he had been an intermittent member of the ANC's national executive, but - such was the animosity between him and Dube - he had never joined the Durban or Natal branches of Congress. The ANC was so loosely organised as to enable Champion to participate at its highest levels only. During the mid 1930s, when Champion tried to gain control of the Durban branch of Congress, Dube had amended the provincial constitution to disband the Durban branch and to ban ICU members from Congress. Champion had kept the ashes of the ICU warm during the early 1940s, and there was even talk in 1944 of trying to revive the organisation nationally.¹ The lacklustre image of the ICU yase Natal made it a weak competitor with the Natal ANC as flagbearer of African nationalism. There were no other serious contenders, such as the All African Convention in the Cape or the African Democratic Party in the Transvaal. Champion's bid for Natal president, then, raised the temperature of internal Congress politics

1. Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1698, 467C, 4; Inkundla, 17 June 1944, p.5 and 31 October 1944, p.3.

significantly. Jordan Ngubane went so far as to call it 'internecine warfare'.¹

The Durban Youth Leaguers entered the fray too. From the early 1940s they had pushed for the restructuring of Congress, and disputed provincial elections offered the best opportunity yet. The Youth League's criticism of the undemocratic nature of the Natal Congress was the single most important reason for the publicity around the leadership elections. As one critic put it, Congress had been run for too long as a 'club of the select few'.² Ngubane and others initially proposed Albert Luthuli, chief of the Groutville mission reserve, to sweep clean the Congress cupboard. At first sight it seems strange that the Africanists proposed a chief for president. Luthuli, however, was an exceptionally progressive chief, who had followed a career as a teacher at Adams College until 1936. Luthuli had a reputation as an honest leader, he was an internationally travelled church figure, and he was a focal point of both African nationalist and Zulu ethnic sympathies. For reasons that are not clear, Luthuli declined nomination.³ The elections for Natal president became a race between Mfundisi, Abner Mtimkulu the priest, and Mahlathi, George Champion the 'forest'.⁴ The Youth Leaguers threw their weight behind the latter, but they did so guardedly. They admired Champion's past as a popular ICU leader, his willingness on occasion to talk the language of confrontation against white domination, and his stated intention to bond the Natal African Congress to the national Congress. They disliked his autocratic and opportunist style, as well as signs of his increasing political conservatism. It was

1. 'Peregrine of the Crossroads', Inkundla, 18 September 1944, p.6.

2. 'Twana', Inkundla, 17 June 1944, p.1.

3. His autobiography is silent on this matter. See A. Luthuli, Let My People Go (Glasgow, Fontana, 1987), pp.89-90. Luthuli remains one of the neglected figures of studies of African politics in Natal. Paul Rich's recent work promises to fill some of the gaps: see his 'Moving Out of Dependency: Black Elite Politics in Natal, 1930-1956', South African Historical Society conference, Pretoria, January 1991.

4. The origins of Champion's praise name are obscure. Champion himself interpreted the 'forest' to be a place of refuge and protection for those in trouble. See Swanson (ed.), Mahlathi, p.xxv.

around issues such as these that Ngubane, and to a lesser extent Dhlomo, maintained a detailed and critical commentary in the columns of Inkundla and Ilanga.

Written in the style of political sermons, these newspaper reports reflected well the preoccupations of Africanism, and the acrimony of the presidential contest. Both Mfundisi and Mahlathi travelled widely in Natal, canvassing followers. Champion effected a coup when he captured the support of Selby and Oliver Msimang, key Congress figures in Pietermaritzburg.¹ Champion and the Youth League instigated the re-founding of a Durban branch of Congress, which soon became a lively forum of competing factions in the leadership dispute.² Natal Congress provincial membership figures grew into three-digits. Both Mtimkulu and Champion lobbied for support from the ANC's president general, A.B. Xuma. Mtimkulu refused to recognise Champion's bona fides as a Natal Congress member. Champion announced a controversial 'shadow cabinet' which excluded all Mtimkulu supporters and the Youth League. In October 1944, Xuma visited Natal to preside over a reconciliation conference between the various factions.³

Finally, in April 1945, after elections had been postponed for a year, the Natal congress held a turbulent general meeting in Pietermaritzburg.⁴ When Mtimkulu tried, from the chair, to postpone elections yet again, pandemonium broke out. 'The Mfundisi took his hat' and stormed out of the hall, followed by his closest supporters. Albert Luthuli managed to restore order and then presided over the elections. Champion was unanimously elected Natal president and his 'shadow cabinet' also made it. But the

1. Inkundla, 30 March 1945, p.3.

2. Inkundla, 17 June 1944, 31 July 1944, 31 January 1945; 'Rolling Stone on Yap Yap Politics', Ilanga, 10 March 1945.

3. Inkundla, 17 October 1944, p.1.

4. The following account is drawn from Ilanga, 14 April 1945; Inkundla, 17 April 1945, p.1; Luthuli, My People, pp.89-90.

meeting was not content to vote in a provincial committee consisting entirely of Mahlathi loyalists, some of whose political ideas were not that far from the Mtimkulu group. Albert Luthuli was also elected, as were Youth Leaguers Herbert Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane. The ideologues of 'Young Natal' had got a foot in the door. The Communist Party's bid failed, however. A young Pietermaritzburg Party recruit, Harry Gwala, was belatedly nominated but not voted in.

The provincial executive promised far-reaching changes in organisation and administration. Stirred by the electoral contest, Durban's Congress branch held a spate of public meetings.¹ By the end of 1945 the Natal ANC reported increased paid-up membership, from 250 to 700.² Alongside these hopeful signs, there were also indications of continuity with the Dube Congress. Spurning the Youth Leaguers, Champion allocated key positions on the provincial executive to his cronies.³ The committee's first actions were to launch a 'National Fund' and to seek the patronage of a number of prominent chiefs.⁴ This was the well-worn territory of politicised regional ethnicity. The interface between Zulu ethnicity and African nationalism, now represented within the new Natal Congress executive, was to continue to be hotly contested in Durban's post-war world. An anonymous letter to Inkundla in July 1945 promised as much when it said: 'I may safely say you will never get Congress running properly in Natal, if one or the other [Champion or Mtimkulu] is President. ... Are there no young men in Natal to come up and put things right?''⁵

1. 'Busy-Bee', Ilanga, 30 June 1945, 21 July 1945; correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699-1700, 467C, 5-6.

2. Walshe, African Nationalism, p.394.

3. 'Khanyisa', Inkundla, 31 May 1945, p.4.

4. Inkundla, 30 June 1945, p.3 and 29 September 1945, p.1.

5. 'Be Honest', Inkundla, 31 July 1945, p.2.

6.5. CONCLUSION

In many ways, then, the war period was a crucible of new developments. From the point of view of this dissertation, the most important process was the growing stake of Africans in urban life, and the evolution of new practices and ideas in the struggle for the city. This was reflected in the strikes and early union organisation, the 'Non-European' unity politics, the heightened activities of the Communist Party, the nationalist formulations of urban citizenship and Africanism, and the tense leadership battle for the Natal ANC. Anti-Indianism also reared its head as a new force in African politics. Both socially, through rapid urban settlement, and politically, through revived organisation and early stirrings of mass-based political culture, the war period was an important time of transition, ensuring that the post-war world would hold many uncertainties.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HIDDEN VOLCANO: CLASS CONFLICT, RACIAL DIFFERENTIATION, AND THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF THE CITY, 1945-1948

‘The African is bitter and feels deeply frustrated ...’.
Editorial, Ilanga, 13 September 1947.

7.1. INTRODUCTION

‘In Durban we are sitting on a volcano.’¹ So said a city councillor in 1947, while giving evidence before the Broome Commission of Enquiry into Native Administration. These words capture well the alarm, anxiety and sense of urgency prevalent within Durban’s ruling class in the post-war period. The far-reaching social changes and political developments of the war years had intensified the contest for power and resources in the city. Demographic density and physical proximity accentuated the skewed distribution of urban resources, and so ‘raised the temperature’ of local politics.² Spatial concentration was a consequence of past municipal policies, and it was visually reinforced by Durban’s hilly terrain. The rate of urban settlement accelerated after the war. By the census year of 1951 Durban had grown into a city of nearly half a million inhabitants.³ Durban’s whites, concentrated in the central city bowl and on the high-lying areas to the north and south, had reason to feel besieged by the pressing black masses of the hostels and shantytowns. White officials spoke in

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1502, 290P, 1: Report of Commission of Enquiry into Broome Commission (hereafter Broome Commission Report), 1947, p.3.
 2. The phrase is Frank Cooper’s. See his ‘Urban Space’, pp.35-37.
 3. Burrows, Population, pp.24-25.

increasingly alarmist terms of a 'black belt' surrounding Durban.¹

Preoccupations with 'race' deepened in Durban during the late 1940s. A far-reaching racial zoning scheme had been proposed towards the end of the Second World War by provincial and municipal planners.² Race-based policies had been central to Durban's history, but zoning radically sought to perpetuate the spatial relations of the 'colonial city' at a time of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. Socio-economic transformation threatened to swamp the piecemeal segregation measures of the previous few decades. In the face of this, the majority of Durban's whites pushed for a more formal allocation of urban space on racial lines. This was a complex matter, however, for there were differences - within local and central government - over the extent and implications of racial zoning. There was virtual unanimity over curtailing the 'penetration' of the Indian bourgeoisie into 'white' areas, but the wholesale removal of thousands of African squatters was a more momentous proposal. None of the organs of state power was prepared to grasp this issue fully during the late 1940s.

Under the shadow of racial zoning and relocation, Durban's Africans intensified their demands for a greater stake in a city whose future was unresolved. The potential for conflict around these demands was enhanced by the increasing permanence and the heightened aspirations of Africans in Durban. These socio-political developments flew in the face of zoning which sought to exclude Africans even further from the city's political economy. This was, in essence, the 'volcano' which the city councillor described to the Broome Commission in 1947. Explosive battles loomed over the social reproduction of Durban, that is, over the relations of domination, the distribution of

1. Maylam, 'Black Belt', pp.421-424.

2. See Chapter Six.

resources, and the provision of services in the city. The Broome Commission was appointed to defuse this combustible situation. It was a difficult task, for there was no large-scale African political movement that could be crushed or neutralised. Broome was confronted with a diffuse African populism.

The largely hidden volcano burst early in 1949. It did so in ways which were not envisaged by the volcano-watching city councillor in 1947. It took the form of the worst weekend of civil violence that Durban had seen to date. Africans attacked Indian persons and property on a wide and horrifying scale, Indians either fled or retaliated, and the state intervened with the mass force of arms. The tale of the 1949 riots must be held over to the next chapter. But the roots of this conflict penetrate back into processes earlier in the decade.

This chapter has two inter-related tasks. The first is to chart the escalating struggles by Africans over the social reproduction of the city. The second is to show how these struggles were shaped by the differential incorporation of Africans, Indians and whites into Durban's racial hierarchy. Class conflict took a profoundly racial dimension in Durban during the late 1940s. Racial ideologies, stressing physical differences as social markers in the allocation of power and resources, became embedded in the consciousness of both the dominant and the subordinate classes.¹ As part of the lived experience of racial exclusion, the subordinate groups absorbed 'race' into their own collective identities and action. This often found expression in various strands of 'racial ethnicity', where racial identities intersected with cultural mobilisation. But urban conflict was not confined to 'race', and racial groups were not fixed and primordial.

1. For a fuller discussion, see J. Rex and D. Mason (eds.), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1986), pp.6-8, 31; E. Boonzaier, "'Race" and the race paradigm', in Boonzaier, E. and Sharp J. (eds.), *South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), pp.58-67.

We should be aware of important sub-identities within and between these groups. A great deal depended on what political targets and social boundaries were identified, and by whom. We shall examine these questions in African politics by looking at the labour market, the commercial and transport sectors, and the housing crisis.¹

7.2. SEEDS ON HARD GROUND: AFRICAN WORKER ORGANISATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The unprecedented strike action by African workers in Durban during 1941 and 1942 had revealed a growing awareness of wage exploitation. African workers expressed in new ways how their collective interests clashed with those of capital. The broad social forces underpinning these perceptions, namely urbanisation and a deepening reliance on wage labour, were both widened and intensified in post-war Durban. A common point of evidence to the 1949 Industrial Legislation Commission was that more and more African workers laboured in Durban for the whole year, despite the recording of a 'home area' in their service contracts.² Workers retained a rural toehold for a multitude of reasons: the lack of facilities in town for family housing; employment uncertainties; and continuing access to rural resources and social networks.³ But these rural linkages were growing thin, and migrancy was becoming nominal.

Various statistics illustrate African proletarianisation. In the central city, where the

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1. Parts of this chapter draw heavily on T.A. Nuttall, 'The Durban "Riots" of 1949 and the Struggle for the City', paper to the Critical Studies Group, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 30 May 1989, pp.4-16; I.L. Edwards and T.A. Nuttall, 'Seizing the Moment: the January 1949 Riots, Proletarian Populism and the Structures of African Urban Life in Durban during the late 1940s', paper to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1990, pp.4-22.
 2. For example, CAD K18, 36, NK3, 46: paras. 3611-3632.
 3. Broome Commission, evidence of A.H. Zulu, 18 November 1947.

large African hostels were concentrated, the male to female ratio remained as high as 440:100 in 1951, but in the townships and the mushrooming shantytowns the gender imbalance had disappeared.¹ Between 1946 and 1951 the census recorded an increase of 25,063 African men and 18,192 African women, giving a total of 167,735 Africans in Durban in 1951.² Employment figures provide further insights. Between 1946 and 1951, the number of African men employed in manufacturing grew by roughly 10,000 to a total of around 40,000.³ In the tertiary sector, the respective figures were 6,000 and 47,000. Amongst African women during the same period, manufacturing employment remained minimal, at no more than a few hundred; but tertiary employment, mostly in domestic service, rocketed by 50% to 18,000. According to the census data, then, there were 105,000 or so Africans in waged employment in 1951, and 55-65,000 in the unwaged sector. Of the latter, nearly 30,000 were children under fourteen years old.⁴ This left approximately 30,000 unwaged adults. The core of urban residents had expanded substantially.

Wages earned in the Durban economy were increasingly required to fund the daily reproduction of urban households, rather than merely support hostel living or supplement rural homesteads. As a result, one could expect increased conflict over wages. There were, however, few strikes and no large ones amongst African workers in Durban during the late 1940s.⁵ This arose partly because some employers seemed

1. Kuper et al., Racial Ecology, p.118.

2. These figures are about 10% higher than the official census. See Simkins, 'African Urbanisation', p.10.

3. The employment figures in this paragraph are compiled from varying estimates in the Population Census and the Census of Industrial Establishments between 1946 and 1951. See also Burrows, Population, pp.150-152, 164.

4. Simkins, 'African Urbanisation', p.10.

5. In 1945, African workers joined with Indian workers in a lengthy laundry strike, the last major instance of joint inter-racial action during the 1940s. See Padayachee et al., Indian Workers, pp.122-129. Between 1946 and 1948 there were small strikes of African workers at Addington hospital, the Jacobs sewerage works, the Clairwood and Umgeni quarries, and on three occasions in the dairy industry. See the correspondence in CAD NTS 7689, 315/332; NTS 7687, 308/332; NTS 7686, 250/332; NTS 7686, 249/332; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1553,

willing to grant wage increases to prevent production losses during the post-war boom. In 1946, for example, threatened strikes by African workers in the chemical, baking and dairy industries extracted wage concessions.¹ From 1947, however, there was a general cutback in real wage levels as the Durban economy slowed down.² Employer organisations successfully co-ordinated a counter-attack against war-time pay increases.³ African workers were the least able to resist this, due to their weak bargaining position in the Durban labour market.

This weakness was the most important reason for the absence of post-war strikes. Except for a few pockets in the manufacturing sector, African workers remained confined to high turnover jobs at the bottom of the city's three-tiered race and skill hierarchy. The 1951 census classed 80% of African workers in Durban as either 'general labourers' or domestic servants.⁴ Despite the economic growth of the past decade, the vast majority of African workers still circulated in a large casual labour market.⁵ The defensive tactics of many of the registered unions, and the widespread demand of Durban employers for ultra-cheap African labour, perpetuated a double colour bar. From this position of structural weakness it was extremely difficult for African workers to confront their bosses collectively. A key ingredient of the early war-time strikes had been the perceived vulnerability and indecision of employers and the state. Such a 'moment' did not arise during the late 1940s.

Faced with a lack of muscle in workplace bargaining, African workers opted for

315E, 4. For the dairy strikes, see also Guardian, 4 December 1947 and Ilanga, 6 December 1947.

1. Ilanga, 13 April 1946 and 22 June 1946.
2. Katzen, Industry, pp.25, 27 and 163.
3. For the preoccupation of organised capital with this issue see IEA Annual Reports from 1944 onwards.
4. Burrows, Population, p.167.
5. Broome Commission, 1947: Evidence of Natal University's Department of Economics.

various informal coping mechanisms and forms of struggle. Two features are worth stressing here. The first was the perpetuation and perhaps even the expansion of 'job-hopping'.¹ A survey at Dunlop in 1946 revealed that 83% of the firm's 1,052 African workers had been employed there for less than sixteen months.² Job turnover was less and less a consequence of oscillating migrancy, and increasingly an urban function of unskilled labour constraints.³ Job-hopping enabled African workers to retain choice and initiative in the labour market, but ironically it reinforced employer stereotypes of Africans as 'come and go labour', and hence 'unsuitable' for more skilled tasks.⁴ A second response to workplace weakness was to look beyond the point of production to co-operative schemes to supplement earnings. Like high job turnover, the pooling and circulating of resources among the urban poor was an understandable substitute for struggles over wages in the workplace. A major difference between job-hopping and co-operative activities was that the former militated against trade union organisation, while the latter was potentially compatible with it.

Unlike strike militancy, some of the wartime union initiatives survived and even consolidated themselves during the post-war period. Restricted to a few industries, and sometimes to just one or two factories, trade unions continued to organise African workers. In doing so, they generated an explicit ideology of workers' rights, demanding wages and social services for a fully urbanised workforce.

Ringrose's 1948 survey found seven independent unions still operating.⁵ Nine

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1. Edwards, 'Nurturing', p.14. For earlier details of this phenomenon, see Chapter Five.
 2. University of Natal, *African factory worker*, pp.4-5, 71.
 3. Broome Commission, evidence of Natal University's Department of Economics, 20 November 1947.
 4. Katzen, *Industry*, p.128; Smith, 'Labour Resources', pp.453-455; Broome Commission, evidence of J. Bristo (sic?), 19 November 1947 and National Council of Women, Durban branch, 20 November 1947.
 5. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.105.

presented evidence to the Industrial Legislation Commission of Enquiry in 1949.¹ The two most prominent were the African Bakers' and Confectioners' Industrial Union (ABCIU) and the African Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union (ACDWU), both of which had been launched during the war.² Jacob Nyaose, Duke Ngcobo and Stanford Mtolo organised bakery workers; and Christopher Mbonambi led the ACDWU, assisted by Harry Gwala.³ One sign of the organisational resilience of both unions was their record of regular meetings at the Bantu Social Centre between 1945 and 1949.⁴ Another was their ability, even though they were legally unrecognised entities, to secure recognition from some employers.⁵ By the late 1940s, the ABCIU was negotiating directly with the Master Bakers' Association over unskilled wages in the industry. The ACDWU had secured stop-order subscriptions for sixty of its members in one firm. By 1949 the ABCIU had 400 paid-up members. The ACDWU had 2,300 names on its books, but only 150 of these were paid-up. These figures were small, but they were nevertheless a remarkable achievement if one bears in mind the many problems in organising African workers, especially in independent unions.⁶ Mbonambi bore testimony to some of these constraints:

‘I am by myself ... I cannot get into touch with all these people at the right time ... The town is so spread out that it takes me months to go round to the different places. I have only one day in the week to collect

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1. See evidence in CAD K18, 34-36, NK3, and in 104-105, NK30.
 2. Unless stated otherwise, details about these two unions in this paragraph are drawn from CAD K18, 35, NK3, file 40: evidence, Durban, 27 April 1949, paras. 3091-3122; and CAD K18, 36, NK3, file 46: evidence, Durban, 13 May 1949, paras. 3611-3632. For earlier details, see Chapter Five.
 3. Ilanga, 28 March 1947.
 4. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1699-1703, 467C, 5-9; Ilanga, 27 September 1947.
 5. IEA Annual Report, 1947-48, pp.45-49.
 6. Referring to high job turnover, Stanford Mtolo of the ABCIU recalled: ‘Your members changed so quickly!’. See Interview with S.S. Mtolo by I.L. Edwards, cited in Edwards, ‘Nurturing’, p.14; See also Mbonambi’s evidence in CAD K18, 36, NK3, file 46: Durban, 13 May 1949.

subscriptions and that is a Friday [pay day], and when that day is finished I have been able to do only ten firms.’¹

During 1945-46, Jacob Nyaose and Philemon Tsele established a ‘Council of African Trade Unions for Natal’.² Tsele had recently joined the fold of independent unions by leading a breakaway ‘African’ union from the South African Railways and Harbour Workers’ Union (Non-European).³ The aims of the Council were to affiliate the handful of independent unions to the Transvaal-based Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU); and to fight the proposals of Durban’s Industrial Employers’ Association for limited rather than full legal recognition of African unions. The Natal Council of African Trade Unions still existed in 1949, but its structures were so weak that it had not been able to fund a delegation to any CNETU national conferences, nor did it have much impact on employer deliberations about the legal status of African unions.⁴

Ringrose found fourteen ‘parallel’ unions operating in 1948, ten of which had been established during the war.⁵ The survival and growth of the parallels reflected the relatively favourable conditions under which they operated. By 1948 some of the parallels boasted impressive membership: 1,520 for the Natal Sugar Industry Employees’ Union, 1,200 for the Chemical Workers’ Industrial Union, 700 for the Furniture Workers’ Industrial Union, and 500 each for the Brick, Tile and Allied

1. CAD K18, 36, NK3, 46: paras. 3611-3632.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1700, 467C, 6: G.E.S. Mhlauli and J. Nyaose to TC, 17 October 1945, and P. Tsele to TC, 2 February 1946, 22 February 1946, 12 April 1946; *Inkundla*, 1st fortnight, January 1946; *Ilanga*, 16 March 1946.

3. See NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1700, 467C, 6: Tsele to TC, 23 Aug. 1945, G.M. Poole to TC, 25 Aug. 1945, Tsele to TC, 2 Oct. 1945.

4. Roux, *Rope*, pp.332-3; Edwards, ‘Swing’, p.19; IEA, Annual Reports, 1947-1949.

5. Ringrose, ‘Trade Unions’, p.182.

Workers' Union and the Paint, Polish and Varnish Workers' Union.¹ In total, the parallels claimed 6,830 members. The impact of parallels on the daily experience of African workers depended on how these bodies operated. From the little that is known, there was a great variety of practices.² At the one end of the spectrum, unions signed on African members with the opportunist and undemocratic goal of furthering the bargaining power of the full members of the union, that is, of white, Indian and coloured workers. At the other end, attempts were made to empower the parallels to represent African workers as forcefully as possible within the constraints of the Industrial Council system.

Communist trade unionists strongly encouraged the formation of fully-fledged rather than nominal parallels. Through their leadership of the Durban Trades and Labour Council, communists like Errol Shanley, Billy Peters and George Ponen continued to exert an important influence over trade unionism in Durban during the late 1940s. The small number of Africans recruited into the Party during the late 1940s invariably found their way into union organisation. One example was Denton Mqadi, who helped organise the 'parallel' of the Chemical Industrial Workers' Union.³ Another was Alfeus Mfeka, a construction worker whom George Ponen trained during 1948-49 as an organiser in the parallel section of the Rope and Mat Workers' Union.⁴ Mfeka's parallel operated as an independent body, with its own funds and committee structures. When giving evidence to the Industrial Legislation Commission in 1949, Mfeka showed a keen enthusiasm for working class politics. He revealed an impressive

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1. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', p.182. The membership totals were for Natal, but by far the majority would have been Durban residents.
 2. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions', pp.105-6.
 3. Ilanga, 13 Apr. 1946 and 22 June 1946.
 4. CAD K18, 34, NK3, file 39: evidence, Durban, 26 April 1949, paras. 3032-3054; CAD K18, 105, NK30, file 73.

knowledge and criticism of labour legislation.¹

In the post-war period, then, various union traditions were kept alive amongst Durban's African workers. Each contributed to collective identities which pitted workers against capital in struggles for wages sufficient to support urban households.² If Ringrose's figures were accurate, then roughly 10-15% of the 40,000 African men in Durban's manufacturing sector were linked to unions. This unionised core of workers, together with the ideology of worker organisation, was to prove an important legacy in Durban's subsequent labour history.

There was another aspect of this legacy that is vital to our understanding of the late 1940s: African workers were being organised on a racial basis. This had implications for worker unity, and indeed for any analytical conception of 'the working class' in Durban. Philemon Tsele called Durban trade unionists to a meeting in 1946 under the international workers' slogan: 'An injury to one is an injury to all of us.'³ Yet it was only African workers whom he had in mind. By 1946 Tsele, a pioneering proponent of non-racial unionism, had swung to African-only organisation. For Jacob Nyaose, Durban's most prominent 'Africanist' trade unionist and a member of the Congress Youth League, it was a matter of principle that Africans experienced unique forms of oppression and exploitation, and so should be organised separately.⁴ Nyaose claimed an exclusive niche for African trade unionists. He asserted that only Africans should organise Africans, and he kept his distance from the Trades and Labour Council unions because they were under white or Indian 'control'.⁵ Christopher Mbonambi, the other

1. CAD K18, 34, NK3, file 39, paras. 3032-3054.

2. See J.D. Nyaose in *Ilanga*, 20 September 1947.

3. *Inkundla*, 1st fortnight, January 1946.

4. 'Busy Bee', *Ilanga*, 16 December 1944; *Inkundla*, 2nd fortnight, May 1946.

5. *Inkundla*, 2nd fortnight, May 1946; CAD K18, 34, NK3, 37: Verbatim report, 21 April 1949, para. 2943.

key independent unionist, was not nearly as dogmatic on this issue. He maintained cordial relations with the Communist Party and was prepared to appear on its platforms.¹

How did communists respond to Africanist assertions of separate organisations for African workers? Although it pragmatically operated parallel unions, the Durban CPSA maintained a constant criticism of racially discriminatory labour legislation. George Ponen, for one, consistently asserted the Communist Party's goal of uniting all workers in racially integrated unions.² Attachment to this goal by communist-trained African unionists effectively undermined Nyause's federation of independent unions during the late 1940s.³

Communist trade unionists were not merely confronted by racist labour law, for Durban's workforce was racially structured through custom and practice, and workers themselves had developed racial perceptions and identities. There are grounds for arguing that the potential for anti-Indianism amongst African workers was enhanced by developments in the workplace during the late 1940s. The significant point for Africans was not that Indians also did menial and unskilled work, but that Indians had better prospects of moving into higher-paid semi-skilled jobs.⁴ Labour-process changes in manufacturing, particularly the expansion of machine-facture, saw the significant growth of an Indian operative workforce. Admittedly, African operatives also began to be employed in a few firms. This small minority substituted for Indians, so reinforcing a pattern of African-Indian competition. During the war, 'African' average real wages

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573, 134, 3: Memo on Communist Party meeting, 22 November 1946.

2. See, for example, UW DHP TUCSA AH646, Dc18: G. Ponen to General Secretary, SATLC, 8 August 1949.

3. Interview with T.H. Gwala by T.A. Nuttall, 13 September 1990.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.144-150, 169-175, 344.

in private industry had increased from 66% to 70% of 'Indian' wage levels. But between 1945 and 1948 the proportion declined to 63%.¹ One way in which African workers perceived declining real wages during the late 1940s was through a widening wage gap with Indian workers. It was not with white but with Indian workers, whose work experience was far closer to their own, that Africans commonly compared themselves. If wage grievances were central to the consciousness of an increasingly urbanised African proletariat, so too was the potential identification of Indians as collective competitors and targets of frustration, rather than as co-workers. This tendency was reinforced by minimal creative social interaction between Africans and Indians outside the workplace, and by the exclusivity of many religious and cultural Indian practices.² African worker consciousness was shaped just as much by broader experiences of Durban society, as it was by life at work.

7.3. STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE: COMMERCE, TRANSPORT, AND HOUSING

The goods people bought and sold, the means by which commuters travelled, and the places where they stayed were all crucial features of the social reproduction of the city. The changes of the war period had unleashed new forces which challenged the way Durban was socially ordered and politically ruled. Amongst Africans, the most marginalised and exploited segment of Durban's society, there was a new determination to intervene in this fluid situation. In many ways, the extent of convergence of middle class, worker and squatter demands was the distinctive feature of African politics

1. Katzen, Industry, p.25.

2. For an example of limited social interaction, even within the same household, see Sitas, 'Accommodation', pp.11-16.

during the late 1940s. The slogan of 'New Africa' expressed this juncture, giving rise to new aspirations of social transformation, urban belonging, communal accountability and the dignity of ordinary Africans.¹ As in the late 1920s, there were signs of militancy and popular expectation. But there were also important differences between the two periods. There was no prominent political organisation like the ICU, with the potential to capture the popular imagination in campaigns against municipal power. Instead, there was a range of small formal organisations, and a host of parochial and informal leaders in the hostels and shantytowns. Furthermore, it was no longer obvious that the municipality was the main or only focus of African militancy. The growth and complexity of urban social relations threw up many targets to fight against. The very power and resources of whites, and the state which supported them, made anti-white resistance a costly and ambiguous exercise. During the late 1940s, a range of African interests increasingly targeted various Indian groups as oppressors, exploiters, and competitors for the scarce resources of Durban. The commercial and landowning Indian bourgeoisie, in particular, had a high social presence amongst Africans. This group occupied a privileged position in Durban's racial hierarchy, but one which was under assault from white power during the 1940s. The dominant discourse in Durban readily lent itself to racial stereotypes, and African leaders showed a willingness to exploit this, knowing that racial-ethnic ideas had resonance with rank-and-file Africans.

For aspirant African traders, small and large, and for African consumers, the commercial world became an increasingly central arena of struggle in post-war Durban. Population growth and rising war-time wages had created many new opportunities for

1. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.11-13.

Africans to trade in goods and services.¹ There was a sharp increase in the number of African applications for trading licences, and in the volume of uncontrolled petty trade. Yet none of the obstacles constricting African traders, which have been discussed in earlier chapters, were removed. White traders were concentrated in the larger-scale commerce of the port, the municipality and the industrial sector. They also dominated the more expensive shopping districts, and met the demands of white customers for separate shopping facilities.² Municipal licensing was less favourable towards Indians, restricting them to the 'Indian quarter' and the peri-urban districts. But historically, backed by capital imported from India, Indians had dominated trade amongst Durban's black population. They operated at the 'lower end' of the market, and so were the obvious target of competition for Africans trying to break into commerce.

But surely we can expect African traders to have vented their frustrations against racially discriminatory licensing laws, and not the Indian commercial elite? Such a question misses the point that African traders had thoroughly internalised the logic of segregation and the pattern of Durban's racially structured market. Like merchants the world over, they were less intent on transforming market relations than on gaining a bigger share of existing trade. They did so by insisting with increased vigour that only Africans should trade in areas predominantly occupied by Africans.³ This was long-standing policy for Durban's African hostels and its two townships, Lamont and Chesterville; but African traders chafed at being restricted to these small racial enclaves. They wanted to extend the definition of an 'African' area to include the shantytowns of Cato Manor, and even the Victoria-Grey street area which was a key

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1. Torr, 'Social History', pp.161-2; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: DCC Memo to 1949 Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.275.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.234.
 3. Torr, 'Social History', pp.159-162.

focal point of African consumer activity. This was controversial, for Indians also lived in these districts. Consequently, African traders increasingly identified Indians, and Indian traders especially, as 'foreigners' who did not 'belong'. This accorded with the view of many of Durban's white ratepayers and with the explicit apartheid rhetoric of the new Nationalist government, elected in 1948. For African traders, both large and small, demands for a greater share of Durban's market were refracted through anti-Indianism.¹

Thousands of African consumers reached a similar end-point, but through a different dynamic. The increased rate of urban settlement, war- and drought-related food shortages between 1944 and 1947, and declining real wages after 1947, all highlighted the unfavourable position of African households in Durban's market-place. African consumer experiences were integral to the processes of urbanisation. Indian-owned stores attracted much of the 'African' trade in the shack areas and in the central shopping and commuter district around Victoria and Grey Streets. Catering for the urban poor, goods in Indian shops tended to be packed in small quantities, they could often be bought on credit, and prices were commonly decided through bargaining. The identity of Africans as customers was bound up with that of Indians as sellers.² Once wages began to decline after 1947, the prices of goods in Indian stores were tangible indices of declining living standards.

The issue of public transport offered further opportunities for the coalescence of 'African' interests. Daily travel was an important feature of urban living. Commuter demand offered a potentially lucrative market to aspirant African transport operators.

1. For comparative themes elsewhere in Africa, see I.G. Shivji, Class Struggles in Tanzania (London, Heinemann, 1976), pp.41-48; T.V. Sathyamurthy, The Political Development of Uganda, 1900-1986 (Aldershot, Gower, 1986), pp.314-319.

2. See Ilanga, 15 February 1947, letter from R.C. Mkize, and Ilanga, 1 March 1947, letter from A. Madlala.

The convenience and cost of transport services were issues of daily prominence in the lives of tens of thousands of commuters. During the 1940s, bus transport became a volatile and explosive issue in many urban centres, particularly on the Rand.¹ Durban escaped collective action of a comparable nature. But if we scratch a little deeper into the matter, a number of important tensions and lines of conflict can be identified. These fed into the broader ferment of the late 1940s.

One sign that all was not well with Durban's public transport system was the appointment of a provincial commission of enquiry in 1946.² The commission had many agendas, not least a post-war preoccupation with macro urban planning, but its most pertinent finding was the municipal neglect of black public transport. The city had a distinctive transport history. Since the 1920s black public transport, especially beyond the Old Borough, had been pioneered and dominated by Indian operators, organised into the Bus Owners Association.³ As established licensees, they occupied a powerful position against other competitors.

It was into this situation of municipal neglect, policy flux, and Indian dominance that a handful of aspirant African bus owners entered during the late 1940s. Hopes had been raised after 1945 by the granting of African-only licences on the routes to Clermont township near Pinetown and parts of the Inanda district north of Durban. Rising African business aspirations found racial channels. Indian bus operators in the burgeoning African shack areas were identified as 'foreigners' whose licences should

1. See Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp.13-15; Hirson, *Yours For the Union*, chap.11.

2. Unless stated otherwise, the details for this section on public transport are from Natal Provincial Administration, *Report ... Durban Passenger Transport* (1946) (hereafter Scott/Baldwin report); NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.317-330, 348, 351. See also L. Torr, 'A Ticket to Drive: The Struggle over African Bus Services in Durban, 1930-1960', paper to Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal, Durban, July 1985.

3. Torr, 'Social History', pp.144-156; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Bus Owners' Association memo to 1949 Riots Commission.

be transferred to Africans in the name of segregation. The major channels by which African traders sought to secure bus licences were the Native Advisory Board and the support of local Native Affairs officials. In the expanding Durban transport market, however, segregation principles ran up against the established interests of the existing bus owners, whether municipal or Indian, who used the local Transportation Board to block a number of African applications during the 1940s. The most publicized example was the failure of African operators to gain licences to Lamont township in 1948.¹ By 1949 there were seven municipal, no African, and thirty three Indian buses on the populous Wiggins-Booth Road route into the heart of Cato Manor.²

Compared to aspirant African entrepreneurs, African commuters had a different set of grievances and anti-Indianism was but one of the potential consequences. It is important, first, to identify reasons for the absence of co-ordinated protests around this issue. The majority of African commuters did not face the prospect of lengthy journeys to faraway townships. A sizeable percentage lived in hostels and domestic workers' khayas in the city centre. Due to Durban's hilly topography, the shantytowns were relatively close to the main commercial and industrial areas. A second important point was the stability of fares on Indian buses throughout the 1940s, a remarkable phenomenon amidst inflation and war-time shortages of parts and fuel. The most obvious source of popular frustration - amongst both Africans and Indians - was the segregation of municipal buses operating in the city centre and white suburbs. Once the few seats demarcated for black passengers were full no more blacks were allowed to board, even if the rest of the bus was empty. On the Durban North route, operated by

1. Torr, 'Ticket', p.8.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban Transportation Board hearing, 25 February 1949.

a private white company, African passengers were only allowed to travel if they possessed a certificate from their white madams.¹

By far the majority of Africans travelled on Indian-run buses. These did not segregate on racial grounds, but they generated their own forms of customer dissatisfaction. Indian buses were few and infrequent. The sparse roads of the shack areas necessitated long walks to bus stops, followed by tedious queues. Only a handful of Indian buses operated ticket systems; none of the conductors wore uniforms. In the jam-packed buses, many of which had both front and rear doors, the payment and charging of fares was often a disputed business. This was especially so during weekends at Cato Manor when thousands of shebeen patrons from the hostels rode back to the city centre. Physical violence on the buses was common. Such conditions affected African and Indian passengers alike. Yet in conjunction with other daily experiences, and reflecting the ease with which stereotypes were crafted in Durban's racial society, the consciousness of African commuters gained a strongly anti-Indian character. We have seen how this developed in the commercial world and in the transport sector. We now turn to the most emotion-charged theme in African struggles for the city during the late 1940s: land, housing and residential rights.

By 1949 two thousand municipal houses and flats had been built in formal townships, designed to accommodate around 10,000 of the estimated 150,000 Africans in Durban. Municipal hostels packed in at least 15,000 residents. Government, railway and private hostels accounted for a further 30,000 people.² A handful of African

1. Broome Commission: evidence of Natal Bantu Ministers' Association, 21 November 1947.

2. University of Natal, Housing Survey, pp.335-338; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p. 6/1. Municipal compounds were heavily overcrowded. Officially, Somtseu Road hostel had 4 500 beds in 1949; unofficially, 8 000 people resided there. See Natal Mercury, 4 February 1949.

traders, professionals and clerics had obtained the elusive permission of the governor general to buy land in the city. Africans owned only 0.1% of the value of Durban's immovable property.¹ As in earlier periods, Durban's highly restrictive African housing policy made little impression on the scale of African settlement during the late 1940s. By the end of the decade, aided by the inauguration of a bus service to the nearby township of Chesterville, over 50,000 squatters had made their home in the Cato Manor valley.²

In 1947 one observer described Cato Manor as 'a recently disturbed anthill'.³ The area was far more than a demographic phenomenon. It was a contested urban space, the epicentre of a pervasive squatter populism which was inspired by African proletarian demands for land and residential rights.⁴ Influential Zionist preachers in the shantytowns called Mkhumbane the 'promised land'. Through both the co-operative movement and the emergence of new forms of squatter leadership, Cato Manor embodied alternative structures of economic and political power, situated less than ten kilometres from the city centre. These developments directly contradicted the racial zoning proposals made by urban planners during the mid 1940s. After the war, the Durban municipality threw its weight behind zoning, calling for the removal of African squatters in the western districts to a massive new township at Umlazi, south of Durban. An axe hung over the future of the self-made society of Cato Manor.

But there were forces preventing the execution. The authorities feared the political costs of mass removals and their potential to provoke organised squatter movements -

1. Kuper et al., *Racial Ecology*, p.31.

2. University of Natal, *Housing Survey*, p.303; Maasdorp and Humphreys, *Shantytown*, p.15; Maylam, 'Black Belt', p.415.

3. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', p.57.

4. *Ibid.*, Chap. 3.

a phenomenon that Durban had escaped so far. Pretoria's bureaucrats remained unconvinced about the wisdom of radical racial zoning; they favoured a more piecemeal approach to African housing, and they saw the Umlazi scheme as yet another instance of Durban shirking its municipal responsibilities towards its African residents.¹ Early in 1948 the report of the Broome Commission offered qualified support to the Umlazi proposals. But there remained a sense of paralysis in the ruling class over the gathering enormity of the squatter 'problem'. Against the threats of health and political control, the shantytowns cheapened the costs of African labour for Durban's employers.

Under these contradictory circumstances a municipal policy of 'containment' prevailed. Using the Slums Act, police raids, and squatter surveys the Corporation sought to restrict shack-building to specified areas.² From 1944 this was coupled with strategies to force shack landowners, the majority of whom were Indians, to provide tapped water and pit latrines for their tenants. From 1947 the municipality began to prosecute recalcitrant landowners. This started a boiling pot of displaced squatters, who were evicted by Indian landlords and who tried to stay one step ahead of police and corporation harassment.³

Amidst many signs of communality, the burgeoning shantytowns were sites of complex social cleavage and competition for scarce resources.⁴ Intensifying shack densities gave rise to intricate networks of ownership, tenancy and reciprocity. An

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1. CAD NTS 4540, 662/313, 1: Statement by Department of Native Affairs to Broome Commission, 1947; Broome Commission evidence: E.H. Brookes, 23 October 1947; *Ilanga*, 6 December 1947.
 2. *Guardian*, 10 July 1947, 11 September 1947.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p.7/5-7/9; for details of stepped up police liquor and pass raids see *Natal Daily News*, 25 June 1948 and *Natal Mercury*, 14 May 1947, 30 June 1948; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.140-141; Maylam, 'Black Belt', p.423; *Ilanga*, 15 February 1947, 1 March 1947, 16 August 1947.
 4. This section relies heavily on Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', chap.4; see also Maylam, 'Black Belt', p.418; Broome Commission, evidence of Natal University's Department of Economics, 20 November 1947.

individual shack cluster was often owned by a number of people, both Indian and African. Both owners and tenants sub-let rooms.¹ At the top of this fluid social hierarchy, and often acting on behalf of absentee Indian landowners, emerged a powerful group of African shacklords. The more established and wealthy shanty bosses became self-styled 'mayors of Mkhumbane', whose territorial power and status was underpinned through 'civilian guards'.² The shacklords provided sites, services and protection to their followers. These colourful 'gatekeepers' of the slumlands - figures like Esau Makatini and J.B. Mathonsi - usually had a smattering of English, were often linked with religious sects, and they kept their distance from formal political organisations. In this socially turbulent world, leadership tended to be autocratic and fractious, the basis for sectarian conflict between competing shacklords and their dependents.³ Gangsterism and crime were rife.⁴

Social pressures within the shantytowns made the need to obtain more land ever more pressing. The availability of Indian-owned land to settle on was a crucial safety valve within Durban's housing crisis, and was probably the single most important reason for the absence of organised squatter movements. But there was also the potential for anti-Indianism to flourish through conflict between tenants and landlords. Indian landowners and rackrenters were easily identifiable obstacles to the drive for more property among both African shacklords and tenants. African material interests in the shacklands found common ground with those of the more established African elite who had long sought to advance their interests through segregationist rhetoric and

1. Guardian, 11 September 1947.

2. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.74-80.

3. For a useful comparative study, see Bonner, 'Squatter Movements'.

4. Broome Commission, evidence of Catholic African Union, 18 November 1947.

anti-Indianism. 'African' areas 'belonged' to Africans, and should be an exclusive preserve for 'African' accumulation.¹ There were potent linkages between parochial squatter politics and the racial, ethnic and nationalist mobilisation by middle class African politicians. Here was a combustible political mix, with many potential flashpoints.

7.4. IDENTIFYING, MANAGING AND TARGETING 'A VOLCANO'

Ironically, both the authorities and the middle class African politicians battled to pinpoint and characterise the African populism of post-war Durban. For the authorities, this task was a crucial one, necessary for the state and capital to 'manage' the increasingly turbulent city. The more privileged sections of the African middle class were themselves alarmed at the 'social dislocation' of the rapidly growing city.² Yet alarm mingled with perceptions of the political potential of mass disaffection, which could be mobilised against white authority.

During 1947, prominent white liberals and officials in Durban persuaded the prime minister to appoint the Broome Commission.³ This was in essence a request from enlightened segments of the local ruling class for someone to define the usurpationary 'mood' of African politics. The difficulty was how to characterise this mood and perceive its direction. Broome's brief was to examine two specific issues: the housing crisis, particularly the controversial Umlazi scheme; and complaints against Durban's Native Administration Department. The one issue had to do with the restructuring of

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1. Broome Commission, evidence of Natal African Tenants' and Peasants' Association, 20 November 1947.
 2. Broome Commission, evidence of the Baumannville African Women's Association, 14 November 1947; the Catholic Youth Council, 18 November 1947; and the Natal Bantu Parents' Association, 19 November 1947.
 3. CAD NTS 4540, 662/313, 1: Durban and District Joint Council of Europeans and Bantu, 'Memorandum on Native Affairs in the City of Durban', 1947; Natal Mercury, 11 September 1947.

the city, the other with the political credibility of the municipality amongst Africans.¹

On the Umlazi issue, Broome proposed a compromise between the competing claims of Durban and Pretoria. Durban should be granted a carefully restricted zone of the Umlazi Reserve for sub-economic housing, but should be forced to develop further the existing townships of Lamont and Chesterville.² Apparently because of its controversial nature, Broome postponed the Native Administration investigation until early in 1948. At the centre of this row was the allegedly corrupt role played by the location superintendents in the 1947 elections to the Native Advisory Boards. George Champion and other Advisory Board leaders made a controversial decision early in 1948 to withdraw their complaints against the Native Administration.³ A key influence over this decision was the way in which Broome conducted his hearings, particularly his willingness to sanction cross-examination of witnesses.⁴ The Native Advisory Boards hired advocate Cecil Cowley to represent them, and the Broome Commission became a public court with the municipality in the dock. Champion sat through the whole proceedings, and on occasion was called to interpret from Zulu to English, or to give the 'Native viewpoint'. This was an intercalary role in which he revelled.

The Broome Commission hearings were a bizarre replay - with some important differences - of the ICU's court cases against municipal policy during the late 1920s, when Champion and Cowley had also been central players. Then, Champion had been the popular young rabble-rouser, spurned and harassed by the authorities; now, he had become an establishment figure, respected (but still distrusted) by white officials and

1. Ibid.

2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1502, 290P, 1: Broome Commission Report, pp.23-29, 45-50.

3. Guardian, 18 March 1948.

4. KCAV 301: Interview with I.K. Allan, 18 September 1980.

politicians. Then, the ICU had paid Cowley; now, the city council paid Cowley to represent the Native Advisory Board. The public prominence and recognition which Champion and others of his ilk gained through the Broome hearings was sufficient to persuade them to drop their campaign against certain Native Administration officials. Their goal was not to overturn the local structures of municipal power, but to gain greater influence within them.¹ Broome looked no further than the Advisory Board for representations of 'Native opinion', and he took Champion's word that the immediate crisis of political credibility had passed.² Broome filed his report, and returned to his judges' chambers. For Champion and other moderate-conservative politicians, the political juggling had to continue. The pressure of 'the crisis' still had to be maintained, so that sympathetic officials would reward African moderates with trading licences, township houses, and permission to buy urban plots. It was vital that Champion and bodies like the Native Advisory Board insisted that they spoke for all of Durban's Africans.

As Natal president of the African National Congress, and acting national president while Xuma was overseas during 1947, Champion was well placed politically. Durban became the venue for regional ANC gatherings, and was drawn into national opposition to the central state.³ In 1947, a local branch of the ANC Women's League began to operate, with Champion's support.⁴ The Natal ANC formed a 'national treasury', which at first glance echoed Champion's ethnic money-raising schemes of the 1930s. But this new 'bank of the people' was a self-consciously nationalist venture, aimed to

1. NA 3/DBN 1/2/12/1/3 NLAB minutes, 10 February 1948.

2. Broome Commission evidence: statement by Broome, 14 November 1947.

3. Ilanga, 11 January 1947, 10 May 1947, 11 October 1947.

4. Ilanga, 8 November 1947, 15 November 1947. For reference to fairly regular Women's League meetings during 1947-1949, either at the Bantu Social Centre or the Grey Street Women's Hostel, see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1701-3, 467C, 7-9.

‘upgrade the nation’ and ‘hasten the unity of all blacks in the country.’¹ Although there was still a strong rural orientation in the Natal ANC,² Champion also turned his hand to distinctly urban issues. During 1947-48, for example, he initiated a series of public meetings in Durban, to launch an African National Workers Federation. This was part of an abortive nationwide campaign to revive the ICU as a ‘labour wing’ of the ANC, in competition with the Communist Party.³

Whether posing as advisory board boss, nationalist leader, or organiser of workers, Champion was doing what he was best at: generating publicity and claiming followers in order to increase his bargaining power with the authorities. Many of his claims and postures of leadership were flawed, and he certainly did not have a mass following during the late 1940s. It was extremely difficult to tap into the usurpatory ‘mood’. But there was one political line that was sure to generate solidarity if not support: hostility towards Indians. This was a theme which Champion and his fellow moderates plugged with increasing vigour during the late 1940s.⁴ It was at once an expression of middle class frustrations against a more privileged Indian bourgeoisie; and a recourse to a broader racial-ethnic wellspring within the lived realities of African urban culture.

The vibrant co-operative movement of the post-war period yielded many examples of populist African assertiveness combined with anti-Indian sentiments.⁵ In the unstable and volatile world of the late 1940s, distributive and savings co-operatives caught the

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1. UNISA AAS1, 4, 9.2.1: ‘Inkulumo kaMongameli eVryheid, 27 October 1945’, translation by X. Sithole.
 2. See for example CAD NTS 7204, 12/326, 1: Minutes of meeting between Natal ANC and the CNC, 13 June 1947.
 3. See for example, NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1701, 467C, 7: Champion to mayor, 17 September 1947 and 6 February 1948, and T. Ndlangamandla to TC, 17 February 1948; correspondence between July and October 1948 in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1702, 467C, 8; see Gilbert Coka’s call for the ICU’s revival in *Inkundla*, 8 November 1947.
 4. *Ilanga*, 11 January 1947 and letter from H.P. Ngwenya, 8 February 1947.
 5. For the war-time co-operatives, see Chapter Six. Unless stated otherwise, this paragraph is drawn from the Edwards, ‘Mkhumbane’, Chapter 2, especially pp.40-49; *Ilanga*, 10 May 1947, 28 June 1947, 12 July 1947, 16 August 1947.

popular imagination as a means of appropriating sections of the market and so increasing the material resilience and power of Africans. Co-operatives offered a means of challenging the impersonal and racially organised mechanisms of the urban marketplace. It was not coincidental that co-operatives gained their greatest following in the shantytowns, those peripheral areas of urban space being settled by African households in defiance of official policies. African women, the most marginal group of the urban economy, were the most enthusiastic followers of co-operative leaders. At the heart of the co-operative movement was William Mseleku's NABANTUKOP, the Natal Bantu Co-operative. By mid 1947, this body co-ordinated 140 'study groups' and claimed to have 10,000 members.¹ Mseleku and his ilk, and the emerging African shack leaders, saw co-operatives as a means of launching themselves on the entrepreneurial road and the path to political influence. The mass of shack dwellers saw co-operatives as a means of survival. They enabled the bulk purchase of essentials, which were then distributed or re-sold. They pooled savings for larger projects, such as building, which could not be paid for by single households. They facilitated networks of informal sector trade.

Some political activists, particularly those connected to the Communist Party, saw in the national co-operative movement a means of transforming property relations in the city through collective ownership.² In Durban the proletarian consciousness inspired by co-operative activities was more that of ethnic populism than proto-socialist transformation. The co-operatives offered a chance to increase African participation in the existing commercial system, not to restructure it. The co-operatives of the late

1. Ilanga, 16 August 1947; Natal Mercury, 28 November 1947.

2. M. Kotane, Let's Do It Together (Cape Town, 1946).

1940s were distinctly 'African', and even more narrowly 'Zulu', phenomena. They drew racial, national, and ethnic boundaries to advance the material interests of urban Africans.

One of the most explicit ideologues of ethnic economic advance was Victor Mallie. Except for five criminal convictions for theft and fraud, his earlier life remains obscure.¹ He achieved prominence in Durban during the late 1940s through the establishment of the African Central Welfare and Industrial Society.² The aim of this organisation was to train African artisans to work in African-owned factories and businesses. His proposal for an industrial school came to naught, despite a personal and segregationist appeal to the new Nationalist prime minister D.F. Malan for a loan of £100,000.³ Equally significant were his calls for Africans to boycott white and Indian shops, and to withdraw their labour from white and Indian employers.⁴ The newly formed Bantu Women's Craft Society in Chesterville expressed similar sentiments.⁵ Mallie was espousing the economic frustrations and aspirations of the African lower middle class, but his discourse was broad enough to embrace the narrow concerns of established traders and the diffuse consciousness of new proletarians. To the extent that co-operatives sought to redirect African buying power, they were explicitly anti-Indian in sentiment.⁶

Amidst these developments, the Durban Congress Youth League offered an important focal point of opposition within the African nationalist camp to George

1. CAD NTS 7259, 338/326, 1: SNA to Minister of Native Affairs, 18 August 1948.

2. CAD NTS 7259, 338/326, 1: Constitution of the African Central Welfare and Industrial Society, 12 January 1946.

3. CAD NTS 7259, 338/326, 1: V.L.D. Mallie to Malan, 24 July 1948.

4. Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1700-1702: 6-8; *Ilanga*, 26 January 1946, 14 September 1946, 15 February 1947.

5. *Ilanga*, 22 February 1947.

6. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.163-9, 304-305.

Champion and his circle. During the late 1940s the Youth League's challenge began to develop organisational punch alongside its longer-standing ideological criticisms. Notwithstanding Jordan Ngubane's publicised anti-communism, key communists like Wilson Cele, Harry Gwala, Denton Mqadi and Richard Biyela became increasingly influential in the Youth League. They brought their trade union experiences into the League. Claiming to speak on behalf of the 'rank and file', and informed by class analysis, the communists in the Youth League openly criticised the Natal ANC leaders for their elitism and pursuit of wealth.¹ Africanist ideologues in the Youth League like Jordan Ngubane and Herbert Dhlomo offered a different emphasis. They criticised the ANC leaders not so much for their class practices, but for their failure to mobilise 'eight million Africans' against the white state and its policies. They spoke of the political and economic aspirations of the 'African mass-man'.² The Youth Leaguers tried to give their own particular directions to the volatile post-war situation. They rejected the opportunist moderacy and the potential for Zulu chauvinism in Champion's circle. The Youth League drew on the paradigms of anti-colonial struggle and popular alliance between a progressive middle class and an organised working class.

The Youth Leaguers, with their varying stresses on mass action, Africanism, working class mobilisation and liberal humanism, could not ignore developments in Indian politics. During 1946-47, the Indian Congress in Durban mounted a passive resistance campaign against the Asiatic Land Tenure Act. Even Ngubane, who had earlier kept his distance from 'non-European' politics, began to view Indians as potential allies in mass campaigns against segregation.³ From 1947, Herbert Dhlomo

1. *Guardian*, 22 January 1948; *Ilanga*, 10 and 17 July 1948.

2. Editorial, *Ilanga*, 13 September 1947; *Guardian*, 28 July 1949.

3. *Inkundla*, second fortnight, March 1946; *Ilanga*, 25 January 1947.

and other young ANC leaders began attending annual conferences of the Natal Indian Congress.¹ In many ways, the NIC was engaging in direct action while the Youth League was still just talking about it. Yet the Natal Indian Congress's adamantly defended 'Indian' economic interests.² In turn, Youth Leaguers like trade unionist turned businessman Masabalala Yengwa relied on building up specifically 'African' custom.³ In seeking common ground with the Indian Congress, the Youth League grappled with the uneasy interface of African nationalism, racial ethnicity, and non-racial mobilisation.

For the established and aspirant middle class leaders various African nationalist paradigms were influential during the late 1940s. Nationalism was the obvious vehicle for their narrow class ambitions. These tendencies, in turn, were influenced by ethnic and racial undercurrents as the politicians tried to draw on the diverse experiences of African groups in Durban's subordinate class. But the political stances of the educated elite were shaped not only by pressures 'from below'; they were reacting to, and interacting with, the impositions and opportunities presented 'from above'.

State and municipal policy had a marked effect on 'nation-building' in Durban during the late 1940s. A crucial feature, from the point of view of African politics, was the ambiguity of state policy towards Indians, who could be perceived as both beneficiaries and victims. Both perceptions, in different ways, fuelled anti-Indianism within African politics. The municipality's legal campaigns against Indian landowners, and the government's Indian Land Tenure Act of 1946, thrust Indians into the no-man's-land between African squatters and the authorities. African politicians and church

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1. Ilanga, 7 June 1947; UNISA South African Indian Congress Collection, AAS 105, 6, 7.1.4: Agenda Book, Second Provincial Congress, Natal Indian Congress, May 1948.
 2. For important insights see Broome Commission, evidence of Natal Indian Congress, 21 November 1947.
 3. Ilanga, 12 April 1947 and 15 November 1947.

leaders popularised the view that whites were dividing the city between themselves and Indians, and casting Africans out.¹ In the long term, thousands of city hostel residents were also threatened by the talk of 'whitening' the city centre and beachfront. Here was a fertile seedbed for ethnicity and parochial nationalism. Both Africans and Indians were increasingly available to be crafted into distinct 'communities'. The state's policies of racial zoning enhanced the ideological homogenization of 'Africans', 'Indians' and 'whites'. In a very real sense, for Africans ranging from aspirant landowners to lumpen squatters, Indians generally seemed to be favoured by the 1946 legislation: they had been 'given' Cato Manor and, through the 1946 Indian Representation Act, promised some form of reformist franchise.² Ironically the Natal Indian Congress's spirited resistance against the 1946 legislation further enhanced the view of Indians as a distinct community with distinct interests.³

The impact of white policy and politics was more complex, however, than the apparent favouring of Indians against Africans in a racial hierarchy. In other ways, the position of Indians became more vulnerable, the target of ridicule and abuse within white politics. During 1947-48 white politicians in Durban, including the mayor and parliamentarians, publicly called for large-scale and compulsory expulsion of Indians to India. Amidst threats of violence Indians were branded as 'foreigners' who should be given 'Boats not Votes'.⁴ Anti-Indianism reached new heights with the general election victory of the Nationalists in 1948. The weak reformism of Smuts's 1946

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp. 224-242.

2. M. Palmer, The History of Indians in Natal (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1957), pp.124-135.

3. Swan, 'Ideology', pp.202-203; Simons, Class and Colour, pp.551-552. For the large number of public meetings called by the Natal Indian Congress during the late 1940s, see the correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573-574, 134, 3-5.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to 1949 Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.194-196; Guardian 13 May 1948.

Indian Representation Act was swept aside. Afrikaner nationalists had been engaged in a boycott of Indian stores on the Transvaal platteland during the late 1940s. Nationalist cabinet ministers used the public platform to denounce Indians as ‘aliens’ without rights and without a future in South Africa.¹ Aspects of African popular consciousness in Durban were mirrored in the discourse of the dominant.

There is always the danger, in trying to sketch in the background to the 1949 riots, of highlighting African-Indian tensions as the sole line of social cleavage in Durban during the late 1940s. It is striking that the Broome Commission did not consider these tensions in any detail. Broome was preoccupied with the threats of urban crisis for white authority. A Natal Mercury editorial in 1947 warned of the ‘terror of lawlessness and bloodshed’, unless drastic solutions were found to Durban’s African housing crisis.² Calls for direct African representation on the city council reached a new crescendo during the disputed advisory board elections of 1947. The focal point of the dispute was the large Somtseu Road hostel, where residents belonging to the ANC Youth League organised big public meetings and had the corrupt election results annulled in court.³ Around the time of this political fiasco, a letter to the local African press hinted at the ominous possibility of ‘underground movements’ plotting violence against an intransigent state.⁴

There were signs that the Communist Party was increasing its influence within organised African politics, through new recruits like Denton Mqadi and Richard

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: South African Indian Organization to Prime Minister, 10 November 1948.
 2. Natal Mercury, 4 September 1947.
 3. Guardian, 29 May 1947; Ilanga, 19 April 1947, 24 May 1947, 31 May 1947, 28 June 1947, 4 October 1947; Edwards, ‘Mkhumbane’, pp.26-28; Broome Commission evidence: Oscar Nkwanyana for Somtseu Road Tenants’ Association, 17 November 1947; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1502, 290P, 1: Memo from Tenants’ Association, Somtseu Road Location to Broome Commission, October 1947.
 4. Ilanga, 16 August 1947; Daily News, 6 September 1947.

Biyela.¹ The Party was a continual thorn in the municipality's side, through its incessant requests for permission to hold meetings in public parks and vacant lots. The authorities tried to restrict communist public meetings to one or two central venues, but the Party was continually looking for new street corners.² The back of a lorry was used as a platform. Usually these impromptu meetings dispersed when the police arrived. But on some occasions, especially after police raided the Party's offices in a nationwide swoop during 1946, illegal meetings were continued defiantly.³ Arrests and petty court cases followed. The authorities became particularly tense during 1947-48 when, in addition to their 'city' gatherings, Party members tried to hold meetings in the Dalton Road and Somtseu Road African hostels.⁴ The municipality resorted to a number of methods, including vetting the agendas of all meetings in hostel halls, to keep the communists out of the turbulent world of the hostels.⁵ Undeterred, Party activists held gatherings over the road from hostel entrances.⁶

This aggressive public politicking did not bring the Party a large following, but it ensured the communists a profile in highlighting the political and economic demands of African workers. The Party criticised the municipal neglect of Durban's Africans, and the narrow agendas of middle class African politicians. In a direct and defensive response to the Party's strategy of regular street meetings, the Durban ANC branch stepped up its organisation of public gatherings.⁷ This, together with the municipality's

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573, 134, 3: Durban City Police memo on CP meeting, 22 November 1946.
 2. This is well illustrated through the correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573-574, 134, 3-5.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573, 134, 3: Durban City Police Memo on CP meeting, 22 November 1946; Guardian, 23 January 1947.
 4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/574, 134, 5: K. Gokul to TC, 27 September 1947 and 17 November 1947.
 5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/574, 134, 5: TC to K. Gokul, 24 December 1947; K. Gokul to Mayor, 9 January 1948; Ilanga, 17 May 1947.
 6. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/574, 134, 5: K. Gokul to TC, 20 January 1948.
 7. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/574, 134, 5: E.S. Dubazana to TC, 14 June 1947; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1701, 467C, 7: E.S. Dubazana to TC, 7 August 1947 and TC to Dubazana, 29 September 1947.

insistence on restricting communist meetings to specified venues, indicated the Party's potential to give direction and momentum to proletarian struggles. Segregation and capitalism were the targets of communist politics; there was little scope within this ideology for anti-Indianism, except to criticise Indian capitalists.

This last possibility was well illustrated by the food campaign of 1946 which marked one of the few attempts to mobilise Indians and Africans jointly in community politics during the late 1940s. Market maladjustments and a severe drought resulted in widespread shortages of food and other essentials during 1946. Scarcity in Durban drove prices up; traders were tempted to stockpile goods and make high profits through controlled selling. The shortages were worse than anything experienced since this problem began in 1944. In consequence, a number of campaigns developed around the issue of food shortages.¹ Popular anger at long queues, scarcity, and the enhanced power of shopkeepers found expression in direct action. A pattern was set when African customers raided an Indian store in the Duffs Road peri-urban area north of Durban. Communist Party and Housewives League activists provided organizational foci, raising demands for state rationing and calling for action against 'black marketeers'. Many traders were no doubt stockpiling goods, but for three main reasons the Communist Party's campaign concentrated on Indian traders in the city centre. Firstly, the white authorities were less likely to suppress the campaign if Indians were targeted. Secondly, to attract a following, the campaign had to relate directly to the experiences of African and Indian customers, who shopped mainly in Indian stores. Thirdly, some of the Communist Party members, who were also leaders of the recently radicalized Natal Indian Congress, had their own agenda of targeting selected wealthy traders who

1. This account relies heavily on Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.18-24.

supported reactionary Indian politics.

Mass rallies were held in various parts of the city. Both Africans and Indians attended, and the crowds ran into thousands. Speakers were applauded for castigating profiteering, the corruption of municipal price inspectors, and the state's neglect of the poor.¹ At one such meeting in Red Square a coffin symbolizing the death of profiteering was ritually buried.² A Communist Party activist later characterised the food campaign as a 'people's revolt'. It was non-racial in character, and popular anger was directed at carefully selected Indian stores, where stockpiled goods were seized and then sold to waiting queues by CPSA activists at controlled prices.³ The generalized looting of Indian stores three years later, in the 1949 riots, suggests that many African participants in the 1946 food campaign were drawing different conclusions to those reached by Party activists. A key element in the success of direct action had been the threatened use of violence against Indian storekeepers. Direct action by ordinary people went beyond constitutional protest politics and overturned legally entrenched property relations. A further lesson could hardly have been missed: repressive state forces had not intervened because the campaign had targeted Indian rather than white shops. Instead, the municipality provided food wagons which sold essential goods at controlled prices. This response, together with the improved volume of food supplies via the market, effectively ended the food campaign.

During the late 1940s the Communist Party tried to penetrate the political culture of the shantytowns. This was a difficult task, just as it was for African nationalist politicians. Yet the Party's message of class struggle had potential appeal to shack

1. Ilanga, 22 June 1946.

2. Interview with Mr B. Nair by I.L. Edwards, 27 June 1985.

3. Ibid.

dwellers who demanded land and housing from the municipality, and whose material position as tenants conflicted with that of African and Indian shacklords. Through Philemon Tsele and others, the Party became involved in the Natal African Tenants' and Peasants' Association, which had begun under the leadership of Sydney Myeza and Willie Able in the mid 1940s.¹ There was a growing fear amongst whites in Durban that such organisations might develop into organised squatter movements, in ways similar to the Rand. The campaign against the eviction of African squatters from Haviland Road in Cato Manor during 1947 gave substance to such fears. This event showed how, under certain kinds of leadership, municipal policy could be singled out as a source of oppression and hence a target of collective action. Accompanied by ANC Youth League, Communist Party and Civil Rights League activists, a non-racial deputation, consisting mostly of African women, marched through central Durban to the Native Administration offices.² The marchers vowed to resist eviction until alternative municipal housing was provided. Dissatisfied with the reception they received, the deputation marched to the city hall gardens, declaring their intent to squat there until all demands were met. The victorious protesters dispersed when told they would be allowed to rebuild their demolished shacks at Haviland Road. The Communist Party issued a trenchant statement attacking the municipal destruction of shacks by the 'well-fed ladies and gentlemen' of the city council.³

The Natal African Tenants' and Peasants' Association continued to be active into the late 1940s but, like other formal organisations of the period, it failed to generate a mass following. This signalled distrust of organised politics and the fluidity of social

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/573, 134, 3: Chief Constable to TC, 11 October 1946; Broome Commission, evidence of NATPA, 20 November 1947.
 2. Ilanga, 20 September 1947; Natal Mercury, 12 and 13 September 1947; Guardian, 18 September 1947.
 3. Ilanga, 20 September 1947.

relations in Durban's shantytowns. It was extremely difficult to co-ordinate the diverse strands of squatter assertiveness. This was particularly so for leaders like Sydney Myeza who was predisposed, as he had shown as a worker representative during the war, to taking up individual squatter complaints in para-legal fashion.¹ Nevertheless, NATPA was the closest that Durban came to having a squatter 'movement', and it was a significant barometer of squatter consciousness. Hostility towards Indians was part of NATPA's stance, but so too was antipathy to local government. Early in 1948, for example, a NATPA deputation warned the police that widespread raids and evictions were causing 'intense hatred in the African people'.² There were a growing number of instances of police being attacked while raiding for passes, dagga and liquor.³

During late 1948, the police filed almost 'daily reports' of 'minor disturbances'.⁴ Collective and organised skirmishes were part of African proletarian experience, especially amongst migrants, and these incidents seemed to be on the increase. On Christmas Day 1948 there was a large confrontation between stone-throwing residents of the Somtseu Road and South African Railways hostels.⁵ Popular violence was anti-authority, but was not usually mobilised around explicit political agendas. In mid 1948, however, popular African militancy had found expression in a strategy that was well etched on Durban's political map. The introduction of smaller tin drinking mugs precipitated a total beer hall boycott.⁶ An African policeman complained about the difficulty of isolating the ringleaders of the boycott: 'We cannot distinguish between the

1. Ilanga, 2 August 1947.

2. Guardian 22 January 1948; See also S. Myeza's letter to Ilanga, 8 February 1947.

3. Ilanga, 13 December 1947.

4. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, Evidence, p.32.

5. Ilanga, 1 January 1949.

6. Guardian, 24 June 1948.

ordinary boycotters, the pickets or the leaders. Every African is a boycotter, every boycotter a picket, and every picket a leader.’¹ The boycott revealed the reservoir that could be tapped in struggles against municipal authority. At the docks, another familiar site of contention, Zulu Phungula, the charismatic stevedore banished from Durban for five years after the 1942 strike, had arrived back in town and was remobilizing the dock workers around wage demands.² Phungula drew a clear distinction between himself - ‘a declared leader of the Durban workers’ - and those African leaders who were ‘exempt from native law, [and] who have brought European status.’ Worker organisation, he insisted, was thwarted by ‘the Corporation and the Sergeant’ who, in turn, favoured the middle class African politicians.³ Consciousness and political culture amongst Durban’s Africans during the late 1940s had many strands, many targets, and many choices. If there was one feature in common, it was their combustible nature.

7.5. CONCLUSION

During the mid to late 1940s the social processes and conflicts of the war years were magnified and accelerated. They did not throw up a cohesive movement in African politics, but a myriad of forces which were difficult to characterise as a whole. These fell under the broad umbrella of urban populism, with overlapping influences of worker organisation, nationalist ideas, and racial-ethnic mobilisation. Their common inspiration, manifest in a variety of ways, was the deepening reliance of ever larger numbers of Africans on the urban social economy. Africans in Durban took the first

1. Guardian 24 June 1948.

2. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 2: NC Durban to CNC, 8 September 1948; Z. Phungula to NC Durban, 15 September 1948.

3. CAD NTS 2222, 416/280, 2: Z. Phungula to CNC, 24 August 1948; CAD K18, 34, NK3, 37: Verbatim reports, 21 April 1949, paras. 2959 and 2963.

steps into an era of mass politics, which had many long-term usurpationary implications for the city's white rulers.

These developments were so rapid, diffuse and diverse that both the authorities and the middle class African politicians battled to identify and define the main thrusts of African populism. They wished, of course, to do so for different reasons. For latter day historians, too, African politics in Durban during the late 1940s is difficult to categorise and characterise. There were so many different strands. To provide some focus, this chapter has concentrated on aspects of African-Indian relations. This approach has yielded a number of important insights. We have been able to explore the deep socio-political roots of potential African-Indian conflict, thereby setting out the broad context for the momentous riots of 1949. This has been done by examining structural and social forces in the labour market, and in commerce, transport and housing. This exercise has indicated that there was no primordial antagonism between Africans and Indians. Racial-ethnic competition and collective identities were features of a modern industrializing society. Some African political leaders wilfully exploited these tensions; others, with an eye on the broader perceptions of African nationalism, human rights, or worker mobilisation, related more uneasily to them. There was no escaping the reality that race became ever more central during the late 1940s to the political culture of both the dominant and subordinate classes. Parkin's model of 'class' is sufficiently elastic, focusing as it does on the intentions of collective action, to incorporate racial-ethnic mobilisation into overlapping strategies of class struggle. African-Indian tensions were key aspects of an intensifying class conflict, rooted in material, political and cultural phenomena, between sub-groups of Durban's subordinate class.

The chapter has been at pains to stress that African-Indian tension was accompanied

by clear signs of popular African hostility and challenge towards white authority, especially the municipality. This was the reason for the appointment in 1947 of the important Broome Commission of Enquiry into Native Administration. Broome adopted the image of the volcano in his findings. Both before and after the Broome commission there were overt, but disjointed, manifestations of this hidden volcano. It took a downtown street scuffle in January 1949 between an Indian shop owner and an African teenager to unleash a city-wide conflict whose scale and horror were unprecedented in Durban's history.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SEIZING THE MOMENT: THE RIOTS OF 1949 AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CITY¹

8.1. INTRODUCTION

In January 1949 Durban experienced a weekend of unprecedented public violence. Mobs of Africans rampaged through areas of the city, attacking Indians and looting and destroying Indian-owned property. Some Indians counter-attacked; many thousands fled to refugee camps. The state's armed forces, which did not intervene initially, quelled the rioting with their own dramatic display of violence. During the conflict 87 Africans, 50 Indians, 1 white person, and 4 'unidentified' people died. At least 1,087 people were injured. A factory, 58 stores and 247 dwellings were destroyed; 2 factories, 652 stores and 1,285 dwellings were damaged.² What caused the violence? Why did it take an apparently racial form? What social fissures were exposed? What aspects of political leadership and popular culture were revealed? What was the role of the state? What were the consequences of the riots?

Some made political mileage from the riots; others grappled with the tragedy. The government's commission of enquiry labelled the conflict as a 'race riot' which reflected primordial antagonism between Africans and Indians.³ The commission

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1. Earlier versions of this chapter were presented as seminar and conference papers in 1989 and 1990. See Nuttall, 'Durban Riots of 1949'; and Edwards and Nuttall, 'Seizing the Moment'. Collaboration with Iain Edwards in the production of the later piece generated new insights which have influenced the writing of this chapter.
 2. Union of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban, UG 36-49 (hereafter cited as Riots Commission Report 1949), p.5. The injured were listed as 541 Africans, 503 Indians, 32 whites and 11 coloureds.
 3. Riots Commission Report 1949, pp.6, 21-22.

concluded that a neutral state had made the necessary intervention to restore control and keep the combatants apart. The apartheid state, many of Durban's whites, and certain African and Indian interest groups drew ideological ammunition from the riots. Racial zoning policies and population removal had been vindicated as necessary to prevent future endemic conflict between 'races'.

Advocates of the emerging multi-racial political alliance between the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Indian Congress (SAIC) realized the deep damage the riots meant for their cause. Not only was the conflict between Indians and Africans, but it had erupted as plans were germinating for mass black action against the state. The Congresses concluded that the riots were fuelled by the depressed socio-economic circumstances in which black people lived, and by the racially discriminatory policies of the state.¹ The same point was made by leading Durban liberals.² Such perspectives avoided the highly sensitive issue of African agency in the riots. Who led the rioters, who was available for mobilisation? The conservative, merchant-dominated Natal Indian Organization (NIO) was one of only two bodies in black politics which ventured the opinion that there was some level of co-ordination behind the riots.³ The other body which suspected this was the Durban branch of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), which criticised the Durban ANC for dabbling with anti-Indianism, and for failing to provide the African masses with effective and progressive political leadership.⁴ At issue here were the crucial questions of differing strategies and targets, and the political distance between formal organizations and their potential

1. Karis and Carter, *Protest*, Vol.2, pp.285-88.

2. M. Webb, 'The Riots and After' (pp.85-96) and K. Kirkwood, 'Failure of a Report' (pp.97-106) in *Race Relations* 16, 4 (1949).

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission of Enquiry 1949.

4. Interviews by I.L. Edwards with R. Arenstein, 29 May 1985, and J. Arenstein, 18 July 1985; Harry Gwala's critique of the ANC leadership in the *Guardian*, 14 April 1949.

constituencies. The riots of 1949 have cast a long shadow. Not only do they provide instructive parallels with civil violence in South Africa during the late 1980s and the 1990s; they are still remembered and exploited in present-day Natal politics.¹

The political sensitivity of the riots for liberal and left-wing analysts has meant that the issue has received relatively little academic attention. A handful of historians have been attracted to the drama of that weekend, but they have done little more than narrate the main incidents.² Three sociologists - Meer, Kuper and Webster - have put forward more analytical perspectives.³ Writing more than twenty years after the riots, Meer stressed the culpability of whites and the apartheid state; and she questioned the appropriateness of the inter-racial alliance politics of the later 1940s. Meer developed a virtually conspiratorial view of the riots: African frustrations were manipulated as part of a white vendetta against Indians.⁴ Meer's second concern was the way the riots highlighted the failings of the black alliance politics of the period. With a keen sense of the late 1940s, she pointed to unresolved tensions between the Natal ANC and the Natal Indian Congress, between 'parochial' strands of African nationalism and the 'international humanism' of 'non-African democrats'.⁵ For Meer, who was a young

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1. G. Mare and G. Hamilton, An Appetite for Power (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1987), p.152; A. Sitas, 'Inanda, August 1985: "Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods"', South African Labour Bulletin 11, 4 (1986), p.109; H. Hughes, 'The August 1985 Violence in Inanda', Journal of Southern African Studies 13, 3 (1987), pp.331-354; South, 20 December 1989.
 2. S.L. Kirk, 'The 1949 Durban Riots: A Community in Conflict', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983; L.K. Ladlau, 'The January 1949 Riots', BA Honours essay, University of Natal, Durban, 1974; S.B. Maraj, 'Faces of a Dark Tragedy: the 1949 Durban Riots', BA Honours essay, University of Durban-Westville, 1985.
 3. F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans (Durban, Avon House, 1969); F. Meer, 'African Nationalism - Some Inhibiting Factors', in H. Adam (ed.) South Africa: Sociological Perspectives (London, O.U.P., 1971), pp.121-157; Kuper, Bourgeoisie; E. Webster, 'The 1949 Durban Riots - A Case Study in Race and Class' in P. Bonner (ed.), Working Papers in Southern African Studies (Johannesburg, African Studies Institute, 1979), pp.1-54.
 4. Meer, Portrait, p.36. Echoes of this line of argument can also be found in Meer's analysis of the Inanda conflict of 1985. See F. Meer (ed.) Institute for Black Research Special Report: Unrest in Natal, August 1985 (Durban, Institute for Black Research, 1985).
 5. Meer, 'African Nationalism', p.132.

activist in 1949, the riots brutally revealed the 'superficial' and 'premature' character of the inter-racial alliance in the volatile Durban context.¹

Meer's perceptive comments are flawed by her portrayal of Africans as pawns, without volition of their own. Kuper's seminal study of Durban's African middle class in the 1960s showed, by contrast, how African traders gained from the riots and their aftermath.² Kuper's focus was broadened by Webster's path-breaking materialist analysis of the riots, an exercise steeped in the 'race-class' debates of the 1970s.³ Webster understood the riots as an 'economically based class conflict with a profoundly racial dimension.'⁴ He stressed the partial character of class formation within a racially differentiated society. He tried to identify the key collectivities among the rioters, and to discern what their motives were. This suggestive work remained introductory, for Webster did not take his research project any further.⁵ No one has offered significant analytical advances on the matter since Webster's 1979 article.

It is clear that any detailed and convincing exploration of the 1949 riots has to address two key issues. The first concerns the inter-relation of class, race and ethnicity within Durban's black politics at the end of the 1940s. The second issue relates to historical timing: why did the riots occur early in 1949, and not at some other time? How did the riots unfold? The riots provide a focal point for theories of social conflict and for fine-tuned historical analysis. The riots were a key usurpationary moment for Durban's Africans. They were targeted against a racially specific and politically vulnerable social group. The collective action of the rioters revealed an acute sense of

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1. Ibid; Interview by T.A. Nuttall with F. Meer, 10 August 1987.
 2. Kuper, *Bourgeoisie*, Chapter 17.
 3. Webster, 'Riots'.
 4. Ibid., pp.30, 48.
 5. Personal communication with E. Webster, February 1990.

class struggle, shaped by the political context of the late 1940s. The riots should not be seen in isolation; they were integral to the social experiences and the African militancy of the late 1940s. The following account of the riots needs to be read in close conjunction with the previous chapter. This point, about locating the riots within wider parameters, has been made by two different writers, Hemson and Edwards, but neither devotes sufficient analytical attention to the riots themselves.¹ It is to this task that we now turn.

8.2. THE RIOTS, PUBLIC VIOLENCE, AND AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

The riots began on Thursday 13 January 1949. The riots began with a common incident which did not in itself contain the seeds of conflagration, but which opened up new possibilities in the subsequent turmoil of events. The first phase occurred during late Thursday afternoon.² It began when an Indian shopkeeper assaulted an African youth, George Madondo, whose head was gashed by a broken window.³ The wound was not serious, but bystanders saw much blood. The scuffle happened at the end of the day amidst the crowds of Victoria Street, near the central bus depot where thousands of Africans and Indians queued for a bus home. In addition to the bus passengers, thousands of central city hostel dwellers had converged on the area, as they did daily, to buy food and drink after work. The nearby beer hall, Durban's largest, was packed with male domestic workers, enjoying their traditional Thursday afternoon

1. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', pp.351-353; Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.50-53.

2. Unless stated, the account of the first phase is drawn from: Natal Mercury, 14 January 1949; Natal Daily News, 14 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2; NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, G. Bestford, pp.31-54; Kirk, 'Riots', p.48-54.

3. It seems highly likely that Madondo was a street ruffian.

off.¹

The bloodied George Madondo would have attracted curious spectators. The presence of domestic servants in the crowd might have been the key factor triggering collective violence. Domestic servants, characteristically young men and often newly arrived from the countryside, were the core members of the amalaita gangs which ruled the streets and parks at night. They were well known for their stick fights and assaults on unsuspecting victims.² It was possible that amalaitas responded to the assault on Madondo with their practised methods of violence. The violence seems to have been prompted by women egging men to take revenge. The original incident became lost in a wider anger focused on Indian shops and buses in the immediate vicinity. Stones began to fly, glass shattered. Within minutes Victoria Street became a battleground of hostile crowds, flying missiles, damaged buses, and broken glass. Indians hurled objects on to Africans from balconies above the street. Looting began through broken shop windows. Motives of personal gain mingled with anger at post-war food shortages and inflation. Both African and Indian bystanders exploited a chance for recompense.³ All the signs were that state power would not intervene to protect Indian property.

If white anti-Indianism provided a general licence for stoning and looting in Victoria Street, the actions of the police provided further encouragement. Taken by surprise, and totally unprepared for 'riot control', the small numbers of baton-wielding police sent to the scene acted with uncertainty and made little impact on the milling crowds. The police argued afterwards that the large numbers of innocent bystanders precluded the use of bullets to disperse the mass. This did not explain why other forms

1. There were around 20,000 male domestic workers in Durban. Burrows, Population, pp.150-152, 164.

2. KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.267-8; La Hausse, 'Nongoloza'.

3. For a useful overview of theories of looting, see Webster, 'Riots', pp.26-29.

of crowd control, such as teargas, were not used.¹ The fact that only Indian people and property were being attacked, and that the rioting remained confined to a small locality, no doubt influenced the police reaction. Sporadic looting continued in the city centre till around 11 pm, and there were isolated incidents in Mayville and Sydenham. Forty eight Indians and four Africans received hospital treatment for riot injuries.

By midnight the streets were quiet. White Durban was only to read of the rioting in the next morning's papers. In one sense, the Victoria Street fighting and looting was not extraordinary, except for its scale. Collective violence and thuggery had become increasingly frequent amongst the city's black proletarians during the late 1940s.² Amalaita gangsters and ingoma dancers, in particular, were well known for their weekend bouts of stick-fighting and stone-throwing. These contests defined group identity and prowess, and marked out spheres of territorial influence.³ Parts of the city, at certain times of the day and the week, had become very violent, and Victoria Street in the late afternoon was one such area. The police kept a low profile in responding to these incidents of violence, as long as the fighting remained small-scale, was confined to Africans, and did not threaten white persons or property. Neither were the street skirmishes of 13 January 1949 the first instance of large-scale confrontation between Africans and Indians. In August 1947, in the Victoria Street district, there had been a two-hour long 'war' - the term used by an Ilanga journalist - involving a crowd of 200 Africans and Indians.⁴ The conflict started when an Indian bystander accused an African youth of stealing, and assaulted him. Attacks and counter-attacks followed. As

1. Teargas was used for the first time in South Africa during Durban's 1929 riots.

2. See for example the letter from 'Cape Bantu', Daily News, 21 April 1947.

3. Ilanga, 1 January 1949; KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981.

4. Ilanga, 2 August 1947.

a result of this skirmish, the Victoria Street beer hall was closed; and the police arrested eight Africans, four Indians and one 'coloured' person. This event died in court, where all those arrested were acquitted.

The acquittals may well have been one of the factors which gave momentum to the events of 1949: African-Indian violence was not punishable in the courts. The happenings of the evening of 13 January became the topic of excited conversation in hostel dormitories, backyard *khayas*, and shack courtyards. The news was spiced with rumour and informed by racial stereotypes. Madondo had in fact gone to hospital, and been discharged after minor treatment. The stories about the attack on Madondo, however, were embellished with each telling. Perhaps the most extreme version was that Indians had cut Madondo's head off and placed it in a mosque.

These rumours found fertile soil in the increasingly explicit culture of anti-Indianism amongst Africans. Popular consciousness amongst Africans fed on niggling day-to-day grievances and on the broader structural tensions examined in the last chapter. It was common talk that the diluted 'European' liquor sold by Indians caused tuberculosis, and that widespread venereal disease amongst Africans was the result of Indian lust for African women.¹ There was a growing preoccupation with the alleged moral degradation and exploitation of African women by Indian men.² This patriarchal concern with the sexuality of African women was an emotional rallying cry for 'racial purity'. Conversation had it that Indian commuters were given favoured treatment on Indian buses; that Indian patients at King Edward hospital were issued with pyjamas while Africans got rough pull-over robes; and that Indians were paid at least three times

1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.277-278, 305-306.

2. CAD NTS 7259, 338/326, 1: African Central Industrial Society to Minister of Justice, 12 March 1950.

the wages of Africans for the same job.¹ Indian traders were the butt of many an angry remark, and letters to the press from Africans openly referred to 'bloodsucking Indians'.²

Cultural caricatures such as these intersected with anti-Indianism amongst Durban's whites. Africans and whites were vastly differentiated in the city's hierarchy of power, but they reached common ground, via very different routes, in anti-Indianism. For whites, collective hostility towards Indians was primarily an exclusionary phenomenon; for Africans, it was essentially usurpationary. Africans, and particularly cultural and political leaders, observed the explicit mobilisation of white power against Indians. If there was one feature which determined the timing of the 1949 riots it was the coming to power of the Afrikaner nationalists in 1948. There had been a certain ambiguity in the policies of the Smuts government towards Indians. Malan's new cabinet brushed this aside in a flurry of anti-Indian invective. The explicit degradation of Indians in the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism struck a chord with expressions of African nationalism and popular culture in Durban.³

This brief digression has been necessary for us to understand why the riots developed beyond the first evening's fighting. That night, the talk went beyond rumours about Madondo to the items that had been looted, the powerlessness of the Indian store owners to stop it, and the weakness of the thinly spread police force. White news reporters had eagerly photographed Africans smashing and looting.⁴ It began to dawn that the events of Victoria Street had unfolded so fast that they had not been fully

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1. Ilanga, 1 November 1947; Broome Commission evidence: Hannah Msomi of the Baumannville African Women's Association, 14 November 1947.
 2. See letter from 'Cape Bantu', Daily News, 21 April 1947.
 3. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp.167-171.
 4. See for example, Natal Daily News, 15 January 1949, pp.1, 3.

exploited. It was as if in the collective taking of breath, Durban's Africans realised that the morrow held out prospects of more looting and further defiance of authority. The Victoria Street battle had opened up an unprecedented moment of opportunity.

The flames of rumour and excitement burned most fiercely that Thursday night in the larger hostels, such as Somtseu Road (8,000 residents) and Bell Street (1,500 residents).¹ A central city hostel manager reported that he had never seen the residents in such an angry and excited mood. Life in these single-sex institutions was hard and regimented, masculine and violent.² There were many possible reasons why hostel dwellers could be persuaded to resort to further rioting against Indian targets. Many hostel residents were migrant workers, clutching jobs on the margins of the labour market. The economic downturn of 1948 would have made their lot even harsher. In addition, local politicians were calling for rigid new controls over migrant labour, in response to the housing crisis. The hostels were highly vulnerable to mass police raids, which occurred with increasing frequency during the late 1940s. Direct collective action in the city centre held out prospects of countering marginalisation from the city's political economy. It would also assert migrant power within proletarian politics, against the more established middle class and the more settled residents of the townships and shantytowns. Practised methods of collective violence offered an obvious means of achieving these agendas. Organised street fighting was part of migrant experience, whether at soccer matches, jasbaadjie and dance competitions, beer halls, or Sunday clashes between gangs.³ The anti-Indian strands in the consciousness of the hostel-dwellers arose from their experiences as consumers, commuters and competitors

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1. For hostel sizes see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p. 6/1, and Natal Mercury, 4 February 1949.
 2. Sitas, 'Accommodation', pp.12-13.
 3. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981; Ilanga 1 January 1949.

for jobs.

It was in the hostels that plans circulated for another attack on the Indian shopping centre during the lunch hour of Friday 14 January. One informant claimed after the riots that 'runners' had spread these plans to all the hostels, as far north as the Coronation Brick and Tile compound on the banks of the Umgeni. There was no formal organisation, only the informal social networks of the hostels and workplaces. One participant in the riots recalled how he gathered with others at the place where 'the boys urinate at the Point.'¹ Another remembered being 'recruited' through his boxing club.²

From Friday morning the riots entered a second phase.³ Although there had been isolated attacks on Indians earlier in the day, notably in the Jacobs hostel area, it was during the lunch hour of Friday that as many as 2,000 Africans converged on the 'Indian quarter' and began looting shops. The police had heard the rumours and were now more prepared; they had enrolled white civilians, arming them with batons. The nature of the looting, however, made it difficult to police in this manner. There was no solid phalanx of rioters, but small dispersed groups followed by crowds. One lunch hour photograph of Pine Street, where looting was occurring, shows Indians, whites and Africans walking unalarmed. Pedestrians helped themselves to goods through broken windows. An eye witness observed a ricksha puller loading up his vehicle with armloads of women's shoes. The unreality of it all provoked laughter and heckling. Individual Indians were jostled on the pavements; some were robbed of their Friday

1. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.

2. Sitas, 'Accommodation', p.11-16.

3. Unless stated, the account of the second phase is drawn from: Natal Mercury, 14 January 1949; Natal Daily News, 14 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2; NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, G. Bestford, pp.31-54; Kirk, 'Riots', p.48-54.

pay. White bystanders gathered; their very passivity was interpreted as approval. Some whites joined the looting. Nearby white shops remained unscathed. The 'rules of the riot', developed the day before, had been rapidly learnt: confine assaults to Indians to avoid the full deployment of white power. Only in one or two cases were the rules broken, for example in lower Florida Road where all passing cars, including those driven by whites, were pelted with stones.

During the early afternoon the looting of Indian shops fanned out, along the Umgeni and South Coast roads, and groups of dock workers moved up Berea Road. Groups of varying sizes marched in loose formation, armed with sticks and periodically clashing with baton-wielding police. Press photographs of the rioters reveal interesting details. The participants were mainly young men, although in one example a ululating woman was at the head. Many were relatively well dressed, wearing the clothes of employed workers and petty traders.¹ In another photograph, the red-trimmed calico uniforms of domestic servants were prominent. Groups marched in rhythm, and the excitement of the crowd was a driving force. Tunywa Dlamini recalls that, amidst cries of 'Usuthu':

'we joined in [the riots] by Maheshe's at the bottom, coming along with it. We came with it to Maheshe's ... we pointed it towards Umgeni Road ... we were finishing them, but not destroying everything as we went. When they tried to jump up you would catch them and throw them down with a knobkerrie.'²

Perceptions and displays of collective power, targeted at Indians, were everywhere. The fighting spread 'like a wind because there was no place where the Indians were not hit. ... The Indians are not a nation that fights, they are a nation that runs away.'³

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: DCC memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949.
 2. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.
 3. Ibid.

A power vacuum had opened up in a strategic area of the city centre, the focus of African trading and commuter life. At 4.00 pm on Friday a crowd of Somtseu Road hostel residents, estimated at 1 000 strong, marched from the hostel towards the city centre. This throng was very different from the dispersed groups which had looted during the early afternoon. As it left the hostel, stones rained down on the nearby Magazine Barracks, a dilapidated municipal hostel housing Indian families. The marchers were making for the Indian shopping area, but from the authorities' point of view they were an ominous portent, threatening an overspill of violence into white Durban. The riots were beginning to escalate from assaults on Indian property into a broader challenge. Police met the crowd on the edge of the Indian shopping area. When warning shots to halt were not heeded, they opened fire into the mass. At least four people died instantly, and the crowd scattered in panic.

The shootings were intended as a dramatic use of force against the rioters. During the afternoon, as the rioting had spread, local police chiefs realised they lacked the personnel to mount the city-wide display of force that seemed to be increasingly necessary if the state's authority was to be restored. Urgent telephone calls were made to Pretoria for police and military reinforcements. Among Africans, news of the police confrontation with the Somtseu Road crowd travelled fast, thanks to the special municipal buses which had been quickly laid on to remove commuters from the city centre. Africans spoke of the successful looting and the police action; Indians carried fearful news of rampaging crowds that seemed unstoppable. The police action introduced a new form of state violence into the rioting, and helped to deflect it from the city centre to the shack areas.

The mass killings in Cato Manor and to a lesser extent in the Jacobs area, signified

a third phase of the riots.¹ The late afternoon buses going into Mkhumbane were packed as usual. Accounts and rumours of the day's conflict mixed with panic and heightened anticipation. The looting and attacking of Indians had largely spent itself in the Grey Street area. Police had used firearms against the Somtseu Road crowd and cordoned the Indian quarter off. The focus of crowd violence now shifted to the squatter slums, where both shanty dwellers and hostel residents saw opportunities to seize Indian land and housing. Here was an opportunity to short-circuit the racial skewing of property relations, and to defy the policies of racial zoning. The territorial aspect gave a distinctiveness to the rioting in Cato Manor. The violence went beyond looting, beating and breaking to include murder, rape and burning. The killings and burnings in Cato Manor amounted to a pogrom: the organized extermination and expulsion of all Indians. In the Booth Road area of Cato Manor in particular, where Indian houses and stores were prominently situated, the destruction was almost total.

Those Indian traders with guns tried to fight off their attackers; many Indians fled into the bush to hide, while the fortunate ones were rescued in police vans and taken to the Cato Manor police station. The vans were pelted with stones as they drove around looking for survivors. The 'war of Cato Manor' violently appropriated an area which the authorities had zoned 'Indian'. The Cato Manor post office was also destroyed, and if there had been other state buildings in the district they would probably have met the same fate.² The Cato Manor police station was effectively surrounded, and initial police attempts to quell the violence were hampered by the dense shack

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1. Unless stated the account of this phase is drawn from: Natal Mercury, 15-18 January 1949; Natal Daily News, 15-18 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, G Bestford, pp.31-54; Kirk, 'Riots', pp.54-57.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1702, 467C, 8: M.A. Bhengu to TC, 3 March 1949.

clusters and difficult terrain, especially in the dark. It was the militant defiance of the rioters, rather than the attacks on Indian people and property, which prompted the police to embark on a 'shoot to kill' policy. Around 500 soldiers began heavy-handed 'mopping up' operations that night. For a local news reporter it seemed the clock had turned back to the Second World War. Machine guns were set up, and sometimes fired 'for five minutes at a time' in the direction of groups looting and burning buildings.¹ In some instances, military patrols were attacked with sticks and stones, and replied with rifle fire.

By Saturday morning the storm had spent itself, although there were sporadic incidents during the weekend. A tense equilibrium had been reached between state power and the rioters; both had achieved short-term objectives. The military units had shown their capacity to suppress rioting by force.² A few hundred more soldiers arrived in Durban during Saturday, and armoured cars patrolled the city and its outskirts. At least eleven Africans were shot dead on Saturday and Sunday, some by soldiers, and some by Indians from motor car windows. The rioters had won their own victory: they had dramatically defied the authorities; they had looted shops and homes; and through popular force had driven Indian residents from the shantytowns and neighbouring districts. By midday on Saturday 15 January there were an estimated 25,000 Indian refugees in the city.³ A photograph taken in Booth Road, Cato Manor, on the Monday after the riots aptly captures the tense aftermath: a small group of soldiers was gathered behind a machine gun on the side of the road; in front of them passed a steady stream of residents returning from work, their raised fists punching the

1. Natal Daily News, 15 January 1949.

2. KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.

3. There were also 2,000 African refugees: see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Manager, NAD to Native Administration Committee, 25 January 1949.

air.¹

8.3. THE AFTERMATH

For the rest of 1949 the strong currents unleashed by the riots surged and eddied. The national leaders of the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa met in Durban, hoping to heal the African-Indian breach.² On Friday morning the Natal Indian Congress and Natal ANC leaders, G.M. Naicker and A.W.G. Champion, had issued a public statement condemning the violence and calling for 'greater calm and understanding.'³ Later that day they toured the city centre on official trucks and used loudspeakers to urge crowds to disperse. Champion's pleas for tolerance rang hollow, for he was a well-known advocate of anti-Indianism. In one instance, Champion was physically assaulted by a crowd of Africans and had to beat a hasty retreat. The national Congresses had neither the ideological disposition nor the organisational capacity to channel the militancy of the Durban rioters. The diversity, ebullience and indiscipline of the 'city mob' made it difficult to absorb into formally organised resistance politics.⁴

If the national Congresses had been concerned to limit the political damage of the riots, there were others in African politics who sought to exploit the new opportunities which had opened up. These included marginal and established traders, local squatter leaders and political activists, and ordinary workers and shack residents. Popular attempts to consolidate the gains of the riots were focused in Cato Manor, especially

1. Natal Mercury, 17 January 1949.

2. Karis and Carter, Protest, Vol.2, pp.285-88; Webster, 'Riots', pp.17-20.

3. Ibid.

4. Hobsbawm, Rebels, pp.7, 110, 123-4.

the Booth Road area adjoining Chesterville township. After two weeks most Indian refugees had returned to their homes, but none dared go back to Booth Road. Civilian guards were formed to protect the new land and property acquisitions and to counter-attack the 'Indian army' rumoured to be massing for a reprisal. New African residents swarmed into Mkhumbane from other parts of the city and the hostels.

The riots had important commercial as well as territorial consequences. Within days, hundreds of petty traders had set up stalls along the road, selling goods no longer available from Indian stores. There was a flood of applications for pedlars' licences, and many more traded without applying.¹ Responding to the massive growth of informal trading, a group of leading traders formed the Zulu Hlanganani Co-operative and Buying Club.² The organization was specifically anti-Indian, and sought to monopolise control of African commercial activity in Cato Manor.

Bus transport was another area of commerce which promised profits to African entrepreneurs. African commuters boycotted Indian buses at Booth Road, the main Cato Manor terminus. They used the emergency municipal buses, or packed into African-driven cars and small lorries which flourished as pirate taxis.³ Indian buses were also boycotted elsewhere. The Point dock workers insisted they would never use Indian buses again, and savings funds were started at the Bell Street hostel and elsewhere for

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Secretary, Cato Manor Ratepayers' Association to TC, 9 February 1949, and NAD Manager's Report, 22 February 1949; Natal Mercury, 24 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Assistant Licensing Officer to TC, 15 February 1949.
 2. CAD NTS 7242, 168/326, 1: Constitution of Zulu Hlanganani Affiliated Sizanani Buying Clubs, and surrounding correspondence.
 3. Initially the municipality laid on 210 special buses, to clear the central city of crowds as quickly as possible. The Indian bus owners challenged the legality of this, and by the end of February there were 30 municipal buses on the Booth Road route. Torr, 'Lamont', p.155; Natal Mercury, 21 January 1949, 22 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Liaison Officer report, 24 February 1949; Sunday Tribune, 20 February 1949; Ilanga, 28 January 1949.

residents to buy their own buses.¹ There was a partial boycott on the Lamont route.² Initially the bus boycott was a spontaneous consequence of the riots. By the end of February it had fizzled out, except at Booth Road where Indian buses were only carrying around 25% of their pre-riot traffic.³ Here small groups of khaki-clad pickets, organized by taxi operators and aspirant bus owners, policed the boycott.⁴ The pickets used violence but this alone could not have ensured their success. The commuters who booed the Indian buses when they arrived at the terminus, or stoned them along the route, provided support.⁵ The temporary municipal bus certificates for Booth Road were due to expire at the end of February, leaving only Indian buses running again on the route. As the end of the month approached, rumours circulated that Africans would rise up against Indians again and destroy all Indian buses. These rumours spread like wild-fire, driving over 500 Indians to seek safety in refugee camps, and signalling the continuing receptiveness of ordinary people to the spirit of the riots.⁶ Increased police patrols and the last minute renewal of the municipal bus certificates deflated the rumours, however, and the weekend was quiet.

Conservatives in the Durban ANC and Native Advisory Board agreed to set up a joint council with the Natal Indian Congress to 'promote mutual understanding'.⁷ With the other hand they used the riots to increase their bargaining power with the municipality, seeking specifically to advance the interests of an aspirant commercial

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1583.SJ, 2-10: Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.346; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: Z. Phungula to TC, 17 February 1949.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NLAB minutes, 8 March 1949.
 3. Details in this paragraph are from NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban transportation board hearing, 25 February 1949.
 4. Guardian 3 February 1949.
 5. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: H.G. Stone's memo to mayor, 30 May 1949.
 6. Natal Mercury, 24-26 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Liaison Officer report, 24 February 1949 and 1 March 1949.
 7. Karis and Carter, Protest, p.287.

middle class through segregation policies which excluded Indian interests from 'Native' areas.¹ Unlike the less 'established' squatter leaders, who made similar demands but needed the backing of popular agitation to be heard by the authorities, the Advisory Board politicians already had influence with officials.² They were supported by the Native Administration manager, E. Havemann, who saw the political advantages of the controlled growth of larger scale African entrepreneurs.³ He was hostile to the uncontrolled petty trading at Booth Road, but initiated basic market facilities at Lamont and Chesterville, set up a wholesale trade for supplying African retailers, and supported African trade licences for Cato Manor and elsewhere. These initiatives yielded increased fees for Native Administration coffers, and enabled the riots to be remembered as an 'act of God' which launched a more prosperous African trading class.⁴

The Native Administration Department invited the Zulu paramount chief to address hostel and shack dwellers, a move designed to regain respect for the municipal authorities and to warn against further rioting.⁵ The major short-term concern of the municipality, however, was not political co-option and control but financing and managing the refugee camps and emergency buses.⁶ It was left to the police to consolidate the state's counter-attack against the rioters. All public meetings were banned until mid February. At least 100 Africans were charged with public violence and given hard labour sentences. Liquor raids were stepped up; police searched widely

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1. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: S. Ngcobo to TC, 4 March 1949; Natal Mercury, 17 January 1949.
 2. Natal Mercury, 21 January 1949.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: NAD manager's report to Native Administration Committee, 16 June 1949.
 4. UNISA, Champion papers, AAS1, Box 1, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. Champion interview by M.W. Swanson, 1 January 1973; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NAD manager to TC, 28 March 1949; L. Kuper, Bourgeoisie, pp.289-309.
 5. Natal Mercury, 26 February 1949; Ilanga, 22 January 1949 and 5 March 1949.
 6. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: TC's diary, 30 January 1949.

for looted goods and prosecuted pirate taxis and illegal street traders.¹ Armoured cars continued to patrol the city, and military units remained on standby. On numerous occasions the police dispersed African crowds which gathered outside Indian refugee camps or threatened to stone Indian buses.² Any African crowd was seen to embody further rioting; the police called for the relocation of central city beer halls and bus depots, and insisted that emergency municipal buses should continue to run on the Booth Road route to minimise volatile commuter crowds.³ Between February and May there were four reported incidents of African-Indian scuffles in the centre of town, one of which disrupted the whole of the Warwick Avenue market area. The role of the police was far from unambiguous in these clashes.⁴

During April 1949 the aftermath of the riots took a new turn with plans for a general strike of African workers. The architect was the Dock Workers' Union leader, Zulu Phungula. Aiming to direct the popular energy of the riots against capital, Phungula proposed a general strike to secure wage demands of one pound five shillings per day or thirty two pounds ten shillings per month.⁵ These amounted to increases of around 500%, a radical challenge to Durban's ultra-low African wage levels. The Point dock workers were well known for their militancy. They were heirs to a long tradition of strike action; they had been prominent in the 1948 beer hall boycott and the January riots. Soon after the riots the Dock Workers' Union was renamed the Natal Zulu

1. Natal Mercury, 26 January 1949 and 19 February 1949; Ilanga, 12 February 1949.

2. Natal Mercury, 19 January 1949, 31 January 1949, 21 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579-80, 323B, 1-2: Liaison officer reports, 8 February 1949 and 6 March 1949.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Deputy TC to Registrar, Natal Supreme Court, 25 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban transportation board hearing, 25 February 1949, and SAP to TC, 12 March 1949 and 17 March 1949.

4. Guardian 24 February 1949, 3 March 1949, 17 April 1949, and 19 May 1949.

5. The following account is based on Hemson, 'Class consciousness'; correspondence in CAD, NTS 2222, 416/280, 2; CAD K18, 34, NK3, file 37, evidence of Z. Phungula, Durban, 21 April 1949, paras. 2950-2964; Guardian, 5 and 12 May 1949; Ilanga, 7 May 1949.

National Workers' Union (NZNWU) and a large public meeting was held.¹ This gathering was dispersed by the police and heavy patrols traversed the Point area. Under the shadow of this police action, the NZNWU launched an intriguing campaign which linked general strike plans to a co-operative scheme to buy buses. A widely distributed pamphlet called on all 'Zulu workers' to strike indefinitely on May Day 1949. Strikers were urged to gather at the Point, to boycott the beer halls and municipal buses, to 'divorce themselves from everything European', and to bring their money for the bus company. Native Administration officials believed that the workers were 'not sufficiently well organised' for a widescale strike. The police nevertheless arrested Phungula on 30 April, and heavily armed convoys roamed the city during the weekend. During 2-3 May an estimated 800 dock workers struck work; they were joined by pockets of workers in firms around the harbour. The strike was weakened, however, by poor organisation and over-reliance on Phungula's leadership, by the aggressive police presence, and by employer threats of prosecution or offers of concessions. By the third day it had fizzled out. The authorities nevertheless regarded the strike agitation as sufficiently threatening to re-banish Phungula from Durban, this time for ten years.

The identification of the leaders of the bus boycott in the Booth Road area was more difficult for there was little explicit organisation. The boycott continued into the second half of 1949. Employers in industry and commerce began to complain that the continuing disruption of Cato Manor commuter traffic was affecting work attendance and productivity of African employees. The boycott had been seen by some members of the Durban Corporation as a useful pretext for introducing a municipal monopoly or

1. Phungula claimed that 20 000 attended, including workers 'from across the Umgeni'. Evidence has not been found to support this.

utility company to run black bus transport.¹ However when the central government refused to subsidise losses on the emergency buses these schemes were dropped. In May 1949 the National Transport Commission ruled that the emergency buses be withdrawn, and eleven certificates be given to African operators. Established African business interests, linked to the Native Advisory Board, jumped at this opportunity, excluding the more marginal squatter entrepreneurs who had gathered around the Zulu Hlanganani Association. The first African buses began running in July 1949.² In the meantime the resilience of the illegal traders, pirate taxi drivers and bus boycotters had forced the police to take drastic action. In May 1949 the police tried to shut down street trading and illegal taxi transport at Booth Road. This provoked widespread stoning of Indian buses, and running battles between police and residents in the area, with the police using 'frequent shows of armed force'.³

During the second half of 1949 the municipality grappled with longer-term policy responses to the riots. A common view among Durban's whites was that there were 'too many Natives' in the city. In December 1949 the city council instructed the Native Administration Department to tighten influx controls drastically.⁴ The focus of municipal concern during late 1949 was the future of Cato Manor.⁵ Apart from questions of health and housing control, Cato Manor was a volatile political threat to

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1. Natal Provincial Administration, Report ... Durban Passenger Transport (1946), pp. 2-3, 47-50; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: E. Havemann to TC, 18 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Deputy TC to Electricity Committee, 19 May 1949.
 2. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Secretary for Transport to TC, 28 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: TC to Secretary for Transport, 7 July 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Electricity Committee minutes, 27 May 1949; Natal Mercury, 2 July 1949.
 3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: Secretary, Cato Manor Ratepayers' Association to Mayor, 11 July 1949; Ilanga, 21 May 1949; Natal Daily News, 12 May 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Mayor's telegram to Prime minister's secretary, 17 May 1949, and H.G. Stone's memo to mayor, 7 June 1949.
 4. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1694, 467, 6.
 5. I.L. Edwards, 'The Durban City Council, M'Kumbane and the Cato Manor Emergency Camp, 1949-1952', in Natal 1909-1961 (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Department of Historical and Political Studies, 1983).

the rulers of the city. The municipality was divided over Cato Manor; some argued that all shack residents should be forcibly removed, while others proposed controlled site and service schemes on expropriated land in the district. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was widely justified as a means of preventing violent conflict by forcing 'races' to live separately. The future of Cato Manor was to become a major policy issue during the 1950s.

The riots threw up enormous dilemmas for the emerging multi-racial mobilisation strategies of the Congress alliance. The Natal ANC executive had lagged behind the national leaders, expressing unease and rejection of the Xuma-Naicker-Dadoo 'Doctors Pact' of 1947.¹ The joint ANC-NIC committees set up during and immediately after the riots achieved little. The riots had exposed a raw nerve. The rioters had exhibited clear usurpationary intent, but from the point of view of alliance politics the wrong targets - Indians rather than the state - had been hit. Local African nationalism and racial ethnicity had revealed a nasty underside. Natal ANC leaders like George Champion participated in the joint multi-racial committees, but also encouraged African traders, landlords and squatters to exploit new openings consequent on the expulsion of Indians from Cato Manor. Perhaps most revealing of the strains within African nationalism was the effect of the riots on Herbert Dhlomo, one of the few local Congress figures committed to alliance politics. A few months after the riots he wrote:

'The African mass-man agrees with the authorities that the races should be separated. Cato Manor is a predominantly African area these days. The mass-man argues that here the Africans should live by himself and cater for his own interests...Let Indians and Europeans confine themselves to their own areas.'²

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1. UW DHP Champion Papers, A922, A5: 'Inkulumo kaMongameli', Champion's presidential speech to the Natal Congress, Durban, May 1947.
 2. Guardian 28 July 1949.

The Cato Manor branch of the NIC resisted all calls for expropriation of 'Indian' land. The Durban NIC argued that Africans should be given land in Umlazi and areas north of the city.¹ The Communist Party publicly opposed the Cato Manor bus boycott, claiming that it was sustained by 'organised gangs of hooligans' who were intent on fanning African-Indian tension.² Many an African shantytown dweller who read the Party's anti-boycott pamphlets must have suspected little more than a defence of the vested interests of Indian transport operators.³ Why did the Party apparently target the aspirant African petit-bourgeoisie and not the Indian merchant class? It seemed as if the riots had uncovered a treacherous reef, which promised to shipwreck alliance politics at every turn.

In the longer term the 1949 riots forced a clearer parting of the ways within local black politics as it entered the apartheid era. As the tempo of organised protest politics and trade unionism gained momentum during the 1950s, African leaders and followers were confronted with two broad political choices. The one option was for anti-apartheid African nationalism, with its sub-strands of multiracialism and worker mobilisation. The other was to acquiesce and participate in state and municipal structures; and to go along with the politics of apartheid capitalism, racism and ethnicity.

Under Albert Luthuli's leadership during the 1950s, the Natal ANC became a very different organisation from that of the 1940s. Reflecting the influence of the Congress Alliance, its African nationalist ideologies tended to be racially inclusive rather than exclusive, and it was more explicitly hostile to the white state. The left wing unions, gathered under the umbrella of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU),

1. Guardian 11 August 1949.

2. Guardian, 3 March 1949.

3. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Durban Communist Party, The Bus Boycott. Who Does It Help?, April 1949.

brought working class influences to the politics of multiracialism in Durban. An African-Indian leadership core developed within the Congress Alliance. This group was still confronted, nevertheless, with the mammoth task of taking its message of non-racial democracy to the mass of potential constituents. The stayaway in 1950 of both Indian and African workers to protest the banning of the Communist Party gave some grounds for hope after the 1949 riots.¹ But Durban's poor performance in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and especially the small number of Africans who participated, signalled the immense difficulties of giving a popular face to anti-apartheid multiracialism.²

The Congress Alliance operated in a situation where race-based structures and experiences were profoundly important, and where forces in African politics wilfully exploited the legacy of the 1949 riots. Organisations like the Zulu Hlanganani initiated annual ceremonies to celebrate the 'war' of 1949. Victor Mallie and the African Central Welfare and Industrial Society were among the most explicit supporters of an 'apartheid' solution to the 'racial mixing' of urban society. In the name of conservative Christianity, racial purity, 'African' advance, anti-Indianism, and threats of bloodshed, they lent their support to the new Nationalist government and lambasted the Congress Alliance as treacherous.³ In the longer term, the people who gained most from the riots were the shacklords, the traders and urban 'bosses' - Champion included - who gained a new foothold in the political economy of the city. They became the state-recognised urban African leaders of the 1950s and 1960s. They channelled African fears and aspirations into racial-ethnic discourses. By contrast, the Congress Alliance spoke of

1. Lodge, Black Politics, p.35; Ilanga, 1 July 1950.

2. Ibid., pp.60-61.

3. See the correspondence during 1950-1951 in CAD NTS 7259, 338/326, 1.

a world that could be changed through non-racial struggles against white power.

8.4. CONCLUSION

The 1949 riots were a particularly violent instance of racial-ethnic conflict within Durban's subordinate class. To understand this, it has been vital to grapple with the centrality of 'race' - and especially anti-Indianism - in African popular culture. Unprecedented levels of social violence were a second notable feature of the conflict. This chapter and the previous one have provided historical analysis of these issues. During the late 1940s racial identities became more and more central to struggles for the city. We have concentrated on the racialisation of African politics, but similar processes were occurring in Indian and white politics. With industrialisation and urbanisation, Durban's social relations had become increasingly complex and the stakes of urban struggle had risen significantly. The growing prominence of race was a consequence both of developing social structures and vigorous racial mobilisation in politics and culture. A critical new feature in 1948, compounding the local racism of Durban's whites, was the vilification of Indians by the new Afrikaner nationalist government. It became very clear to Africans that Indians - as a racial group - were highly vulnerable politically. A fertile situation developed for African frustrations to find expression in anti-Indianism.

But these points, on their own, offer insufficient explanation of the 1949 riots. White Durban, despite being backed by state power, was increasingly alarmed at the growing symptoms of African unrest and militancy. African struggles during the late 1940s were pitted against a range of targets. The 1949 riots were not inevitable. They are best understood as a series of phases, with each new phase opening up new

opportunities for Africans to make decisive statements about their aspirations in a city whose future was so undecided. The two most prominent African groups which participated in the riots were hostel residents and shack dwellers. They were on the outer margins of the urban political economy, and collective violence offered them a chance to short-circuit their exclusion from the city. This was expressed through the looting and destruction of Indian property and the seizure of houses and land in Cato Manor. African shacklords and traders were the obvious allies of the hostel and shack residents. The violence of the rioters reflected the inability of progressive African political leaders to direct African militancy. It also revealed the violence of everyday life in Durban, and the crucial initial hesitation of the authorities to put down the uprising with force. When the riots threatened to become a wider urban insurrection, the authorities resorted to a dramatic display of violence to meet the challenge.

The underlying social forces which exploded in January 1949 could be contained but not eliminated by the state. Durban had reached a key turning point in its history. The riots had far-reaching implications both for white power, represented in the state and the municipality, and for local black politics. For property-owners, white and Indian, the riots highlighted the necessity of dramatically reshaping the residential landscape of the city, to remove hostel-dwellers and squatters to a 'safer' distance. The implementation of racial zoning and population removal was to be the major urban issue of the 1950s. For black politics, the riots threw up the stark choice of multi-racial mobilisation under the banner of an inclusive African nationalism, or racial-ethnic strategies informed by apartheid's discourse. In Durban, black politics had reached a new era.

CONCLUSION: A TALE OF TWO RIOTS

This thesis has sought to fill some of the more important gaps in the history of African politics in Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. The social eruptions of 1929 and 1949 have provided meaningful points at which to begin and end this study. These events were fascinating in themselves and they bounded a crucial phase in Durban's history. In the late 1920s Durban was a predominantly 'colonial' centre of commerce; by the late 1940s it had grown rapidly as an industrialised city. Both the 1929 and the 1949 riots were a consequence of African frustration and anger at their exclusion from the resources of the city. In each case public violence resulted from the mobilisation of subordinate groups against an oppressing group which was perceived to be vulnerable. The failure to achieve some of the deep-seated African demands of 1929 bore bitter fruit in 1949. In 1929 social anger was directed against the municipality and its 'native' policies. African militancy sought to disrupt the municipal beer monopoly and the pass system. For the first time in Durban's history, Africans mounted mass-based resistance against white domination. In 1949, reflecting the increasingly multi-layered social struggles of a complex city, segments of African society were both more desperate and more determined to stake their claims to urban citizenship. Africans seized urban land and commercial property from Indians, who had become a vulnerable target of African frustrations. Both riots were suppressed by armed state force, although in scale and consequence the 1949 conflict overshadowed that of 1929. Both events exposed in different ways the social fissures of Durban society. They also threw up stark questions about leadership, ideology, strategy and organisation in African politics.

In addition to analysing the flashpoints of 1929 and 1949, this dissertation has built a chronological bridge between them. This has been essential for a full historical

understanding of the similarities and differences between the two events. The historical account began with the radical anti-municipal populism of 1929-30, a politics informed also by militant strands of Zulu ethnicity and communist ideology. Through its stirring mass meetings, its anti-white and anti-capitalist rhetoric, and its appeals to 'Zulu' resistance, the ICU yase Natal fashioned and led a popular alliance of confrontation. This was expressed through its court campaigns against the Durban System, its role in the 1929 riots, and its co-ordination of the beer hall boycott to starve the municipality of revenue. The ramshackle ICU yase Natal was very difficult to sustain as a mass movement, and by late 1930 it had spent itself. The banner of confrontation was briefly taken forward by the fledgling Communist Party before it was suppressed in 1931.

In the bleak political conditions of the 1930s radical populism was superseded by conservative forms of regional Zulu ethnicity, rooted in a defensive reaction to the radicalism of the 1920s. These developments were aided by vigorous state policies of retribalisation. In Durban, key African intellectuals and politicians saw new openings in segregation, and migrant workers proved receptive to various kinds of ethnic mobilisation in times of hardship and uncertainty. The 1930s also provided a unique moment for the African middle class to make explicitly elitist demands for a stake in Durban's political economy. Radicalism was sporadic and there was relatively little popular pressure 'from below' on the middle class politicians.

The Second World War brought drastic political and social changes. It provided new international reference points for local struggles. The ethnic politics of the 1930s was eclipsed. War-time strikes and trade union organisation amongst African workers marked a significant new development, building on the pioneering worker struggles of the late 1930s. As a consequence of migrant labour and the concentration of African

workers in the vulnerable margins of a racially-structured labour market, neither strikes nor unions had yet been seen on any significant scale in Durban's history. Even during the favourable conditions of the early war years, strikes among structurally weak and disorganised African workers were short-term phenomena; but the more resilient unions promised to exert a more profound influence, both politically and in the workplace. They laid important foundations for the key worker struggles of the 1950s. An incipient multi-racial populism, espoused by the Communist Party, was another new development during the war. This arose first as a rejection of South Africa's participation in the war; and then, in a dramatic turnaround, gained momentum as an anti-fascist campaign in the name of socialism and democracy. Communist slogans and speeches spoke not only of a faraway war, but of the demands for wages, houses, and trade union rights for all South Africans. This message briefly mobilised significant numbers of Indians, Africans and even whites in united campaigns. As conditions changed after 1942, this multi-racial populism was overshadowed in African politics by new nationalist, populist and ethnic voices.

Coherent ideologies of African nationalism only developed significant momentum in Durban during the early 1940s. These were crafted by a new, upwardly-mobile generation of middle class intellectuals and activists. They mobilised around confrontation between the 'African nation' and the segregationist state. Accelerated African urbanisation, which deepened demands for a living from the city, offered new levers for forcing concessions from white power. A militant middle class leadership hoped to find common ground with the urban masses, creating a powerful social movement behind the banner of African nationalism. Under the influence of the younger nationalists, the small local branch of the ANC was stirred into action. For the

first time in its history, it showed signs of moving beyond elitism. Yet organisational advance was slow, and the impact of the young African nationalists remained predominantly ideological. The repertoire of ideas ranged from international humanism to parochialism, reflecting the contrasting capacities of nationalism. Humanist influences provided an ideological basis for 'non-European' alliance politics, the integration of socialism with nationalism, and the gathering demands of Africans to be treated as 'urban citizens'. Parochial nationalism underpinned chauvinist Africanism and merged into the politicised racial ethnicity of anti-Indianism. This provided new bases of social identity and cultural belonging amongst Durban's Africans. Within an increasingly complex urban landscape, Indians were singled out as a politically vulnerable but economically influential group. This reflected the development of racially differential social structures and the effect on African politics of anti-Indianism in white politics.

During the late 1940s, alongside anti-Indianism, there were other kinds of African politics which targeted municipal power and state authority. The political and economic frustrations of the African middle class, the deepening proletarianisation and partial organisation of African workers, and the dramatic growth of African squatter settlements all fed into a diffuse urban populism during the post-war period. No leader or organisation emerged to give coherency and a broader vision to this popular discontent and ambition. Although there was a significant increase in the tempo of organised politics during the late 1940s, the whole range of politicians battled to gain support. African society at the time was too fluid, disorganised and divided to be mobilised behind a coherent mass movement. The worlds of the hostels, the domestic servants' quarters and the shantytowns were notoriously volatile, suspicious of 'smart'

politicians, and difficult to penetrate politically. It was extremely difficult to re-kindle a movement like the ICU of the 1920s.

The 1949 riots were a particularly violent explosion of racial ethnicity, indicating its pervasive appeal. However, this conflict was more than simply a racial one; it also reflected some of the imperatives of populism and nationalism. In addition to the African-Indian dimension, the collective action of the riots can be understood at many levels: the urban poor against the rich; migrants against squatters; rioters against soldiers; tenants against landlords; small traders against large traders; small landowners against large landowners; and Africans against the state. Indeed, the anti-state aspects of the riots should not be ignored. Acts of mass social violence always have the potential to contest the legitimacy of the dominant class. Having allowed the initial phase of rioting to proceed, because it involved merely sporadic African-Indian violence, the authorities suppressed the riots once they threatened to spill over into a city-wide revolt. For the authorities the message of these usurpationary events was clear. The deepening urban crisis in Durban was largely due to the breakdown of municipal control mechanisms over the city's restless African middle class and proletariat. The city had to undergo major restructuring if the political and economic interests of Durban's whites were to be secured and entrenched. From this flowed the apartheid social engineering of the 1950s and 1960s. For some of the less scrupulous African politicians the riots were a moment of triumph; for those sympathetic to the emerging multi-racial Congress alliance the conflict was a moment of anguish and soul-searching. In short, the riots were a watershed both for black politics and the municipality.

This study of African politics between 1929 and 1949 has shown how African

politicians were engaged in a complex process of 'negotiation' with the white holders of power and resources. The key African politicians tended to be members of the middle class, simply because they had the resources, the status, the opportunity and the inclination to engage in political activism. In their class practices these politicians both sought concessions from white power and led confrontation against it. Sometimes this appeared contradictory and self-serving; at other times, it was a maximizing strategy where democratic procedures and organisational accountability were not yet established. There were moments when members of more marginal African strata thrust themselves into positions of leadership and so challenged middle class assumptions of this task.

To summarise, the nature of African politics was shaped, firstly, by the choices and interests of the African politicians. Secondly, there were the political pressures on these leaders from within African society. Thirdly, there were the openings and closings of municipal and state policy towards Africans. Fourthly, there were the structural changes of the city as it underwent industrialisation and began to show increasingly severe symptoms of urban crisis.

'Class', 'race' and 'nation' have been three core concepts used to analyze these multi-faceted developments in African politics in Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. The three notions have been combined theoretically through Parkin's model of social closure and political strategy.¹ This combination enables the analysis to move beyond the race-class dichotomy which has been such a preoccupation of South African historiography. Parkin defines class struggle as the fundamental social conflict between strategies of 'exclusion' and 'usurpation'. In this dissertation, African politics has been portrayed as a continuous but varied 'usurpatory' struggle against a range of

1. Parkin, *Marxism*, pp.44-47, chs.4-6.

'exclusions'. The capacity for African resistance was usually thwarted by unequal power relations which favoured white power and capital. 'Race' was deployed as a central and complex mechanism of domination. In response, racial-cultural mobilisation of varying kinds was a key resource in African politics. This was manifest in a wide variety of ideologies and accompanying political practices. The thesis has illustrated the whole spectrum: elitism, populism, nationalism, ethnicity and 'workerism'. Each fed in different ways into the all-embracing language of 'the nation' in organised African politics.

During the 1930s and the 1940s, Durban's Africans participated in an increasingly 'mass society', but explicit support for organised politics was the exception rather than the rule. Africans lost their political innocence through the suppressed militancy of 1929-30. At the end of the period, the 1949 riots dramatically highlighted the weaknesses and dilemmas of organised political leadership and mobilisation. African politics in Durban between 1929 and 1949 bequeathed a challenging but enigmatic legacy to the apartheid period. Through the ANC-dominated politics of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Cato Manor riots of 1959, the 1973 strikes, the black trade unionism and the community mobilisation and violence of the 1980s and 1990s, Durban has continued to be a place of political complexity and surprises. Since the 1920s, Durban has been a city of substantial if intermittent political energy amongst Africans, but clear political patterns have always been difficult to discern.

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40, 36/7, N2/2/2(28): Mission Reserves: Inanda, 1922-1936.

41, 38/1 & 47, N1/7/2(X): Representation of Natives, Parts I-III.

50, 43/25, N1/12/8(X): Inyanga Licences - General.

64, 55/3, 3/11/3(7): McCord's Hospital, Durban, Parts I & II.

69, 56/1, N2/2/2(X): Mission Reserves General Correspondence, Part I.

- 72, 57/29, N1/1/3(32): Zulu Tribe - Usuthu Section and Tshaka Memorial.
- 81, 58/7/3, N1/1/3(32), 1: Solomon - Conduct, 1927-1932.
- 82, 57/438, N1/1/3(32), 1: Ihlambo Ceremony, 1934.
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- 94, 64/31, N1/14/3(45): The African Co-Operative and Trading Society.
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- 111, 102/5, N1/14/3(X), 1: Co-operative Societies.

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17/14/2: Justice: Annual Reports, 1934-1939.

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