

**A HISTORY OF THE FOOD AND CANNING  
WORKERS UNION 1941 - 1975**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty  
of Arts University of Cape Town for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

Canning workers were organised into the Food and Canning workers Union in large numbers when the union grew along with the growth of the South African canning industry, stimulated by the demand for canned goods during World War II. Formed in 1941, by Ray Alexander a member of the Communist Party, the union spread into the small canning towns to become established with a base in the fruit canning districts of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and in the West coast fish canning industry.

As a consequence of developing within a geographically dispersed and seasonal industry, the union assumed a particular organisational form, promoting the autonomy of branches and seasonal fluctuations in union strength.

The Food and Canning Workers Union was a non-racial and militant union that brought tremendous improvements in wages, working and living conditions to the workers who joined its ranks and participated in the struggles it led. The union also played a major role in the affairs of the labour movement and participated in political campaigns that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. Through a relationship to the Communist Party in the 1940s, to the South African Congress of Trade Unions during the mid 1950s to early 1960s, the Food and Canning Workers Union reveals an approach to politics that gave priority to the economic position of its members and also sought to contribute to broader political campaigns.

This dissertation provides a critical history of the union from its inception in 1941 to 1975. The primary material that it is based upon are the records of the Food and Canning Workers Union and oral interviews.



## PREFACE

This dissertation was undertaken as a project to write as comprehensive as possible a history of the Food and Canning Workers Union. By and large this was conceived as a continuation of my Honours dissertation, submitted in April 1983, which, I felt, had numerous omissions to be made good. The background to selecting this topic for research stems from conservation activities of the Cape Town Labour History Group who, sensing the value to the union's records and fearing that fishmoths and mould would devour this written history, persuaded the union to donate its records to the UCT archives for preservation. The purpose of this study has been to make these records more accessible by using them extensively in the writing of a detailed history of the union.

Thanks are firstly due to the FCWU for allowing me access to its records and for the many hours members of the union devoted in discussion of old times. Assistance from members of the Economic History department has been considerable, in particular that from Alan Hirsch and Dave Kaplan, who supervised this dissertation, and Ian Phimister who made useful comments along the way. I am especially grateful to Adele de Jager who, with affection, accuracy and ability helped in the production of this dissertaion.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACL	Associated Cannery Limited
AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers Union
ANC	African National Congress
BTI	Board of Trade and Industry
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CFLU	Cape Federation of Labour Unions
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organisations
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
CP	Communist Party of South Africa
FC&AWU	Food Canning and Allied Workers Union
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FRAC	Franchise Action Committee
FSAW	Federation of South African Women
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa
LKB	Langeberg Koöperasie Beperk. (Langeberg Co-operative)
MBF	Medical Benefit Fund
MC	Management Committee
NEC	National Executive Committee
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NUDW	National Union of Distributive Workers
NULCDW	National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
RFF	Rhodes Fruit Farm
SACOD	South African Congress of Democrats
SACPO	South African Coloured Peoples Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAF&VCA	South African Fruit and Vegetables Cannery Association
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SATUC	South African Trade Union Council
SAT&LC	South African Trades and Labour Council
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
TLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
TLFU	Trawler and Line Fishermens Union
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWIU	Textile Workers Industrial Union
WD	Wage Determination
WFCC	Wolseley Fruit Canning Company
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions

## INTRODUCTION

Within the rural areas no other union that is part of the independent union movement today has a history as long and as notable as that of the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU). Established in 1941, under left wing leadership, the union played a major part in the political activities of trade unions in the Western Cape, was one of SACTU's key affiliates and survived through a period in which similarly politically active unions collapsed entirely. Organising unskilled and semi-skilled African and coloured workers in the fruit and fish canning industries took the union to the small towns of the Western Cape and West coast, giving it a unique character and involving it closely in the lives and struggles of these people. The FCWU stands apart from other unions due to its practice of combining organisation on the factory floor to advance wages and better working conditions with a form of political unionism directed at the state and an active interest in the social welfare of its members beyond the factory gates. Developments in the broader labour movement since World War II are reflected within this union and its history provides insights into changes and realignments experienced by the labour movement. The history of the FCWU is also impressive for it has a rich and colourful past that has been distilled into a tradition that successive generations of unionists are rightly proud of.

### Aims of this study

To write a critical history of the Food and Canning Workers Union which spans the years between 1941 and 1975 is the central aim of this dissertation. In the process some of the more important questions posed by the union's activities and the context it operated within are touched upon and subjected to brief discussion.

As an institutional study of a trade union, this dissertation is distinct, for no other union history in this country that has been subjected to serious scholarly attention, has been so extensively based on union records as this work. Nicol (1984) whose thesis on garment workers has filled many lacunae in Cape Town's labour history was denied access to Garment Workers Union records for his research. While

privileged access to union records has permitted a detailed account of union activities to be generated, the content differs from those official histories commissioned by unions, such as that of the National Union of Distributive Workers.<sup>1</sup> Such histories are prone to be more selective in their presentation of the past, narrating personalities and events un-critically and in some cases are no more than apologia.<sup>2</sup> The selectivity of official histories is evident, too, in the history commissioned by the FCWU. Rex Close, a journalist, wrote a history of the union, entitled New Life, to mark its tenth anniversary. The booklet contained biographies of three leaders and recounted happenings in the strike which launched the union, as well as describing union activities in organising fish workers and agitating for housing improvements. Three thousand copies of the fifty four page booklet were produced. Commissioning such a history was an unusual act for a South African union with a generally lower skilled membership, but indicative even then of a pride in past achievements. Valuable as this history is for discovering the origins of the union (which is where its focus lay), it does not give a full account of the union over the entire period and thus is silent on many of the important issues confronting the union such as the formation of a unregistered parallel union for African workers or how the union approached negotiations.

Here an academic distance, with a rare opportunity to use union records, permitting an inner view to be gained of official union decisions and combined with interviews, has enabled a study of the union to be made which posits a more accurate and complete history as its goal. In large part this dissertation takes the form of a chronological narrative. The overall emphasis is to sketch the details of what occurred over the years. Combined with this aim is an attempt to analyse and explain the union's development over time, its stance on issues confronting the trade union movement as well as its victories and failures.

Research for this dissertation was mostly primary work on the large collection of union documents. This entailed sifting through a massive amount of mundane details in minutes, reports and correspondence to

1 Herd, N. Counter Attack. The Story of the South African Shopworkers. Cape Town: NUDW, 1974.

2 The official history of TUCSA by Ruth Imrie is illustrative of this genre of labour history. Imrie, R. M. A Wealth of People: The Story of the Trade Union Council of South Africa Johannesburg: TUCSA, 1979.

extract important information. What has resulted as a history of the union is the first major study to make comprehensive use of this important archive.

Given the significance of the FCWU, and the availability of its records, it has attracted some academic attention. With the exception of my own honours dissertation<sup>3</sup> researchers have examined the union in relation to other issues, such as the fishing industry, women's organisation or affiliation to SACTU.<sup>4</sup> This study aims to make a contribution to the South African labour history through a detailed critical history of the Food and Canning Workers Union.

### Sources

This study makes extensive use of the union's own collection of records. These are housed in the manuscripts and archives division of the University of Cape Town library. The collection consists of detailed minutes, reports, correspondence, financial statements and related material dating from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s. It has been sorted but not indexed. Records predating 1948 are unfortunately missing from the collection. When material is identified to in this study it is referenced by class of item and date, and may be located via the archives reference system of chronological filing under each class.

Also consulted was the collection of FCWU records housed in Department of Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand. This collection contains records from the FCWU's Port Elizabeth branch as well as some earlier records not present in the larger UCT collection.

Records of the South African Fruit and Vegetable Canners Association comprise the third major source of unpublished records. These are kept at the associations offices in Cape Town. Material consulted consisted of reports between 1960 and 1975. The Association

3 Goode, R. 'For a Better Life: The Food and Canning Workers Union 1941 - 1975' Hons, UCT, 1983.

4 See Soudien, D. 'The Food and Canning Workers Union: The Organisation of the Food and Canning Workers during the South African Congress of Trade Union Years' Hons, Wits, 1981.  
Zinn, G. 'Trade Unions in the South African Fishing Industry 1940-1970' Hons, UCT, 1984. Schreiner, J. forthcoming M. Soc. Sci. dissertation on the organisation of women and the FCWU.

does not have records of its predecessor, the South African Cannery Council, which pre-date 1960.

In addition to official records and more general secondary sources, some thirty five interviews were conducted with workers, union officials, factory managers, canning company executives and engineers. These have provided me with with much valuable information and insights into the operation of the canning industry that would have escaped me, had I not had the opportunity to test my reading against their experience. Interviews also introduce the voice of those who participated in forging the union's history into the narrative, and help counterbalance the otherwise excessive reliance on official records with their inherent features of recording events as the minute-taker saw them. Many interviews with workers were in Afrikaans and as their evocative quality would have suffered in translation these have been retained in the original. An English translation of these interviews is provided in appendix II.

### Analytical Influences

Implicitly, if somewhat unconsciously, this work follows the pattern being established in South African scholarship which Webster has referred to as 'New Labour Studies'.<sup>5</sup> This approach has the following characteristics: a focus on shop-floor issues; the examination of discontinuities in the experience of South African and West European trade unions; it is not politically neutral; and is distinguished by a methodology which uses comparative material and makes extensive use of oral sources. Related meaning has been given to the term 'New Labour Literature' by Southall (1984) for writings on the independent labour movement that are politically committed; overtly partisan on behalf of workers; and view the non-racial trade union movement as a major vehicle for radically transforming the existing South African society.<sup>6</sup>

Several features of methodology associated with 'new labour studies' are evident in this work, most notably the use of interviews to complement official records and to enliven the narrative. Salient

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5 This following comments are influenced by Dr. E. Webster's oral presentation of a paper on New Labour Studies given at the 1985 ASSA conference and also a seminar given in the UCT department of Sociology in October 1985.

6 Southall, R. 'South African Labour Studies', SALB, 9(7), 1984.

features of the labour process within its social context are examined in order to provide an understanding of the terrain over which the union organised and how its form was shaped by the labour process and contours of the labour force in turn. The focus on the factory floor also serves to counterpose the activities of individual workers with the aggregate view of workers necessarily portrayed by examining the collective entity of a union.

An effort has been made to examine relevant comparative material in order to move beyond a parochial focus on the South African labour movement. As the canning industry has not attracted the scholarly attention devoted to many other industries, very little comparative material exists with the result that only one other useful source has been located.<sup>7</sup> This dearth of comparative work has prevented the focus moving beyond the confines of organisation in the South African canning industry.

Having stated my intention to produce an institutional history certain objections immediately spring to the fore. In the South African context such historiography dealing with: opposition politics; nationalist movements; and the labour movement more broadly, has drawn criticism for its focus upon formal political activity.<sup>8</sup> These institutional histories, it has been suggested, are valuable departure points but need to be supplemented by an approach which is able to expose and incorporate "the relationship between the political and the economic, or most crucially, the relationship between class formation, political consciousness and culture."<sup>9</sup>

Labour history, as a distinct historical focus, shares the above limitations and some that are specific to itself. As McLennan has observed, labour histories often take on explicitly teleological connotations by describing the 'rise' of labour and are narrowed by their focus which excludes histories of the working class as a whole.

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7 A thesis by V. L. Ruiz on the trade unionism in the California canning industry has provided some comparative commentary. With the exception of some research into the unionisation of the Alaskan salmon canning industry, no other comparative material was traced.

8 Here I am referring to works such as those by Roux, Time Longer than Rope. Simons, H.J. and Simons, R.E., Class and Colour in South Africa. and Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge.

9 Marks, S. & Rathbone, R. (eds.) 'Introduction' Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. London: Longman, 1982. p.7.

Further as 'committed' class history involving sympathy for the subject, the result is often celebratory or defensive.<sup>10</sup>

These problems are elaborated on by Hobsbawm, who, as a historian, has stressed the importance of taking a broader perspective on labour history.

I had a rather strong prejudice, and I still have, against institutional labour history, history seen exclusively as a history of the parties, leaders, and others of labour, because it seems to me quite inadequate - necessary but inadequate. It tends to replace the actual history of the movement by the history of the people who said they spoke for the movement. It tends to replace class by the organised sector of the class. And, it leaves the door wide open, partially for the creation of mythologies and for the sort of diplomatic difficulties that have made it extremely hard to write official histories of trade unions, political parties and other organisations.<sup>11</sup>

Accepting that the problems of an institutional history are profound, how can the present study be justified? It is tempting to rebuff the theoretical and methodological problems associated with labour history by asserting that it has been conducted with an aim to create a 'history from below' in a class partisan fashion, based on the struggles and experiences of canning workers. For a proper 'history from below' to be written, a far broader perspective would need to be adopted which would necessitate giving attention to a series of questions such as the community life of canning workers, cultural traditions and the experiences of unorganised workers - none of which are attempted in this more narrow study.

In defense of the self-imposed limitations of this work of labour history the following points can be made. While close attention is paid to the pronouncements of officials, and the study draws heavily on their perceptions in the form of the union's records, the official view has been sifted through a critical appraisal and contrasted with other, notably oral, sources. Furthermore, locating this study within a political economy of the canning industry has provided some checks to the voluntarism of focusing upon the activity of leadership of the union.

10 McLennan, G. Marxism and the Methodologies of History. London: Verso, 1981. pp.114-116.

11 Hobsbawm, E. interviewed in Abelow, H. et.al.(eds) Visions of History by Marho The Radical Historians Organisation. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1983. p.31.

A major feature of the approach adopted here concerns the use of oral testimony to gather evidence. Substituting oral testimony for official documents cannot be considered simply as a means of overcoming the problems involved in an institutional history, as oral testimony carries its own set of methodological and theoretical problems. Oral testimony may be unreliable with regard to facts and time sequences. It may be overlain by dominant or local and specific perspectives, as the recall of the past is refracted through subsequent experience.<sup>12</sup> But, this does not render it useless. Rather, it requires a careful listening to assimilate and synthesize the recollections of participants and combine this with an examination of the records to produce an authentic picture of events at the time. Moreover, this approach has served another crucial role - that of involving those who were instrumental in the creation of history in the process of recording it. This has served as a means of democratising the process of creating a history of the union.

### Limitations

Setting out to provide an institutional history of the union necessarily limits the focus of the study. However, there are other methodological and historical limitations which are of my making and which that need to specified at the outset.

Using records as a major source, the resultant history is blinded to events and debates not recorded in the minutes. Associated with this problem is the dearth of AFCWU records. Union policy was to maintain a parallel set of minutes for the registered and unregistered unions as a mere formality. However, the minutes frequently do record slightly different versions of meetings attended by both unions. Since AFCWU records are limited, these do not permit a detailed comparison to over the whole period. The most significant aspect of this approach is that issues and debates which most concerning the AFCWU are often neglected. The net result is that the activities of a union consisting of two parts are often collapsed into one - the FCWU. Moreover, union minutes were recorded as statements of points made and decisions taken, seldom reporting the opinions of individual members of committees. The result is that it is often only possible to assess resolutions taken,

<sup>12</sup> Editorial collective 'Oral History' History Workshop. No.8, 1979. p.iii.

without access to the debates which led to these decisions. Where possible interviews have been used to overcome the brevity of the written records.

Giving emphasis to certain issues in this study has necessitated the omission of other aspects. A concentration upon union activities has allowed little space for the elaboration of contextual issues. Only an overall summary of national political issues, as they impinge upon the operation of the union, is reproduced here, in contrast to the central place they occupy in other commentaries upon the labour movement, especially during the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> The effect maybe to provide, at times, a rather insular view of the union.

Not all aspects of the union's activities are treated evenly. In particular, the fruit canning industry in the Western Cape is examined in more detail than other sections of the union. It was in this sector of the industry that the union emerged and grew strong. While it penetrated other parts of the food industry, its base remained in fruit canning. Union organisation here also survived the union's decline during the 1960s and early 1970s. This Western Cape focus is consistent with focusing upon the most significant parts of the union. However, this in turn has contributed to the virtual exclusion of other more remote parts of the union that were activities poorly recorded in minutes, such as the West coast fishing villages, East London, Durban and Johannesburg. A further result of the restricted attention given to matters at the periphery, has been the underplay of events and issues peculiar to such locations and precludes discussion of such regional dynamics as do occur.

### Chapter Structure

Chapter one details the establishment of the union in the context of trade unionism in Cape Town and the expansion of the canning industry. Salient features of the canning industry are sketched out here.

13 Representative of such studies which examine the labour movement's relationship to political struggle are Feit, E. Workers without Weapons: the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Organisation of the African Workers. Hamden: Archon, 1975; the review of this book by Lambert, R. 'Political Unionism in South Africa'. SALB, 6(2&3), 1980; and Bonner, P. 'Black Trade Unions in South African since World War II'. in Price, R. & Rosberg, C. The Apartheid Regime. Cape Town: David Philip, 1980.

Chapter two describes the growth of the union in the fruit canning industry, its spread to fish canning and other sectors of the food industry, as well as its expansion to other industrial centers. The character of the union is established and its two-fold political nature outlined: one part directed at aspects of state power; the other agitating to improve the living standards of its members.

Chapter three deals with the workings of the union at a branch level, briefly examining how branches were organised and moving on to portray in detail one of the union's major strikes, that at Wolseley in 1954.

Chapter four traces the activities of the union from the mid 1950s to 1960 in which the pattern of union activities established in the preceding years is examined in the context of heightened political struggles.

Chapter five covers the period from 1960 to 1975 and details the decline of the union's organisation and its struggle for survival against accumulated problems of repression, state and employer hostility and inflexible tactics for negotiations which bring the union smaller returns for its efforts. The end of this period marks a low point in the unions's history with its near demise.

Chapter six is a political overview that draws on all of the preceding chapters to analyse the union's structure and political character.

Chapter seven concludes this study with an summing up of the argument concerning the character and activities of the union and assesses its wage performance by examining trends in fruit canning wages.

## CHAPTER I

### **Birth of a Union and an Industry**

#### **The Formation of the Food & Canning Workers Union and Origins of the South African Canning Industry**

Trade unions, like most social entities, have to survive some test of their durability if their formation is not to pass unnoticed. That most august event, the founding of the Food and Canning Workers Union, on the 6th of February 1941, merely brought another small industrial union into existence, becoming part of an upsurge of unionism in secondary industry. Crucial to the development of this union was the context in which it was founded - that of an expanding canning industry with conditions conducive for unionisation. In this chapter that context is situated historically and elaborated upon. Some ramifications of the major features in the development of the canning industry for labour organisation are commented upon.

#### Growth of Industry in Cape Town

The conditions for the emergence of industrial, as opposed to craft unionism, with a non-racial as opposed to exclusively white composition, were present in South Africa in the inter-war years. In the specific combination of capitalist development and organisational activity, principally from the Communist Party of South Africa (CP) or former members of the Communist Party, a 'new' industrial unionism emerged.

The material base for this unionism was the development of secondary industrialisation, particularly in the consumer goods sector. In these new industries, mechanisation established a division of labour that employed a semi-skilled workforce, drawn from the ranks of the newly proletarianised. Craft privileges, and to a lesser extent, racial divisions were swept aside by the 'appropriate' form of trade unionism which organised along industrial lines. Unions were established for the first time in the chemical, clothing,

confectionery, furniture, leather, laundry and rope and canvas industries.<sup>1</sup>

These unions emerged in a regional context and took on characteristics derived from the region where they functioned, which justifies a digression into the nature of Cape Town's political economy. Historically Cape Town as a region is distinct in several respects from the rest of the country, when conditions of class struggle are appraised. As Nicol (1984) has pointed out, Cape Town did not develop a substantial industrial base (it still has no heavy industry) and the working class were never able to seriously challenge the dominant classes in the city. Class struggles in the city did not follow the same racial pattern evident in the rest of the country.<sup>2</sup> In the major industrial centers outside Cape Town, black workers were excluded from labour organisation and there was a reliance upon partially proletarianised African labour. In Cape Town, on the other hand, as a port, local industry had to compete with relatively cheap imported manufactured goods resulting in a concentration of the manufacturing industry in the consumer goods sector.

Industrial growth in the Peninsula, where commercial interests had previously held full sway, was given a major fillip by the First World War, laying the foundations for the development of unionism still to come. In the Cape Peninsula and environs industry employed 21 000 people in 1916/17, 17% of the national total, this figure rising rapidly in the post-war boom. Before the depression 41 000 people were employed. After the depression employment grew to 56 200 by 1937/38, 16% of the national total.

No single industry emerged as a 'leading sector' although, ranked by employment, clothing moved into parity with food and drink at the end of the period, followed by metal, engineering and building. The growth of other industries displaced the food and drink sector, as it had employed 23% of the Peninsula's workers in 1916/17 declining to 16% by 1937/38. Even though employment in food processing declined, it was nonetheless the most significant sector measured by output. In comparison with the Witwatersrand the Western Cape followed a similar trajectory of development, albeit at a lower rate of growth in output.

1 Lewis, J. Industrialization and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa 1924-55. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. p.46.

2 Nicol, M. 'A History of Garment and Tailoring Workers in Cape Town 1900 - 1939.' PHd, UCT, 1984. p.68-69.

The principle difference was a failure to develop a metal and engineering sector. This failure, argues Kaplan, is the key factor in the comparative lack of development of the Western Cape. Cape Town developed a particular industrial profile with a corresponding class structure and racial dimension, key amongst them being less Africans in employment and fewer operative labourers than on the Rand.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the rest of the country, racial divisions in the skilled ranks of the Peninsula's labour force were not as marked, as there were coloured artisans and skilled workers in most trades. Craft unions were not strictly racially segregated, and although their leadership was not free of racial prejudice, efforts to prevent undercutting required the admission of coloured members.<sup>4</sup> In general terms the ratio of black to white workers in Cape Town's industry during the inter-war period was 6:4. White workers being concentrated in metal and engineering, printing and transport.

Women comprised a far higher proportion of the industrial workforce in the Peninsula than in the rest of the country. Between 1918 and 1938 the number of female employees ranged from some 18% to 28% of total employment, approximately twice the relative proportion in the rest of the country, a preponderance explained by the concentration of the consumer goods sector in the peninsula. Women were concentrated in tasks reflecting a commodification of domestic activities associated with their sex: clothing, food processing, sweet making, soap and candle making. Women were also well represented in cigarette making, match making and book binding. Between 1914 and 1942 the proportion of women workers in the food processing industry remained unchanged at 38% of total employment, but as more black women started to work in industry the number of white women fell. By 1942 white women comprised only 12% of the food processing industry's total employment of 13 196, yet had comprised 38% of total employment in 1914.

3 Kaplan, D. 'Industrial Development in the Western Cape 1910-40'. Center for African Studies, UCT, Conference: Western Cape Roots and Realities. 1986.

4 Van Duin, P. 'Skilled labour, Trade Unionism and Racial Attitudes'. Center for African Studies, UCT, Conference: Western Cape Roots and Realities. 1986. See also Marais, F. 'Craft unions in the Cape Town Building Industry 1917 - 1920'. mimeo, 1986. Marais shows some of the economic imperatives underlying these 'colour blind' craft unions.

## Trade Unionism

Labour organisation in Cape Town emerged first in the form of craft unions in the wood working, printing, engineering, building and masonry trades. These unions were weak and unstable, loosely united through the Cape Federation of Labour Unions (CFLU) formed in 1913. In the post World War I boom there was an upsurge of worker organisation and several new unions emerged on the scene. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was formed in 1919 and for a short while worker militancy rocked Cape Town. The militancy faded along with the boom by 1921 and organisation collapsed. Increased industrial development resulting from policies pursued by the Pact government gave worker organisation another temporary boost prior to the depression. The depression took its toll and industrial unionism only re-emerged in the late 1930s and then with renewed vigor, the organisation of black workers, particularly on the Rand, making enormous strides.

The Communist Party's work in Cape Town amongst trade unions in the late 1920s was led by Johnny Gomas, Mark Shuba and James La Guma. This group was later joined by Ray Alexander on her arrival in Cape Town in November 1929, and by Douglas Wolton after he was banished from the Rand by government order. By 1930 a group of garment, laundry and tobacco workers were being organised by CP unionists who also revived the African Federation of Trade Unions and launched assaults against the conservatives in the CFLU to break their hold over the Cape labour movement. New unions that were established conformed to the structure of industrial unionism advocated by the Party. In the words of Ray Alexander:

This idea of one union for one industry was agreed by all the comrades in the Party, Johnny Gomas, Shuba, La Guma, there was no difference of opinion. In fact they believed that the reason why the ICU had not succeeded was because of its general character, because there was not proper accountancy and because there were workers from all over being organised. From farm workers to dockers to tobacco workers, garment workers, any workers, anybody, including even domestic workers. And the result was that workers demands and grievances were not attended to because it was all too spread. So we concentrated, we established a Party trade union group in the Cape Town District Party Committee which consisted of comrade Shuba, Johnny Gomas, La Guma and

myself and we went out spreading the organisation of workers in one industry, one union for one industry.<sup>5</sup>

In the mid-1930s textile, distributive, tobacco and sweet workers unions were formed. The latter two industries employed a large proportion of female labour and the impetus to organise them came from the powerful Transvaal Garment Workers Union.<sup>6</sup>

Ray Alexander was active in a number of areas in the labour movement, assisting with the organisation of railways and harbour workers, stevedores and dock workers and was also involved in the formation of a union in the retail trade that later became part of the National Union of Distributive Workers.<sup>7</sup> She started full-time trade union work in 1936 and was involved in the organizing activities of the industrial committee of the Party. When the Party headquarters were moved to Cape Town in 1939, she served on the industrial department of the political bureau along with Bill Andrews and H.A. Naidoo from Durban.<sup>8</sup> In this capacity she was involved in organising tin, chemical and sweet workers and become the Cape Town branch secretary of these three unions at the end of the decade.

#### Food Workers are Organised

In the context of the Second World War, which massively stimulated South Africa's industrial activity and manufacturing in particular, food processing workers were simultaneously organised in Johannesburg and Cape Town by left wing unionists. Bettie Du Toit of the Textile Workers Industrial Union, who helped to form the Food Canning and Allied Workers Union in Johannesburg claims the FCWU was formed at her suggestion.<sup>9</sup> This is likely to have been only one of several causes for the formation of the FCWU. The principal factor cited by Ray Alexander, the union's founder, was the diffusion of trade union consciousness to unorganised workers. Left wing unionists promoted an approach to trade unionism which stressed self reliance, organisational

5 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

6 Prominent Garment Workers Union leaders Hester Cornelius and Anna Scheepers are reported to be acting on behalf of a number of small unions in The Guardian during 1938-40.

7 FCWU 'Proud Record of Ray Alexander' Press release n.d. FCWU Collection housed in the Manuscripts and Archives division of UCT Libraries, BC 721, file miscellania.

8 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

9 Du Toit, B. Ukubamba Amadolo - Workers Struggles in the South African Textile Industry. London: Onyx, 1978. p.7.

responsibility and financial autonomy, as a consequence, unionised workers recruited unorganised workers in other industries on occasion. Thus late in 1940 members of the Sweet Workers Union, with Ray Alexander as secretary, encouraged their friends and acquaintances who were working at Maytens Limited (a food firm) to organise and form a union.<sup>10</sup> The impetus to organise may have come from Maytens but subsequent action focused on workers from Crosse & Blackwell. Wage demands were formulated and, prior to any proper organisation presented to the employer, whose curt rebuttal terminated this fledgling attempt at organisation.<sup>11</sup>

Early in 1941 unresolved grievances drew workers together again. On February 6th 1941 about fifty workers gathered in a house in Bloem street Cape Town and there it was resolved to form a Cape branch of the Johannesburg based Food, Canning and Allied Workers Union (FC&AWU) and accordingly informed the Divisional Inspector of Labour to that effect.<sup>12</sup> Office bearers were elected and membership forms made and signed. Contact was made with workers at a large jam factory in Paarl and a draft proposal for increased wages, and conditions of work covering hours, paid holidays, sick pay and protective clothing was drawn up as the basis for improving conditions in local industries.<sup>13</sup>

The new union used avenues for propaganda available in the The Guardian, a progressive weekly paper staffed by members of the Communist Party. During the war The Guardian's circulation rose dramatically, indicative of the increased popularity the Communist Party enjoyed in those years. Close links were maintained between The Guardian and the left wing of the labour movement, as a result FCWU activities were well reported in the pages of The Guardian. Soon after the union's launch, the paper published an interview with new members of the union in which they described their responses to the union. "We were scared to ask for higher wages. Few of us dared to complain if we thought our piece-rate wages had been wrongly worked out. We had seen too many of the daring ones come out of the managers office in tears."<sup>14</sup> They also said that their mothers had progressed from

10 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985. It is not known what type of factory this was and there are no further references to it.

11 Close, R. New Life, Cape Town: FCWU, 1950. p.32

12 The Guardian, February 13 1941.

13 'Take-away tea with Miss Ray'. Learn and Teach, 1986. No.2, p.23.

14 The Guardian, 6 March 1941.

instructing them not to complain and place their jobs in jeopardy, to being amongst the new union's strongest supporters.

A response from Paarl was not long in coming, and Ray Alexander was invited to address the workers of Associated Cannery (ACL) in Daljosaphat. Since workers had been denied access to a meeting hall they met next to the Berg river. Members of the Sweet Workers Union and FC&AWU addressed the assembled canning workers in English and Afrikaans, introducing the union and explaining its legality. New members were signed up by the lights of a Rolls Royce, provided by a sympathetic friend to transport the party of organisers to Paarl.<sup>15</sup>

In Cape Town negotiations with Crosse & Blackwell employers secured an agreement at the end of March, yet they only signed after the union applied for the establishment of a conciliation board.<sup>16</sup> Wages for lower paid workers rose from 17s.6d. to £1 10s. and from £1 10s. to £2 5s. per week for the higher paid; hours were limited to forty five per week; work-breaks gained; and two weeks annual leave and one week's sick leave granted.<sup>17</sup> Improvements such as these boosted the union's status and were regarded as a great victory.

By May the union dropped the 'Allied' and 'Johannesburg' parts of its name and called itself the Food and Canning Workers Union. This indicates that remaining a branch of the the Johannesburg union was unsatisfactory for the Cape Town section. Although the two unions were to co-operate, more than a decade was to pass before they merged. Active in the country districts, the FCWU formed a branch in Wellington by June and workers from the Paarl and Wellington branches joined Cape Town workers in a "Victory Social" to celebrate the improvements achieved at Crosse & Blackwell.<sup>18</sup>

Conditions in the rural areas were harsh, as the union discovered in August when it spread to Worcester. Average wages in the canning factories there were 3 shillings per day for men and 2s.6d. for women.

15 Learn and Teach, 1986. No.2, p.24. and The Guardian, March 20 1941.

16 These were bodies of employer and employee representatives convened in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act which could reach an agreement that could be made legally binding. A fuller discussion of the legal machinery is given in chapter two.

17 Close, R. op.cit. p.33.

18 The event included speeches by the first president of the union Mr L. Mactavie and other leaders. The Guardian, July 31 1941. Mr W.H.(Bill) Andrews spoke at the meeting, the first of many similar occasions in his close association with the FCWU until his death in 1950.

Workers did not receive annual leave, paid public holidays or sick pay and pregnant women were laid off work and deprived of confinement allowances. Furthermore, workers in Paarl, Daljosaphat, Worcester, Wellington and Robertson areas were excluded from government supplementary income measures introduced to compensate for rising inflation referred to as a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA).<sup>19</sup> These conditions required urgent improvements claimed the union and declared its intention to organise in these areas.<sup>20</sup>

In Paarl the branch grew rapidly as workers at Associated Cannery (ACL) joined the union in droves. Wage demands agreed upon at a union meeting were for weekly wages of £2 10s. to £3 10s. against existing rates of £1 5s. to £2 5s. for graded work. Labouring rates were £1 10s. to £2 10s. against a flat rate of 17s.6d. These demands were submitted to ACL in Paarl and Wellington followed by a request to convene a conciliation board. The firm responded quickly by granting a three shilling increase in the COLA without negotiating with the union, hoping that this would disarm activists, but the union claimed this as the fruits of its agitation.<sup>21</sup> At H. Jones, Paarl's other cannery, progress was slow as workers were apprehensive about joining a union. Several meetings were required to convince workers there to join a union. Later clandestine recruiting started and by the end of August most of the H. Jones workers were members. Dissatisfied with rates of pay, excessive overtime and general working conditions, and the victimisation of two active members who were shifted to casual employee status, large numbers of H. Jones workers attended a mass meeting for their factory called by the Cape Town, Daljosaphat and Wellington FCWU branches on August 30th. On the platform were leaders from ACL Daljosaphat: Isaac Fraser, Dot Fortuin, Joseph Mafeking and from Cape Town the union president Leo Mactavie, Mabel van der Westhuisen and Sidney Motshigi. Cecil Capello of H. Jones was in the chair. A set of

19 Cost of Living Allowances are referred to by the FCWU in a report in The Guardian, August 21 1941, however regulations governing the administration of Cost of Living Allowances were officially contained in War Measure 43 of 1942.

20 The Guardian, March 27 1941.

21 Close, R. op.cit. p.16.

demands to be submitted to H. Jones and ACL were agreed upon and the meeting also resolved to protect members against victimisation.<sup>22</sup>

Workers go on Strike "An Unusual Occurrence for Paarl"

When Mr. Cecil Capello reported for work at H. Jones next morning, he was fired. "What do you want here? You get out of here before I kick your arse."<sup>23</sup> are the words attributed to a factory foreman in the union's official history. On hearing of the dismissal, workers poured out of the factory and demanded Mr. Capello's reinstatement. The factory came to a halt as the majority of the workforce marched off the premises and gathered in Station road where they were spoken to by Mr. W. Gant, manager of H.Jones as well as by the Mayor of Paarl who tried to persuade the strikers to return to work.<sup>24</sup> In season three thousand people were employed at H. Jones but this strike was out of season and the figure of four hundred on strike, published in the towns newspaper, would have been about three quarters of the total employed.

Ray Alexander hurried out to Paarl on learning of the strike and a delegation led by Frank Marquard was elected. The deputation was mandated to discuss the demands agreed upon at the meeting and the victimisation of Mr. Capello. What had started over a dismissal then became a fully fledged battle for reinstatement and higher wages.

The firm's account of the affair was made public in an official statement from Mr. W. Gant. He denied the firm had dismissed employees for trade union activity and said that it was simply exercising its right to dismiss workers guilty of misconduct:

The truth is that the discharged employee was dismissed for (1) threatening certain of H.Jones & Co.'s workers and (2) impertinence and impudence to his departmental boss.<sup>25</sup>

Mr. Gant pointed out he had voluntarily increased COLA and was in favour of certain wage increases. He was not, however, prepared to reinstate the dismissed Mr. Capello. Scab labour was brought into the factory to off-load fruit and a large job advert which read: "European

22 Figures who were to feature prominently in the future were also present: Frank Marquard, Betty Kearns, Mrs.Kilowan, Beatrice Nkewu, Alfred Masize, Eva Arendse and Pieter Hartogh. Letter from Ray Alexander to membership recalling September 1 1941 n.d. (mis-filed under Central Committee minutes 1950)

23 Close, R. op.cit. p.24.

24 Paarl Post, September 2 1941.

25 Paarl Post, September 5 1941.

girls and boys, must be over 16 years, permanent employment"<sup>26</sup> appeared in the town's newspaper. Approaches were also made to individual workers at their homes with offers of money to entice them back to work.

The FCWU appealed for assistance for workers to exercise their right to join unions and improve conditions and wages. An appeal for donations was made "so that the workers and their families should not be forced to starve."<sup>27</sup> Support was forthcoming from Paarl and other towns enabling the union to pay a weekly strike pay of 12s.6d.

The firm did not respond to the union's wage demands directly, instead it negotiated via the South African Cannery Council. The FCWU was assisted by the secretary of the CFLU, John Emmerich and Betty Du Toit, secretary of the FC&AWU from Johannesburg, who came to Cape Town to help as Ray Alexander was ill at the time. A settlement with the Cannery Council was reached on September 10th whereby strikers agreed to return to work without Mr. Capello. The union also accepted wage offers of between three and five shillings on existing rates plus COLA. These it considered "niggardly"<sup>28</sup> but accepted them for tactical reasons in order to end the strike. Furthermore, in quite a blatant attempt to circumvent the union and impose a paternalistic company body on the workers, the Council recommended employee affairs be taken up through welfare committees.

When work recommenced (under the watchful eye of the police) many machines were found to be out of order due to incompetent handling by scabs. The employers did not honour their side of the agreement and on learning that members of the strike committee had not been re-employed, the majority of workers ceased work and the strike resumed. Workers marched out of the factory, amending their list of demands to include: the re-instatement of all strikers; the recognition of the FCWU; direct negotiations with the union and the reinstatement of Mr. Capello.

Although Mr. Gant claimed that over 200 employees were still at work and essential services continued, finding scab labour proved to be difficult. Unemployed African workers were hired as labourers to clean and unload but when they learnt a strike was in progress they left. Desperate for labour the factory accepted the help of the Afrikaaner

26 Paarl Post, September 5 1941.

27 Paarl Post, September 5 1941.

28 The Guardian, September 11 1941. See footnote 32.

Vrouevereeniging. But these heroines proved to be useless, refusing to be trained by the few coloured black-legs still working. Unable to withstand the harsh conditions, they left within a week.<sup>29</sup>

The strikers had on their side a broad spectrum of support, mobilised remarkably quickly for a union that had only been in existence for six months; suggesting that as the secretary of three union branches in Cape Town, Ray Alexander was well placed to call on support from the labour movement. Garment Workers Union leaders, Johanna Cornelius and Anna Scheepers, put the strikers' case to the Minister of Labour, support was given by the CFLU and the South African Trades and Labour Council, and a strike relief fund was established under the chairmanship of Bill Andrews. Donations were made by: the Typographical Union; the Pretoria branch of the Building Workers Industrial Union; and the National Union of Distributive Workers. Support was even forthcoming from Northern Rhodesia and Australia. Other FCWU union branches helped and food workers elsewhere in the country supported the strike.<sup>30</sup> Strikers and union members from other towns did all they could to stop scab labour: holding meetings and informally picketing in Wellington.<sup>31</sup>

After three weeks the strike was settled through a second agreement negotiated between Mr. Gant, the Cannery Council and the Union. The agreement confirmed the increase offered by the Council, stipulated that there was to be no interference in lawful trade union activities and that strikers were to be reinstated. While the strike was a victory the union did not win all its demands. Mr. Capello was not reinstated, even though the union had the option of taking his case to a conciliation board. Nor were the anti-trade union recommendations concerning welfare committees removed from the agreement.

Betty du Toit told the The Guardian afterwards that she had been impressed with the spirit of the Paarl workers and felt sure that if the management attempted to undermine the union through a welfare

29 Close, R. op.cit. p.24.

30 There are references to food workers' unions in other parts of the country. A Food and Canning Workers Union in East London is reported to be giving support to the striking workers at H. Jones & Co. Johannesburg factory workers were levying themselves 1s. a week, suggesting these were members of the FC&AWU in Johannesburg. The Guardian, September 18 1941. Research has produced no further evidence of these union(s).

31 The Guardian, September 11 1941.

committee it would be taken over by the union's shop-stewards. In summing up she said:

Although the result of the strike is in some respect disappointing, at the same time great gains have been achieved. These workers, by their courageous struggle and their unity, have won improvements for hundreds of other Non-European food and canning workers. They have established the union as a force to be reckoned with in the country areas, where till now wages have been scandalously low, and working conditions deplorable.<sup>32</sup>

On returning to work strikers were again greeted by a large contingent of police, there on the pretext that the strikers might cause trouble. Despite the firm's undertaking, fifty strikers were refused jobs and the union continued to support them with strike pay. Half of these were later re-employed, but the union accused the firm of deliberate victimisation against the remainder which included active union members. Mr. Gant told the workers' committee not to concern itself these workers, as they were being "punished".<sup>33</sup> Workers claimed that factory foremen were carrying out a campaign of victimisation and intimidation against union members. They stated that one foreman had assembled all the workers in his department and demanded to know who the union members were, saying that he would kick them out of the factory. The FCWU requested the CFLU to intercede on its behalf but without success and some workers were not reinstated until the next season.

The Paarl strike launched the union in the canning industry. It demonstrated that the FCWU - which had in so short a time developed sufficiently solid organisation to weather a three week long strike - was not going to be easily removed. Paarl workers had no previous trade union experience and were highly courageous in maintaining such worker unity. Three factors were in their favour: workers across the board struck and the union had the support of the upper ranks of the work force, indeed the top earners and supervisors were among the strike leaders; war-time demand kept the factory working at full capacity and

32 The Guardian, September 25 1941. As pre-union wage rates are not known it is only possible suggest the following rates based on what was reported in The Guardian. Labourers wages were reported as a flat 17s.6d. per week. The agreement stipulated the following starting wages: men 15 - 18 years 17s.6d.; 18 - 21 years £1; over 21 years £1 2s.6d. Women: 15 - 18 years 15s.; 18 years and over 18s. All with a COLA of 1s 6d. This represented graded increases with 6s.6d. as the maximum, a 37% increase.

33 The Guardian, October 30 1941.

it therefore suffered through lost production, although it was not in the fruit season; and finally, the support of the union by the labour movement meant that the promise of the benefits of trade union organisation and working class solidarity were backed up in practice. The strike was clearly a make or break affair for the FCWU's entry into the canning industry and more generally a test of its credibility in the small towns. The success with which it mobilised all the resources at its disposal, raising a total of fl577 (£400 being a loan) indicated the new union's energy and its determination to win.

With the first battle fought and won, the union was poised for growth. Canning factories at the time were stretched to capacity by war orders and into these factories came workers in their thousands, many newly proletarianised and caught up in the massive social upheaval effected by the war. Tight labour markets and generally conducive conditions facilitated the FCWU's growth. While it was met with hostility from the bosses it had cordial relations with the Department of Labour.<sup>34</sup> Fuelled by the success of the Paarl strike the union penetrate further into the canning industry and soon this sector became the union's principle base.

#### Selecting the sector - the canning industry expands

In October 1941 the union was a small industrial union that had gained a toe-hold in Cape Town's food processing industries, and expanded into the Boland towns where it emerged the victor of its first strike. It seems safe to say that the union was intended to penetrate the food processing industry in the Peninsula, representing 16% of total industrial employment in the before the war and thus a prime candidate for unionisation. Workers in this industry were only marginally touched by labour organisation; bakers and biscuit makers were the only organised workers. They were organised as operatives on craft lines and affiliated to the CFLU, and hardly constituted a union actively organising within the food sector. Thus, the industry was open to organisation, a task that Ray Alexander tackled with the goal of building a union out of the 13 196 workers in that sector in 1941/42, a

<sup>34</sup> Stein, M. 'African Trade Unions on the Witwatersrand in the 1940s', mimeo, 1978. He argues that the Department of Labour supported the growth of African trade unions on the Rand to foster a co-operative bureaucracy and avoid war time disruptions of production.

third up on the pre-war numbers. These workers were by no means easy to organise. By and large they were unskilled, a large proportion were women, performing tasks regarded as an extension of domestic work with concomitant low wages. In addition factories were small, with the average number of workers per factory only 39 in 1937/38, rising to 53 in 1941/42.

Contrasted with the profile of other factories in Cape Town, the canning factories were different in at least two significant ways. Firstly they operated on a much larger scale. The average number of workers per factory was 102 in 1937/38 and 194 in 1941/42. Canning factories employed enormous seasonal workforces which made each factory a significant base for large scale unionisation. The above figures based on industrial censuses both fail to reflect different size firms, and tend to underplay the seasonal component of the workforce. For example, well before the war induced growth, total employment for the industry in 1935/36 is given as 2523, spread over 18 establishments, yet at a big factory like H. Jones & Co. there were a thousand workers in the canning department alone during the season, the preparation department would have been similarly sized.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the racial composition of the workforce differed quite considerably. In food factories in the Peninsula a larger proportion of white workers were employed, some 38% in 1937/38 which dropped rapidly to 28% in 1941/42. Averages of white employment in the corresponding periods for canning are 20% and 15%.

It would be an ex post rationalisation to identify the proportion of white workers in the labour force as a problem for successful organisation. The union developed along lines and within secondary manufacturing industries where precisely such militant non-racial unionism was successful in organising without regard to racial divisions. Moreover the emphatic non-racialism the union espoused was matched in practice by a non-racial membership. The significance of these observations lie in two factors. Firstly, in the case of Cape Town, the union faced organising along industrial lines in a sector where a significant proportion of the workforce were white wage earners

35 In 1935 Mr. J.P. Delpont was responsible for 1000 workers in the canning department at H. Jones. As the preparation department was similarly sized the total would have been more than double. At a later date H. Jones employed some 4000 people at the height of season.

Interview, J.P. Delpont, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

and where, it is reasonable to assume, they occupied some important places in production. These workers could and were unionised on the basis of "common economic oppression, which took no account of race."<sup>36</sup> The canneries on the other hand had a more homogenous workforce. Seventy percent of the workers were classified as labourers in 1942, and a further fifteen percent as operatives.<sup>37</sup> These were coloured and African workers where the division of labour was principally along lines of gender and age, although African men tended to do the heavier work. The remainder of the workforce was clerical, supervisory and artisanal and almost exclusively white.<sup>38</sup> Thus the canning factories presented a large homogenous workforce with a potential for expansion: an attractive proposition for unionising. Secondly, when political and ideological shifts occurred in the future, drawing white wage earners away from non-racial trade unions into racially exclusive bodies, the union was correspondingly less affected.

There was a great need to improve wages and conditions in both urban and rural food processing factories of the Cape, particularly so in the countryside where conditions were very harsh. The main reason for the union's development in the canning industry, was due to the scale on which canning was undertaken. It offered a mass base in an important industry which was visibly expanding at the time that the union began to organise in the Boland factories.

The union's general development and specific form can best be understood with the benefit of an appreciation of the specifics of the industries within which it developed. This is not to suggest a mechanical relationship exists between growth and profits in the canning industry and gains or setbacks for the union, as this relationship is far more subtle, complex and involves other factors. What is certain, however, is that outside of a context capable of comprehending the patterns of accumulation in this industry it would be impossible to develop a rigorous analysis of the FCWU.

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36 Lewis, J. op. cit. p.67.

37 Wage Board for the Preserved Food Industry, 1943. p.15.

38 Ibid. Table II.

## Origins of the South African Canning Industry

The South African canning industry consists of two main parts, a fruit and vegetable section and fish section. These will be discussed in turn.

Early fruit preservation was in the form of jam making, factories for this purpose being established in the 1890s. One of the earliest factories was the Paarl Fruit Preserving Company established in 1892.<sup>39</sup> More fruit was produced as a result the establishment of Rhodes Fruit Farm (RFF), a fruit exporting scheme in the Drakenstein valley in 1897.<sup>40</sup> Fruit canning, as opposed to jam making, only started five years later.<sup>41</sup>

Jam making and fruit preserving was a very minor manufacturing activity, not really worthy of being called an industry until the mid 1920s. Canning was used more as a means of disposing of low grade fruit than an exacting market for higher quality fruit that farmers geared themselves to supply.<sup>42</sup> Locally produced goods had to compete with the well established American and Australian industries. This situation improved for local canners with the First World War, when a reduction of imports increased the demand for their goods.

After the war, farmers started to turn to canning to dispose of their produce on a larger scale and by 1925 there were twelve factories in the country processing fruit. By 1928 the industry permanently employed some 921 persons and had a fixed capital of £190 000. Over the next ten years capital investment grew steadily, except during the depression. While the number of enterprises varied between ten and twelve, investment in machinery, land and buildings more than doubled - amounting to £434 000 and total employment at 1947 in 1938.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to fruit canning the pre-WWII fish canning industry was less developed. This component of the fish industry started with

39 Hansmann, C.L.N. Birth of a R60 million Industry. Apricot,- Pear and Peach Growers Association: Annual Report 1970 Paarl: The Association. p.22.

40 Anglo American Public Relations Department. The Estate Rhodes Built. Undated pamphlet.

41 Hansmann, C.L.N. op.cit. p.23.

42 Black, M.W. 'A Review of the South African Canning Industry.' Farming in South Africa, March 1952. p.118. Quoted in Mackintosh, D.S. 'The Importance of Branding in Relation to the Fruit Canning Industry of the Western Cape.' M.A. UCT, 1974. p.24.

43 Board of Trade and Industry Report No.296. The Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry. Pretoria: Government Printer, 1947.

the establishment of crawfish canneries early in the twentieth century. By 1913 fifteen crawfish canneries had been built in Cape Town and along the West Coast and by the end of WWI most of the major fish factories were established. These factories were expanded to process pelagic fish (giving a wider range for canning) from the 1930s onward.<sup>44</sup> Permanent employment in 1935 stood at 927 persons and fixed capital £132 000. By 1939 this had risen to 1379 persons and fixed capital to £206 000.<sup>45</sup>

#### War Time Expansion and the Growth of Exports

In the pre-war WWII period the major products were jams and marmalade of which ninety percent was consumed locally. Fifty percent of the canned fruit production, generally half that of jam production by volume, was exported in the 1930s but exports declined to a quarter of total production in 1942. On the world market, and in particular the crucial British market as the largest importer of canned fruit, the South African industry was a midget alongside the massive United States, Malaysian and Australian industries, providing only half a percent of U.K. imports in 1939 compared to the U.S. share of 53%.<sup>46</sup> So poor were prospects for the fruit canning sector of the industry to be in the U.K. market that the Board of Trade and Industries investigation in 1939 concluded that the only alternative for the industry was greater development of the home market or securing alternative overseas markets.<sup>47</sup>

Demand for canned food during the war radically changed this. Exports to Britain increased dramatically, boosted by a limitation on tin-plate for locally consumed goods imposed by U.S. suppliers. For the local industry competition between canneries was reduced to that for raw materials. There were in effect four customers for the local producers: local consumers; one London importer, H.Peabody; the British Ministry of Food, and the Ministry of Defense. Lucrative orders flowed in.

44 Zinn, G. 'Trade Unions in the South African Fishing Industry 1940 - 1970.' Hons. UCT, 1984. p.7.

45 Industrial Census Reports for 1934/35 and 1938/39.

46 Glendening, G.S. 'Development of S.A. Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry.' Food Industries of South Africa, April 1965. p.31.

47 Board of Trade and Industry Report No.253, 1939.

With the war we came under government control and were forced to supply a certain amount to the government which sent this overseas for the troops. Cannerymen were keen to get allocations of government orders - it was easy money.<sup>48</sup>

War time demand created conditions for the major growth of the canning industry and this was sustained after the war, albeit at a slower pace. Output of the fruit canning industry increased nearly four times from 1,3 million cartons worth £858 000 in 1938 to 4,85 million cartons worth £4,82 million in 1945. The number of large canneries doubled as did capital stock. By 1945 there were 26 enterprises with a fixed capital stock of over a million pounds.<sup>49</sup>

Total employment rose nearly five-fold, from 1 867 in 1928/39 to 8 018 in 1944/45. The racial composition of the labour force changed from a black to white ratio of 3,2 : 1 to 8,3 : 1 over this period.<sup>50</sup>

The fish canning did not expand as rapidly during the war, but accelerated in the late 1940s. Employment which remained fairly constant through the war around 2000 rose from 1850 in 1945 to 3829 in 1950. Fixed capital increased from £348 000 to £2,1 million over this period.<sup>51</sup> By the end of the decade there were seven canning and fourteen fish meal and fish oil factories.<sup>52</sup> In the 1940s the pelagic fish proportion of the catch grew from very little to about eighty percent of the total by 1950.<sup>53</sup> The significance of this change for the canning industry being that the majority of this fish was canned and factory processed and not sold fresh.

What was significant about this massive growth for the possibilities of worker organisation is that it was not merely a short lived war-time boom. With regard to fruit canning, although production dropped in the late 1940s and military contracts fell away after 1946, local consumption rose strongly after the war, compensating for a decline in U.K. imports. Moreover, the general trend was for an increase in exports as South Africa continued to supply large orders from the British Ministry of Food. The industry became export oriented after the war and emerged on the world market, in particular the

48 Interview Mr. J.P. Delport, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

49 Board of Trade and Industry Report No.296. op. cit. pp.36 - 36.

50 Board of Trade and Industry Report No.296. op. cit. pp.36 - 36.

51 Industrial Census Reports 1939/40 to 1949/50.

52 Department of Industry Report of the Commission of inquiry into the Fishing Industry The utilisation of fish and other living marine resources of S.A. Report No.47/1972. para.89.

53 Ibid. para.92.

English market as a major supplier where it benefited from Commonwealth trade preferences. These tariff advantages on the U.K. market meant it competed with similarly placed Australian and Malaysian canners and had an advantage over the much larger U.S., European and Philippine industries. By 1963 South Africa was the major supplier to the U.K. market, providing 35% of its canned fruit imports.<sup>54</sup> In the three decades after the war production increased steadily from 4,7 million cartons in 1945 to 20,5 million in 1975. Tariff advantages continued to apply when South Africa left the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth Preferential Area of Nations agreement.

Initially the bulk of exports were of jams and vegetable products but this underwent a change. Canned fruit overtook jams and vegetables by 1950 and comprised some seventy percent of output from the late 1960s onwards - over eighty percent being exported.

As the industry became export oriented, and dependent upon world markets, so changes in these markets exercised a considerable impact upon the local industry. The most significant changes in this regard occurred when the U.K. market was deregulated during the mid-1950s and reverted to private trade and again in 1973, with the entry of Britain into the European Economic Community. The latter involved the gradual introduction of external tariffs which curtailed South African exports to the U.K. A gradual decline in export to the U.K. has been compensated by increased exports to other markets and greater local consumption.<sup>55</sup>

Total output of canned goods by volume is depicted in Figure 1.1. Despite fluctuations the overall trend shows a considerable and sustained rise in output from pre-war levels. Counter trends mark particular aspects of this development and the following suggestions can be made to explain them. The lack of growth in output from the mid to late 1940s was due the cessation of military contracts and exports lagged until the stimulus of the Korean war was felt. The fall off in the mid 1950s was influenced by the deregulation of the British market, ending the system of state purchases of canned goods, with the result that trading conditions reverted to conditions of greater competition. The dip in output around 1960 was a result of a major crisis in the canning industry with world wide over production causing stocks to be

<sup>54</sup> Glendening, G.S. (1965) op.cit. p.31.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews Mr. D. du Toit, Bellville, 27.01.86. and Glendening, Cape Town, 15.04.85.

dumped. In the early 1970s the drop in production output was probably caused by the effects on South Africa of the entry of the U.K. into the European Economic Community.

## JAM, CANNED FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

TOTAL OUTPUT OF CANNED GOODS BY VOLUME

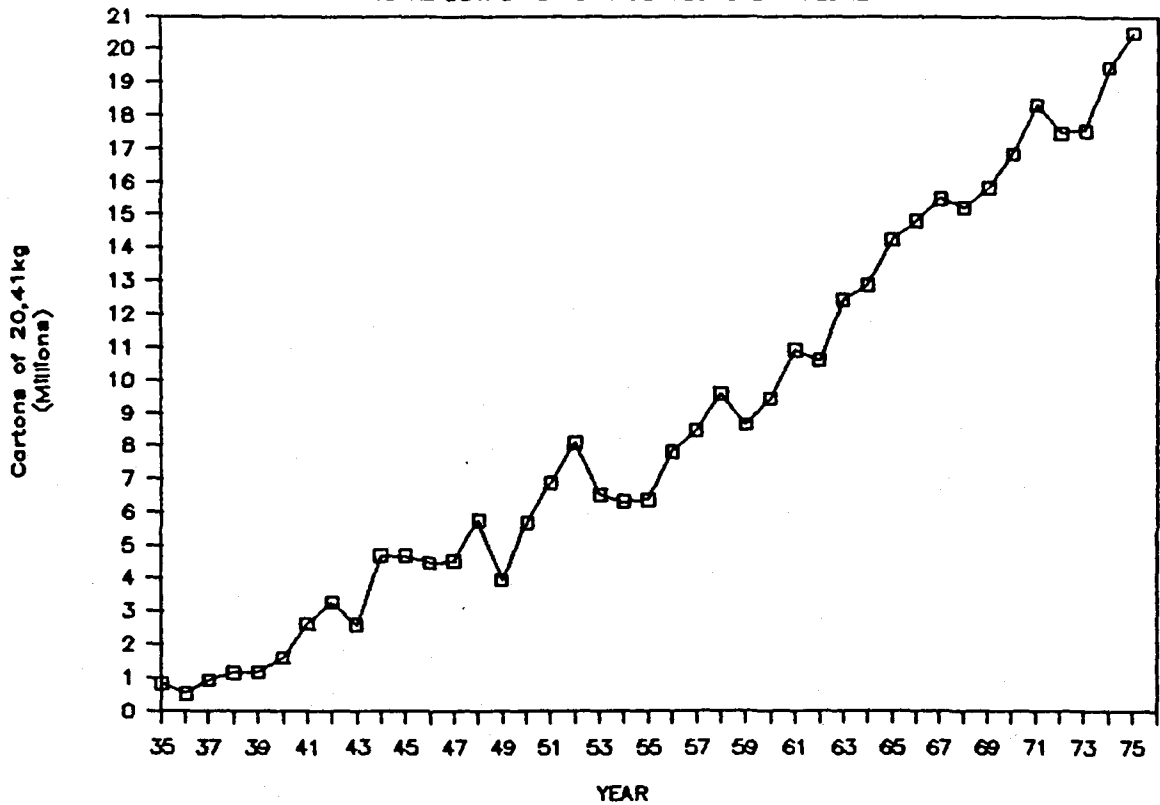


Figure 1.1

### Regional Distribution of Fruit and Vegetable Canning

Geographic location of the industry is primarily determined by the location of the materials it uses. There are three main canning areas: the Western and South Western Cape, the Eastern Cape and Transvaal. It is in the Western and South Western Cape, where most deciduous fruit is grown that the industry is concentrated and the bulk of its output is destined for export. Canneries in this region produce mostly canned fruit, some canned vegetables and jam products. The main canned products of the region are apricots, free and clingstone peaches,

pears, apples guavas, plums, fruit salad, fruit cocktail, youngberries, strawberries, gooseberries, peas, beans and carrots.<sup>56</sup>

Citrus products and pineapples are canned in the Eastern Cape and Natal. Canning in the Transvaal mainly processes vegetables. Vegetable packs include peas, green beans, baked beans, tomatoes, tomato paste, sweetcorn and asparagus.<sup>57</sup>

### Economics of Canning

Fruit and vegetable canning is highly seasonal, requiring large amounts of labour and capital for a short period of intensive utilisation. Canneries provide finance and services to farmers who provide them with produce. Those farmers who have a contractual relationship with the cannery to supply a certain amount of produce may be granted loans to finance their crops. Advisors from canneries visit farmers to assess their produce and determine the optimum time for its harvest in relation to the factory's processing schedule.

Canneries require working capital to finance the cost of production, and this capital is acquired through bank loans. In the short canning season this working capital is needed to pay for raw materials, labour and the hire of machinery. Certain fixed costs in land, buildings and machinery are constant overheads, however, a significant part of the cost of machinery is paid for in rent on a seasonal basis. Specialised machines are required for the preparation of each major type of material with the capacity to handle the required through-put in the limited time available while the fruit ripens.<sup>58</sup>

Three-quarters of the products produced are processed during the season, lasting from the end of November to the end of March. The remaining part of the year is spent working off-season products like marmalade, reprocessing manufactured pulp made from excess fruit not

56 Mackintosh, D.S. op. cit. p.22.

57 'The South African Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry.' Cape Town: SAF&VCA mimeo, 1982. pp.3-4.

58 A lot of fruit preparation machinery is in use for an extremely short time - three weeks in the case of apricot pitters and five weeks for clingstone peaches. Board of Trade and Industry Report No.676, 1960. Machinery is rented from the major machine suppliers who install and maintain their machines on the cannery premises. The bulk of these machines are Food Machinery Corporation or Filper products with very high development costs and not available for sale. Only the oldest machinery may be bought.

handled during the season, as well as labeling, packing, dispatching the finished products and doing machine maintenance. Most factories in the Western Cape also work some vegetable products out of season to give them a longer working period. Revenue is generated through the sale of stocks throughout the year, giving canneries an income to pay back loans. As canners finance stocks through loans, increased interest rates pressurise them to unload stocks to repay loans as soon as possible by cutting prices. Similarly, if by the start of the season inventories are high, canners may resort to 'dumping' to free funds to repay loans and acquire necessary working capital. Thus, in addition to competition for market shares, and also being subject to fluctuations on international markets, canners face undercutting and instability from 'dumping'.

As an industry processing agricultural products the local content of manufacture is high as. Apart from imported capital goods, the bulk of its inputs are local raw material. In 1934-35 South African materials made up 70% of the total materials. Fifteen years later, by which time the industry had expanded considerably, local materials made up 88% of the total and by 1954 this had risen to 91%. Some chemicals and fruits, like cherries, continued to be imported. High among the factors boosting local content was the development of local tin-plate manufacture.

In money terms at the close of this period in 1973 the industry spent some R22,7 million for 442 000 tons of fresh fruit and 45 000 tons of vegetables. R20 million worth of cans were purchased, 70 000 tons of sugar worth R6 million was bought and a further R 4,8 million spent on labels and cartons.<sup>59</sup> The industry receives rebates on can and sugar exports.

### Research

Experimentation to devise new canning methods and improve quality was generally undertaken by individual canners in the early period. As each cannery has its own laboratory for quality control there was scope for local innovation. Overseas contact was an important source of technical knowledge when the industry was first established and many canners visited the U.S. which was the main source of technical advice.

<sup>59</sup> Glendening, G.S. 'The Canning Industry Present and Future.' Cape Town: SAF&VCA mimeo, 1974. pp.4-5.

Both major canning groups brought in experts from overseas to help them establish certain lines.<sup>60</sup>

Research into can closure and preservation was done by the can supply company Metal Box South Africa which also did other basic research and assisted canners with specific problems. The industry as a whole encouraged research into fruit cultivars to improve quality and lengthen the ripening season so as to extend the canning period. Research of this nature was conducted by the state owned Western Province Fruit Research Station. By 1950 "the time was ripe for organised research by the industry as a whole"<sup>61</sup> and a Food Technology Institute was established at Stellenbosch to function along similar lines as the Sea Fisheries Research Institute. Funding was provided by the Deciduous Fruit Board, canners and Imperial Cold Storage.

Technological change in canning processes have been slow, the main techniques of food preservation by means of canning were well understood at the turn of the century, with the result that a high turnover of capital goods to remain abreast of international competition has not been necessary. Nor have local firms required links to foreign capital to provide them with current technology.

#### Entrepreneurship - being the boss

Prior to the change in ownership structure in the industry through monopolisation in the mid 1950s, most canneries were run by owner-entrepreneurs who raised bank capital or attracted overseas investments. The Langeberg Co-operative (LKB) was an exception. Here farmers used a co-operative structure to pool capital to start a cannery. Cannery bosses had either come to manage plants in South Africa, as in the case of H. Jones management and had previous experience in canning practice; or they had worked in canneries and then left to start their own companies. The capital required to start a cannery was not large, requiring the purchase of rudimentary plant and financial backing to secure loans of operating capital. The Ashton Canning Company, for example, was started by a Mr. Barnard who had

<sup>60</sup> LKB acquired the services of a Mr. McKloskie, a retired agronomist who had worked for Libbies in Hawaii and H. Jones brought in an expert from Australia who did a lot of experimental work on pineapple canning and started experimental farms at Witney and Kei River Mouth. Interviews Dr. J.A. Mouton, Paarl, 9.04.86 and Mr. G. van Willing, Cape Town 10.04.86.

<sup>61</sup> Food Industries of South Africa, August 1950. p.25.

worked as a retort cooker at H. Jones. Going into business with his brother who had a peach farm at Ashton which provided the necessary collateral, a former H. Jones employee recalls:

He started in a very rudimentary way, using cut down petrol cans for jam cookers. Big money was made after the war. Then he established himself, bought more farms and later his son took over.<sup>62</sup>

Direct control overseeing production was exercised by the canning bosses who saw that work was done to their satisfaction by personally intervening in the labour process and supervising. Although canning factories tended to be large, the impression gained of managements' role was one of having a hand in all activities. These bosses planned production and did quality control and testing at the start of the season to determine the right processing methods for that year's harvest. A certain amount of direct experimentation was also done as canners sought new methods for improving quality and adjusting to seasonal variations. Frequently dealing with labour matters themselves, they selected who was to be taken on and what wages were to be paid. Thus, prior to the establishment of the larger LKB group in the mid-1950s which necessitated a head-office organisation, dealings with canners on the part of the union were direct and unmediated by management teams. This continued to be the case for independent canners until the late 1960's.

### Capital's Organisation

In 1923 common interests among canners in the nascent industry drew them together to form the South African Canners Council. The Council covered fruit growing, fruit, vegetable, and fish canning, and bottled squash manufacturing. Fish canning was at first the more developed industry, but fruit canning expanded and by 1939 these two sections dominated the council. Formed to represent and advance the interests of canners the council campaigned for tariff protection, but was a small voice alongside the clamoring of other light industry manufacturers (eg. clothing). During WWII the council acted as the liaison body between the industry and the government on the supply and coordination of food stuffs and the allocation of tin-plate supplies among members.

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62 Interview Mr. G. van Willing, Cape Town, 10.04.86.

The council's attempt to organise agreements between producers to reduce competition after the war met with little success, causing a canner to remark "they were never observed, they were just a waste of good time, they had no legal powers."<sup>63</sup>

Divergent interests between fish and fruit & vegetable canning sections led to the dissolution of the council and the formation of separate associations representing fruit and fish. In 1950 the fish meal and fish oil producers constituted themselves as separate associations within the council. Breaking away four years later, these bodies formed the Fish Cannery Association.<sup>64</sup> In response fruit and vegetable canners formed an employers body, the South African Fruit and Vegetable Cannery Association (Pty.) Ltd. as a private company with canning companies as share holders. The association acted as a body to: collect and collate information for its members on production statistics; circulate technical information; advise shipping lines on space requirements; represent the industry to government; select representatives for state marketing boards and research bodies; represent the industry's views on standards and act for the industry on labour matters.<sup>65</sup> The Association was the body the union dealt with when negotiating industry wide agreements with canners and it would co-ordinate and represent the views of employers in the dispute. It did not formulate much by way of a formal labour policy for canners to follow and in many instances referred the union to take up matters with individual bosses directly.

The Fish Cannery Association had a stronger role as it sought to regulate production and distribution among canners in addition to other functions of representing the industry's interests. By voluntary agreement between canners the Association made efforts to control output by setting export quotas and prices and functioning as a collective sales organisation.

State regulation of the fishing industry received formal expression when the Fisheries Development Corporation was established with joint representation by both industry and state in 1945. This provided for state expenditure on harbour infrastructure, facilities for fishermen and fish-catch quotas.

63 Interview Mr. J.P. Delport, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

64 Lees, R. op. cit. p.196.

65 Glendening, G.S. 'History and Growth of the South African Canning Industry.' Food Industries of South Africa, May 1969. p.29. and interviews 21.01.83 and 15.04.85.

The fruit and vegetable canning industry required very little state intervention to become established due to the manner in which it developed. Standardised containers were used from the earliest period, as can making machinery was imported from North America and Britain where much older canning industries had established standard sizes. Furthermore, as an export industry, standard sizes and grades were established to conform to the specifications of the British Ministry of Food. Raw materials were subject to inspection by the South African Department of Agriculture which graded produce. At one stage, an attempt to institute a South African Bureau of Standards inspection and grading system was made, but it fell away as it would have been in addition to inspection by the Department of Agriculture, necessitating doubled inspection fees.

State controlled marketing was introduced in the mid 1950s to regulate competition. The Canned Fruit Export Control Act was introduced in 1956 as a temporary measure to regulate exports to the U.K.<sup>66</sup> which laid down minimum prices and terms for selling in an effort to stabilise the sale of canned goods. Defaulting canneries were penalised by fines. In 1967 it was made permanent. These measures will be examined further in chapter five in relation to a crisis the industry.

### Statistical Overview

An overview of the canning industry, with the help of government reports, will assist in giving more definition to the previous discussion and alert the reader to broad trends confronting the union's organising project. Statistical material is drawn from the industrial census. In these sources the scope of the survey changes and enterprises other than canneries, like dried fruit works, are also enumerated. For the purposes of this study the most consistent categories have been used and although the data includes non-canning fruit preservation, the relative importance of this is small. Total employment in twenty canneries in 1957 stood at 20 564<sup>67</sup> compared to 21 291 in eighty four enterprises given in the industrial census, which

<sup>66</sup> Whitehead, G.H. 'Production and Future Prospects of South Africa's Canning Industry.' Food Industries of South Africa, December 1956. p.27.

<sup>67</sup> Report of the Wage Board on the Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry 1958.

### FRUIT & VEGETABLE CANNING INDUSTRY VALUE ADDED IN MANUFACTURE

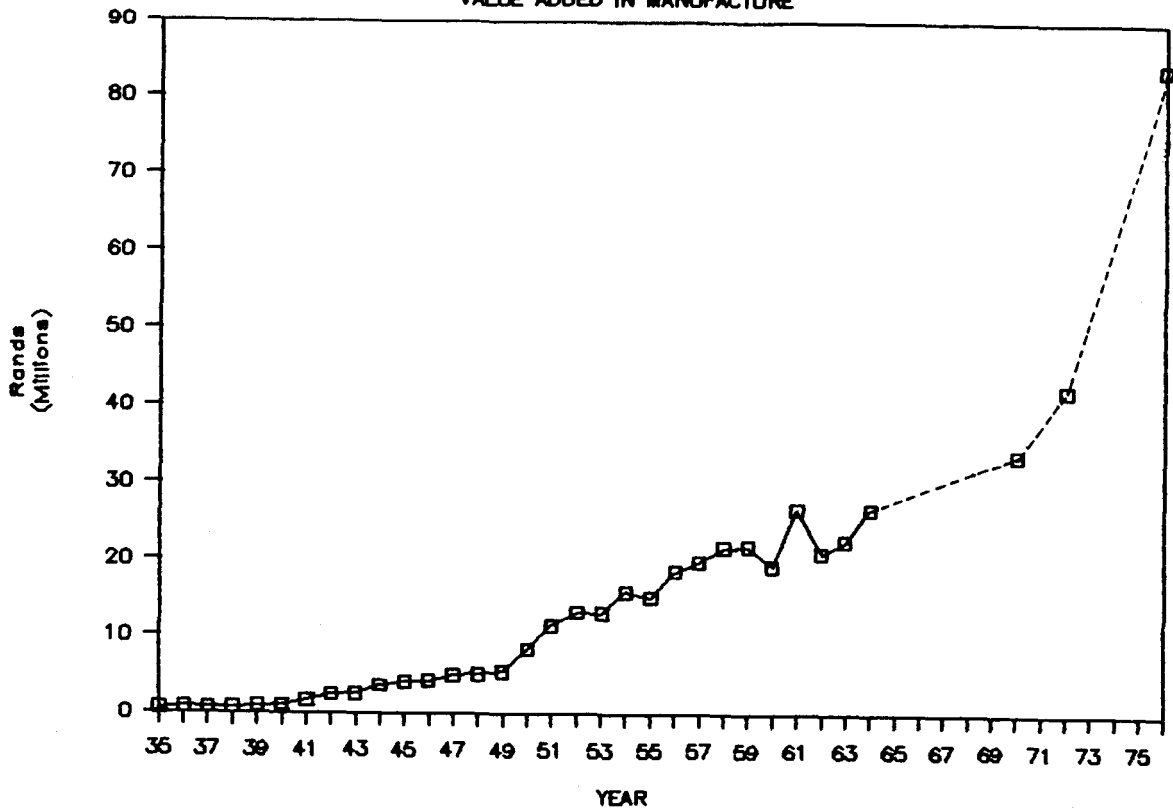


Figure 1.2

### FRUIT & VEGETABLE CANNING INDUSTRY FIXED CAPITAL INVESTMENT

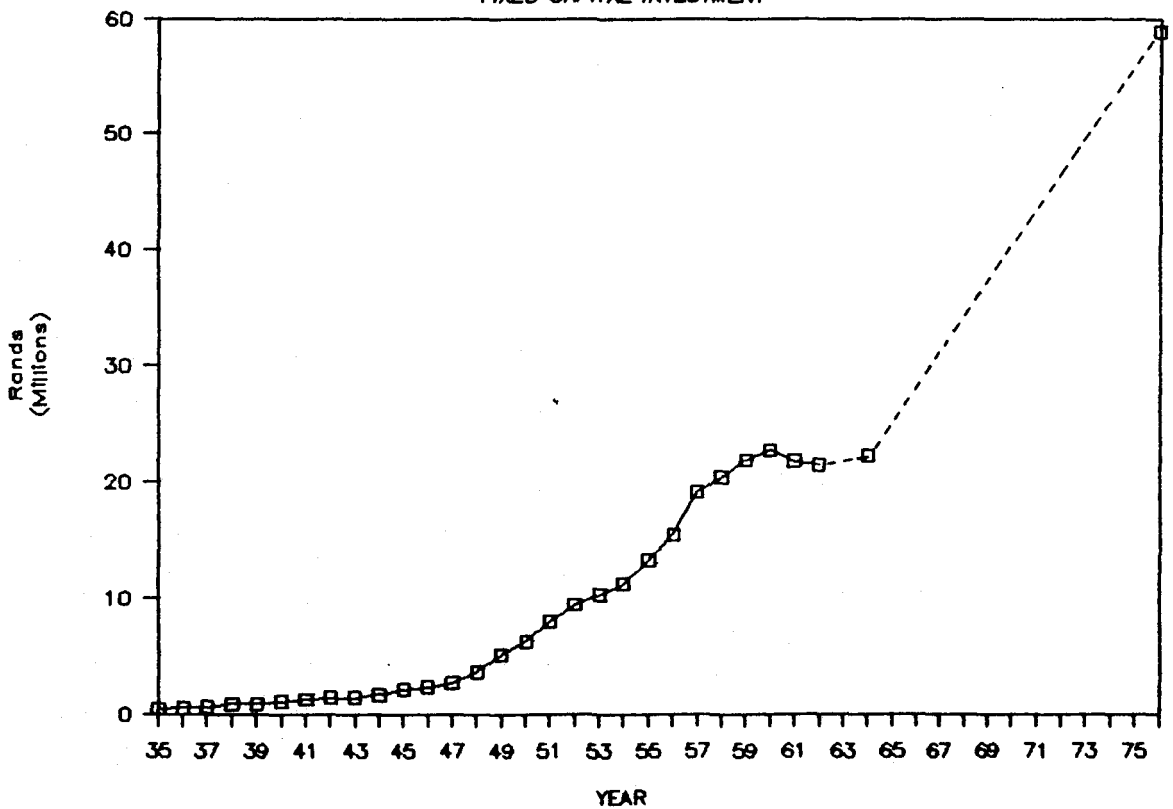


Figure 1.3

includes non-canning fruit preserving, indicating that there is a small difference between numbers in the aggregate data and canning. For this reason the anomaly has been discounted and the discussion is centred on the canning industry. Money figures are in Rands at constant prices. Tables of data show graphically below are given in appendix I.

### Value Added in Manufacture

Figure 1.2 shows that the advent of the war started a rise in the value added in manufacture, but this did not rise as rapidly as rates achieved later. The rise in the early 1950s and slower growth in the mid 1950s can be seen to match the sharp increase in output and subsequent decrease evident in Figure 1.1. Fluctuations in the rate of growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s correspond to the crises the industry experienced then. Rates of increase in value added thereafter are high.

### Fixed Capital Investment

Capital invested in land, buildings, transport equipment plant machinery and tools is depicted in figure 1.3. It indicates that investment rose slowly from low levels prior to the war, and while this accelerated during the war, its rate of growth was slow. A higher rate of investment occurred from the late 1940s to mid 1950s. This rise can be attributed to factory expansion programs as output increases with a sustained demand for canned goods and ability of canners to acquire machinery that was unavailable during the war. The second rise in the rate of investment in the latter part of the 1950s can be attributed to capital deepening as new plant is installed to permit higher volumes of production.

### Per capita Investment

Investment per capita, shown in Rands per worker in figure 1.4 should be read in conjunction with the graph of employment in figure 1.5. The rise in the rate of investment per capita from 1936 to 1938 can be attributed to the very low base point and small workforce, well illustrating the growth of investment (discussed in the section on the origins of the canning industry). Declining per capita rates of investment from 1939 to 1947 show that the increased output during the

## FRUIT & VEGETABLE CANNING INDUSTRY

PER CAPITA INVESTMENT: RANDS PER WORKER

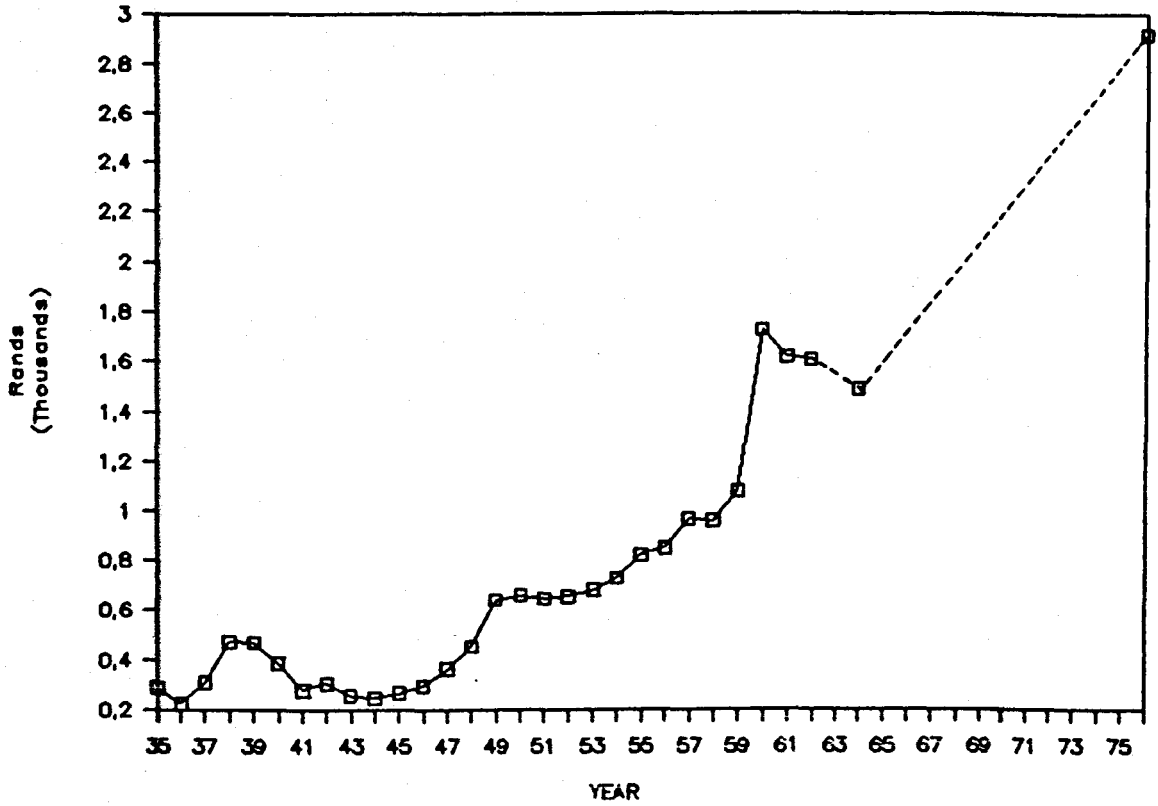


Figure 1.4

## FRUIT & VEGETABLE CANNING INDUSTRY

EMPLOYMENT 1935 - 1976 BY RACE

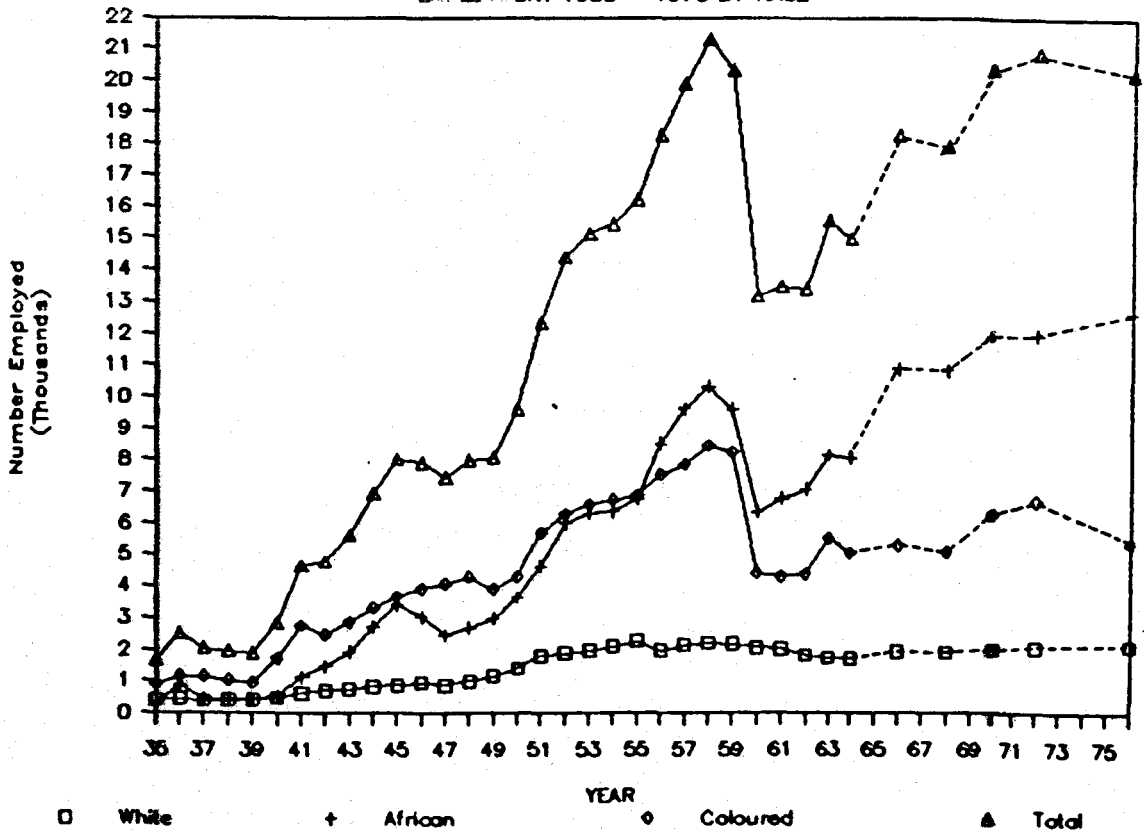


Figure 1.5

war was based on massing labour resources in production as employment rose steeply. Continued high rates of increase in employment at the same time as increased investment during the late 1940s to early 1950s is reflected in the low rate of per capita investment for that period. In the late 1950s per capita investment leaps up as a result of a slight increase in investment but much larger fall in employment as labour is shed due to mechanisation. In the early 1960s a curtailment in investment with a slow rise of employment produces a decline in per capita investment. From the mid-1960s to mid-1970s there was a steady increase, indicating that while total employment grew over this period, the rate of investment exceeded the growth of employment.

#### Trends in the Composition of the Workforce

Statistical data on the composition of the workforce describes the contours of the working class the union set out to organise, revealing its form with respect to race and gender. These trends reflect both broader developments in South Africa's political economy such as proletarianisation and increasing female participation rates in this particular industry, as well as who and how many people the union had to organise over time. Accounting for these trends alerts us to the issues that were to confront the union in the future. It should be noted that the data is based on total employment in each category, thus it includes working proprietors, administrative and managerial staff as well. Since the proportion of African and coloured employees who are salaried staff is negligible, generalisations about these categories of workers is permissible.

Starting with total employment, as illustrated in figure 1.5, numbers rose sharply during from 1939 to 1945 and then leveled off at around eight thousand, dropped off slightly in the late 1940s and then rose steeply again from 1949 to an all time peak in 1957-58 of 21 291. There followed a slight and then very rapid fall-off in total employment which bottomed out at thirteen thousand in 1960 and grew more slowly, with a slight fall off in the mid-1960s, to reach twenty thousand in the early 1970s. These periods of growth correspond to the industries expansion during the early 1940s and a sustained growth during the 1950s which enjoyed a stable export market. Most telling of all is the fall in employment in the early 1960s, caused by a crisis on the world market due to over production and large scale

## FRUIT &amp; VEGETABLE CANNING INDUSTRY

EMPLOYMENT 1935 - 1976 RACE &amp; GENDER DISTRIBUTION

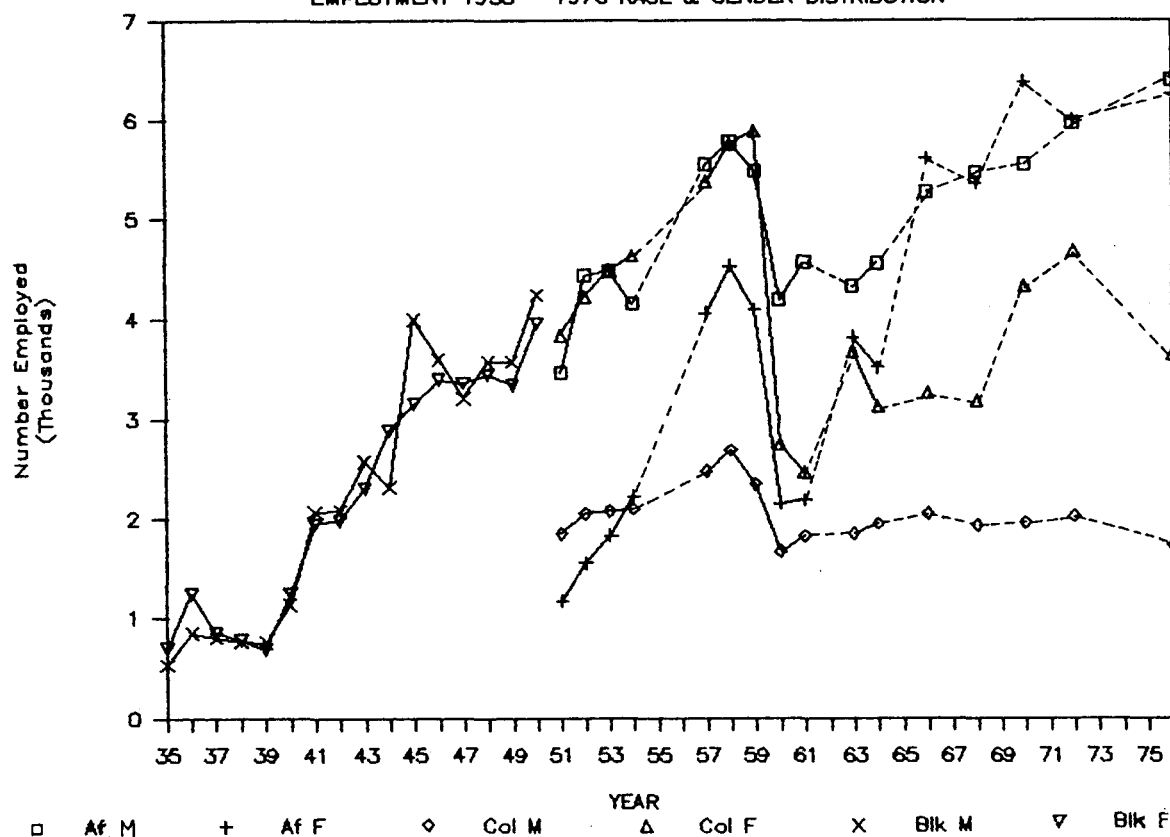


Figure 1.6

mechanisation which resulted in canneries shedding labour.

White employment declined from over a quarter of the total workforce in the mid 1930s to a tenth by 1945. This figure rose briefly in the late 1940s but declined to around 10% from the mid 1960s onwards. The numerical insignificance of white employees, many of whom were clerical or managerial staff, relieved the union of the problem of spanning the political distance between white and black workers, a factor facilitating an effective non-racial industrial unionism. Efforts to organise white workers failed for the reason that the bulk of them were in managerial positions. African employment rose from a lower base to equal coloured employment by WWII's end and then declined briefly. While it matched the growth of coloured employment in the early 1950s it peaked at a higher level of 10307 in 1956-57, 2000 more than peak coloured employment, and did not drop off as drastically, only falling to six thousand in 1960 and doubling over the next sixteen years. The growth of African employment during the 1960s and after the proclamation of the Western Cape as a coloured labour preference area

(noting that are national figures) indicates that employers did not necessarily have their use of African labour restricted. The implications of growing African employment during the 1960s, for the union were more serious as the registered coloured branches, better able to deal with the hostile conditions of the 1960s, had only half the membership potential of the unregistered African branches.

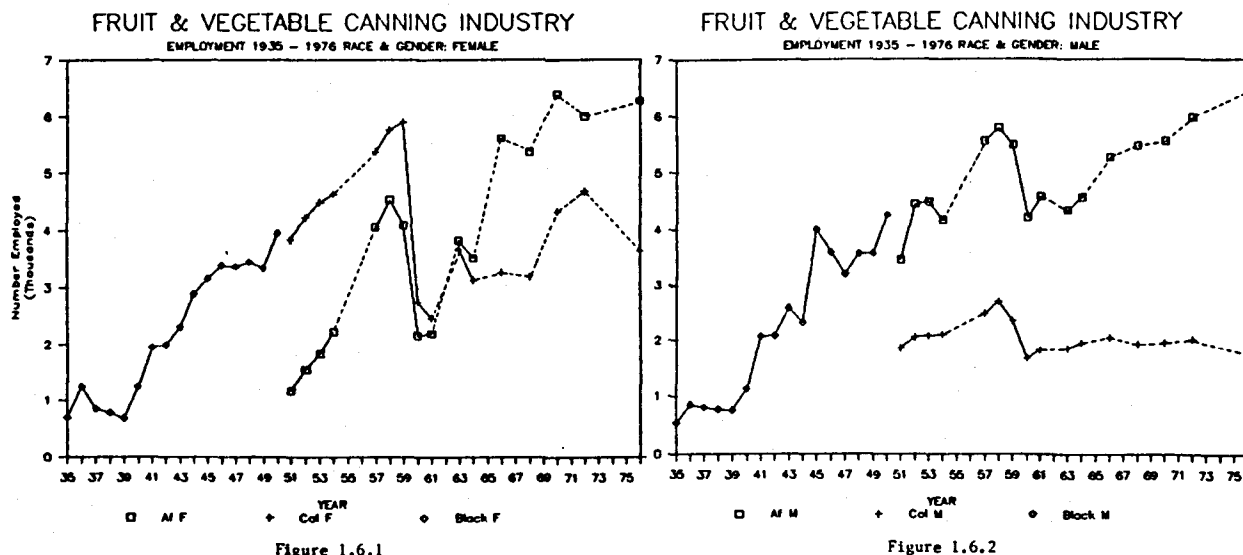


Figure 1.6.1

Figure 1.6.2

Including the dimension of gender, as depicted in figure 1.6, develops the significance of these trends considerably. In the growth of employment up to the 1950s there is no appreciable difference in the distribution between genders in each group. Most significant is the growth of African female employment, which was only 30% of coloured female employment in 1950, but which strongly replaces coloured female employment in the employment growth of the 1960s ends up twice as large. (more clearly shown in figure 1.6.1) This would suggest a process of proletarianisation of African women is underway. However, a fuller treatment of this issue will not be attempted here. Since wage rates never become racially defined, and coloured and African workers share similar jobs on the whole, this trend is not simply attributable to a 'filtration' effect of coloured workers moving into higher paid jobs. Male employment trends (more clearly shown in figure 1.6.2) are less volatile. Coloured male employment grow more slowly during the 1950s and stabilise at roughly 1800 after the decline in 1960. African male labour in contrast grew rapidly during the 1950s on a par with female labour, yet was the least affected by the decline in the late 1950s. It grew steadily from 4000 to 8000 by 1976. The slight fall of in total employment and more accentuated reduction in coloured

employment from the early 1970s would have been caused by plant closures through a rationalisation of the industry.

### Conclusion

The FCWU was founded in a context of growing unionism in secondary industry generally led by a left wing leadership. It was structured as an industrial union and from its inception organised non-rationally. Through a combination of good organisation, the ability to mobilise support, and high cost to the bosses through a lengthy interruption of production, the union was able to win its first strike at H. Jones. Having survived its first test the union was poised for growth in an industry that was expanding rapidly. Structural features of the canning industry that were to influence the union in the future have been identified and elaborated upon in this chapter as they significantly influenced the way the FCWU developed. Attention must now return to how the union forged its history in the particular conditions which confronted it.

## CHAPTER II

### **Establishment and Character**

How the Food and Canning Workers Union grew in the canning industry and developed a specific form of unionism shaped by the context it worked in, is dealt with in this chapter, spanning the the 1940s to the early 1950s. This was the period of major growth for the union, when it grew concurrently with the growth of employment in the industries organised by it and spread into four principal sectors: food packing, dried fruit packing, fish canning and fruit and vegetable canning. Seasonality and patterns of accumulation characteristic of the latter industries impressed themselves upon the union. Practices, methods of organisation and politics that were to characterise the FCWU over the greater part of its history, were evolved during this period and contributed to the development of a specific union identity.

#### Conditions in the Factories and the Canning Labour Process

In this institutional history of the FCWU considerable emphasis has been placed upon the examination of the canning industry as a means to understanding the subsequent development of the union. This has privileged fruit and canning over other sections of the union and exposed it to closer scrutiny. While the weight of union lay in these factories this approach excludes examining the dynamics of other sectors. This holds for the broader structural features of employment, racial and gender composition and how these changed over time, so shaping the union. In attempting to focus on the workings of the union within the factories, a correspondingly closer view of the workings of canning factories is presented. To appreciate the lives and struggles of canning workers an understanding is needed of the terrain over which they fought their battles, in this case requiring an understanding of the canning labour process.

From the earliest time through to the late 1930s, virtually all aspects of production were carried out by hand. From that time to the late 1950s, this continued to be the case in relation to fruit preparation. The most important tasks, preparation and canning were

performed by piece workers using special shield knives and spoons to cut and peel deciduous fruit by hand. Lye peelers (using caustic soda to dissolve the skin) were fed and stirred manually.

Fruit from the farms arrived in lorry-loads of small wooden boxes 'handpluk kissies' whereupon it was graded and sorted for size and sent on its journey through the preparation process in wooden boxes, trays or buckets.<sup>1</sup> Women stood at long tables peeling and slicing the fruit into buckets. These buckets were moved manually in relay to the canning tables where the fruit was sorted into grades, packed into cans, and syrup added, or if vegetables were being canned brine was added. Lids were sealed on with a slight vacuum (referred to as exhausting) to reduce corrosion to the container and strain during sterilization.<sup>2</sup> Cans were then loaded into baskets and lowered into steam retorts to cook for a length of time which varied with each product. Fruit with its naturally high sugar and acid content hostile to micro-organisms requires only a short cooking time.<sup>3</sup> When cooked, cans were lowered into a water bath to cool and prevent further cooking. From there they were unpacked from the basket, ferried to the warehouse and stacked in wooden storage bins until ordered, whereupon they were unpacked, labeled and dispatched.

As noted in chapter one, the principle factors influencing the division of labour were those of gender and age. Women were employed in the preparation of fruit and canning and men doing the heavy work of transporting and working the cookers. Young boys and girls worked in the factory transporting fruit as 'bakkie draers' (bucket carriers).

On the factory floor supervision and control to maximise output was done via 'voorvroue' (forewomen or supervisors) under the control of foremen, who were exclusively white to begin with. Foremen were harshly authoritarian. 'Voorvroue' came off the factory floor as competent canners and cutters not vastly removed from the ordinary workers and

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- 1 This outline of canning production is based on interviews, principally with Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 18.04.86 and Liz Phike, Paarl, 4.06.85.
  - 2 Cruess, W.W. Commercial Fruit and Vegetable Products. New York: McGraw Hill, 1938. p.98.
  - 3 Howard, A.J. Canning Technology. London: J & A Churchill, 1949. pp.191-202.

they were union members.<sup>4</sup> No formal training was provided; the supervisors showed new recruits how to do the work and inspected their progress on the job.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to war investment in plant by existing factories was most likely to have involved the installation of mechanical sorters, peach-hullers and brought the first forms of mechanical transport into the factory. New factories built during the war were unable to import capital goods and this stimulated the local production of the more rudimentary equipment as a result. This 'capital deepening' most affected the middle stages of exhausting and closing cans expediting the process by introducing hand operated closing machines, and later conveyor belts to transport cans. Power was generated by a single source and distributed mechanically by long shafts, running the length of the factory, which drove belts linked to each mechanical device.<sup>6</sup> These belt drives were often unprotected and a constant hazard to unwary workers.<sup>7</sup>

In the early 1940's conditions in the factory were harsh. There were no rest periods and lunch-breaks were not fixed. Workers would go outside to eat for as long as the foreman allowed and would be called back when he decided work should resume. Work in season went on for as long as it took to process the fruit, after a day's work with an hour's break for supper, it would continue until the job was done, to nine, ten or eleven o'clock at night and sometimes even later. No transport was provided for workers who had to walk home late at night and then be back at work at seven-thirty the next morning.<sup>8</sup> Factories did not have cloak rooms, nor did workers receive holidays, sick leave or have set

4 Many of the union's leaders were supervisors, with their advantages of influence and mobility organising was made easier. Not all supervisors supported the union, some would spy for the bosses, but the union could exercise some control over them as they lived amongst the workers. Interview, John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

5 Interview Mr. P.Conradie, Paarl 9.04.86.

6 This form of power distribution persisted until the mid-1950s and beyond when electric motors became cheaper and more freely available, enabling the attachment of a motor to each machine. The latter was a technically significant development which did not necessarily increase the speed of work, but did promote overall efficiency. Interview Messrs. Ainsley and Du Toit, Paarl, 18.04.86.

7 Workers were frequently injured by these belts which caught limbs and carried them into moving machinery. Interview Liz Phike, Paarl, 4.06.85.

8 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 18.04.85.

conditions of employment.<sup>9</sup> No protective clothing was supplied and workers, particularly the younger workers, often worked bare-foot on floors wet with acidic fruit juices which blackened the skin and ate into the cuticle, causing swelling and drawing blood, a condition known as 'vrugte vingers'(fruit fingers). Blood oozed from the feet of people working on wet floors for long hours.<sup>10</sup> Liz Abrahams describes how the work was done as follows.

When I started there were not a lot of machines, everything was being done by human beings. The women had to cut the fruit, peel it and put it in the tins. At that time when we were working the apricots, we are cutting apricots open and throwing out the pit inside. And then we used to have little girls, young ones, which they call 'bakkie draers', they are the people who carry the fruit from the table to the lines. Then at the lines there are people who are doing the packing jobs and at the same time they are sorting it. They don't just pack the fruit, each packer has certain tins which they have to grade the fruit into: smallest, medium and the bigger size. We were working piece-work by the carton that carried the fruit. It was a box and you counted your cards by that box.<sup>11</sup>

During the war with the increase in size of the workforce interviewees recollect that direct supervision increased and the relative proportion of supervisors to workers rose.<sup>12</sup>

Foremen would say: "Maak gou! Maak gou!" They were always charging round. They would walk through the tables every five minutes, every ten minutes to say, "Opskud! Opskud! Opskud!" to make the workers work faster.<sup>13</sup>

Payment for workers involved in fruit preparation and packing was by piece-rates. This form of payment suited the bosses as fruit is perishable and meant piece-workers drove themselves hard to maximise their earnings. As basic wages were so low workers were unwilling to give up piece-rates and become ordinary labourers, yet while they were able to earn wages way above basic rates, this was at the expense of

9 Proud Record of Ray Alexander (1 page bibliography Miscellania file)

10 Close, R. op. cit. p.9.

11 Interview Liz Phike, Paarl, 4.06.85.

12 Employment rose rapidly during the war and out-put was based on an expanded scale of production involving a doubling of the labour complement which required a correspondingly higher level of control through supervision.

13 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 18.04.85.

their health. A predicament they were keenly aware of, as union leader Betty Kearns remarked "piece-work pays us but it murders us too."<sup>14</sup>

### Women Workers - Backbone of the Union

To maintain a silence on gender in this study would be remiss. A historical study such as this requires explicit mention of gender in order to avoid the assumption that the category 'workers', treated androgenously, accurately describes the situation of women as well as men, for it does not, women tend to be obscured. Gender therefore needs to be integrated into the historical materialist method employed here to develop an understanding that is sensitive to gender. This is particularly so in view of the central focus of this study upon the public sphere of social production, yet simultaneously dealing with issues which domestic reproduction such as the length of the working day for women. Gender sensitivity does not imply giving attention to 'women's issues' that are in some way incidental issues, as to do so marginalises gender as an informing category of analysis.

Gender needs a significant place in examining the union for a further two reasons. Firstly, women make up a majority in the workforce and in the union. Secondly, unlike many trade unions with a large female membership with only nominal levels of involvement in the affairs of their union, women were key union supporters. Former general secretary John Mentoor put it simply, "Die unie se mag het gelê in vrouens."<sup>15</sup> His views are amplified by John Phendlani, former AFCWU president who contrasts the participation of men and women.

The women, they are the strongest. If there is no women, there is no union, take it from me.

The men ...Ahg! they don't worry about such a thing. If we are holding a meeting right in the factory, they play dominoes, they got nothing to do.

(You ask them) Come to the meeting gentlemen. "Haai man, coming...."

No, the women is number one.<sup>16</sup>

Women's participation in trade unions has been shaped by the nature of their incorporation into wage labour under capitalism. The nature of women's work has been characterised by Pudifin and Ward (1986) as: constituting a 'flexible and disposable' working population; lower

<sup>14</sup> The Guardian, November 14 1946.

<sup>15</sup> Interview John Mentoor, Pniel, 5.04.85.

<sup>16</sup> Interview John Phendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

waged, job types characterised by unskilled work, not requiring continuous service and often over supplied; concentrated in lower occupation levels with little chance of promotion; poorly represented in trade unions; poorly provided with social security; having little commitment to training women and exhibiting a sexual division along the lines of the types of work women do in the home.<sup>17</sup>

In relation to trade union involvement, historically in Britain in addition to characteristics of their work, women also faced a resistance from men's trade unions to recognise the necessity of incorporating women, antagonism from employers to their unionisation and traditions eschewing organisation at the point of production.<sup>18</sup>

South African research on the organisation of women workers has pointed to several instances where British experience does not apply for, unlike their British counterparts, women workers in South Africa were recruited into industrial unions. However, black women workers constituted a small part of the workforce outside the domestic and agriculture spheres and this is the principle reason why their organisation has only recently emerged as an issue within the independent trade union movement of the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

In the canning factories the situation was different, women constituted a majority of the labour force, did not occupy less skilled positions, were employed on a seasonal basis but were not subordinate within their trade union. The reasons for this were the ideological position emanating from the first general secretary promoting the organisation, and involvement of women in running the affairs of the union,<sup>20</sup> the numerical importance of women workers, and a tradition that became established of women's involvement. As Drake has observed, women have not lacked for militancy and their support for strike action has been considerable. Where the FCWU succeeded was to translate militancy into organisation and place women at key positions in its structures. Many of the union's branch officials and its leadership on the central committee were women and the high level of female

17 Pudifin, C. & Ward, S. 'Working for nothing ... Gender and Industrial Decentralisation in Isithebe.' M.A. Durban, 1986. p.102.

18 Drake, B. Women in Trade Unions, pp.198-202.

19 Bird, A. 'Organising women workers in South Africa' SALB, 10(8), 1985.

20 Ray Alexander promoted the organisation of women in addition to her general trade union work and was one of the persons instrumental in formation of the Federation of South African Women in the Western Cape.

participation in the union confirms the view that, where unions encouraged the involvement of women and gave them the opportunity to assume positions of leadership, this did occur.<sup>21</sup>

### Seasonal Dialectic

Integral to the active role women assumed are fluctuations in the union's power due to seasonal changes. As the raw material required processing in a fixed and limited time period, capital required maximum surplus extraction over a very short period, which was simultaneously the zenith of the union's power. Production was required without interruption at the highest possible levels and the mechanisms to achieve these aims were piece-rate payment and excessive overtime. During season when the factories worked at full capacity, what could not be processed during the day was done in overtime, shift-work and a systematic shift system to run the factories for more hours per day was only introduced in the 1960s. The height of season was a time when the foremen would be harsh in pushing for production and when the workers would be bold about their power to produce - and to withhold production. Workers did not have a monopoly on skills and their power lay in their collective action. The union was the embodiment of that power. This was the time most favoring the union in negotiations to improve wages and conditions and when brief work stoppage might occur to strengthen the union's hand in its dealings with the bosses. It was also the time new piece-rates for the season were negotiated at each factory. In the factory workers were demonstrative of their power.

When you are going in, when you are there, we got a song inside the factory - specially in season time because there is so much work the boss is a little bit afraid for us. They make a song, a song. They are going to hear the boss say "Ah! Hulle is weer agter 'n ding. Daar kom 'n ding aan." Then he is going to ask the committees "What is going on here?" No, the people are not satisfied, they want more money.<sup>22</sup>

Songs mixing English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, were sung in the factory in departments such as preparation and canning where workers were

21 This aspect of the FCWU is paralleled by that of a California canning union which developed a strong and militant female leadership component from the shop floor.

Ruiz, V. L. 'Ucapawa, Chicanas, and the California Food Processing Industry 1937 - 1950.' PHd. Stanford, 1982.

22 Interview John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

concentrated. During negotiations singing would go on all day, mixing songs about higher wages with 'freedom' songs. This is an example sung to the tune of My Clementine.

Higher wages, higher wages,  
higher wages, Afrika.  
We will fight for higher wages,  
higher wages, Afrika.<sup>23</sup>

Out of season the position was reversed. Seasonal workers were laid off, only the permanent staff, most of whom were men, remained to clean, repair machinery and dispatch stock. A small number of workers were semi-seasonal which meant they worked for longer on off-season crops, including some vegetables and peas. Reduced numbers in the factory weakened the union, reducing its power, decreasing subscription income and leaving the committees without some of their most militant members. This was exacerbated due to gender divisions as most women were seasonal workers and their absence weakened the committees. Since work is created to keep men employed out of season, men fear for their jobs should they be too active in the union. However, this inactivity rebounds when there are no women present to mediate on their behalf.

Sou ek nou opgesom het, die vroue in die unie kry meer reg met die base as die mans. Soos ons ook hier, ons dring aan op 'n ding waar die man miskien sou uitsak sommer, maar die vrou hou aan. Die vrou sak nie uit nie, sy hou aan.

En die base kan meer die man weg kry van die punt af. Dit het ons ook uitgevind. Die man stem gouer saam as die vrou, die vrou bly by haar punt en sy staan daarby. Want ons baas het all gesê, "Hoekom is julle net vrouens, ek wil mans ook hê". Maar die mans wil nie die komitee dien nie. Hy vra want hy het gesien die vroue hou aan met die ding tot dat hy, hy moet instem met die vrou, hy moet vir hulle gee wat hulle wil hê, maar die man sak sommer uit, hy..

Ek dink die beste is die vrou, die vroue staan saam as die man!<sup>24</sup>

I would suggest that the women's militancy was due to a combination of factors ranging from the limited span of their employment period to the power of numbers that they wielded during the season. As most women earned the bulk of their yearly income from their factory work during the season they had reason to agitate to maximise their earnings and their numbers, which signified their strength, predisposed them to collective action.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

At the start of the new season workers would go on standby, waiting for word that work was to begin. Management would inform supervisors when a particular crop was to be processed through the grapevine. Seasonal fluctuations in membership required the union to reorganise its members each season. In addition workers moved between factories, and the workforce therefore was not a stable one for organising purposes, increasing the administrative burden upon branch secretaries. Seasonality, comprising the interplay of gender, power during production lasting only a few months of the year and unemployment during the off-season slack period, is a central feature defining the particular character of the FCWU.

#### Firm foundations for growth

These were the structural conditions of the canning industry that confronted Ray Alexander as she spread the organisation of canning workers into the towns surrounding Paarl. Having weathered the H.Jones strike and already showing tangible benefits of membership, the union grew in conditions conducive to organisation. Harsh working conditions, low wages and a disregard for even the limited protection workers were afforded under the law<sup>25</sup> created the need for collective action by workers to improve their conditions. Greatly exploited, mostly illiterate workers, newly drawn to factory work, readily embraced this new organisation as a weapon to aid their fight against the bosses. In the context of expansion in the industry and a more sympathetic attitude on the part of the Department of Labour to unions during the war, the hostility and intimidation on the part of the bosses to keep the union out of their factories did not succeed.

The central role Ray Alexander played in founding the union and directing it over the years needs to be clearly established. Miss. Ray, as she was popularly known, made an indelible mark on the lives of thousands of workers she organised into unions. She did indeed "wake us up and give us the union"<sup>26</sup> and in so doing earned the respect and affection of thousands of workers. As a dedicated and incorruptible leader she set high standards for unionists to follow and in the process laid down the principles of sound union organisation that

25 This applies to protection afforded workers under the Factories Act, extended by amendment in 1941.

26 Interview John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

enabled the union to survive when many other unions collapsed. Communist Party policy on trade union administration stressed honesty and proper record keeping as sound practices to advance the interests of the workers for those members working in the unions. Alexander with a meticulous attention to detail embodied this approach. She would brook no nonsense when it came to how leadership should conduct themselves, as Liz Abrahams recalls,

En jy sien, so streng is sy, jy kan nooit speletjies maak of sê, ag, dit was sommer so. Sy sê jy moet weet as jy die werkers lei, jy moet reg lei en vir hulle die regte leiding gee. Want as jy nie die regte leiding gee en jy moet die werkers more sê, "Julle moet nie dit en dit en dit nie, wat sal die werkers sê? Want jy doen dan dit en dit, hoe kan jy vir ons sê? Jy sien, daardie soort 'education' was sy baie streng op.<sup>27</sup>

Ten months after its inception the FCWU held its first annual conference. Two thousand workers were represented by delegates elected from branches in Cape Town, Paarl, Wellington, Worcester and Wolseley. Motions adopted called for a campaign to organise all food workers in the Cape Province and liaise with other unions for the formation of a national food union. Strategy to improve wages featured prominently, the conference adopting a motion which read "For many years the employers in the canning industry have been making large profits, while the workers receive starvation wages which in many instances are as low as 7s. 6d, 10s. and 12s. 6d. per week." The motion called upon the executive to negotiate wages to provide workers with satisfactory conditions of health and comfort, concluding that "while negotiations for wage increases should be opened immediately with individual employers, steps should be taken for the conclusion of a national agreement covering the whole industry throughout the Union."<sup>28</sup> One of the leaders in the Paarl strike who was not re-employed, Ms. Eva Arendse, was elected vice-president and simultaneously appointed as an organiser.

Pursuant upon the second resolution Alexander wrote to the Minister of Labour, Walter Madeley, and argued the case for improving wages for the people "without whose labour the increased production could not be recorded - the people, without whose labour the needs of the country

27 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl 18.06.86.

28 Close, R. op.cit. p.35.

could not be met, without whom the war could not be won."<sup>29</sup> The union applied for the establishment of a Wage Board for the food processing industry and, as an interim measure, convened a national conference of employers and food unions to reach an agreement on improving wages and conditions. Alexander cited worker discontent as indicative of the urgency of the situation, referring to a short strike at A.C.L.'s Daljosophat factory where workers had recently struck over piece rates<sup>30</sup> and at the Durban jam factory, C. & E. Morton, where workers had voted for and gone on a strike after a protracted and unresolved struggle.<sup>31</sup> Food unions in Johannesburg and Durban concurred on the urgency of bringing about improvements through a national agreement.

Minister Madeley agreed to convene a conference which met in January 1942, and arrived at a wage agreement to last for six months. The Johannesburg union was represented by Betty du Toit and J. Andrews Durban food workers by unionists Alex Wanless and T. Pillay (the Durban union did not have a full-time secretary) and Ray Alexander, Leo MacTavie and Frank Marquard represented the FCWU. Delegates exchanged experiences, noting that employers had been resisting negotiations and so necessitating strike action, and resolved to form one union for food workers.<sup>32</sup> The Durban strikers who had been out for several weeks and won widespread support for their non-racial unity and despite intimidation, ended their strike victorious on the successful conclusion of the conference, having won themselves higher wages.<sup>33</sup>

The agreement provided the union with legal space to work within and consolidate its structures, which worked well in the bigger factories. However, it was soon apparent that many of the smaller employers refused to sign the national agreement. Against them the

29 Letter from R. Alexander to the Minister of Labour. December 3 1941. Quoted in Close, R. op.cit. p.36.

30 This short stoppage earned workers 50% more on piece-rates. It was the forerunner of localised stoppages. Negotiations were conducted by the local branch officials. The Guardian, December 4 1941. Of note was the success of anti-scab action which defeated an attempt to break the strike with labour from another town. Interview Betty Kearns, Paarl, 15.2.83.

31 The Guardian, December 11 1941.

32 The Guardian, January 22 1942.

33 Precipitated by placing African women on short-time, the strike involved some 400 Indian and African workers. Pickets were attacked by strike breakers and charged under the Masters and Servants Act. They received considerable support from FCWU members who had the Paarl strike still fresh in their minds. The Guardian, 23 December 1941, January 8;15;29 1942.

union could only appeal to the minister and rail in the press: "Our union cannot and will not stand by and watch the undermining of the gains which the workers have so painfully won for themselves."<sup>34</sup> Its efforts were rewarded by the Minister appointing an arbitrator who made an award similar to the agreement binding upon employers. At the same time as the long awaited Wage Board investigation was announced, the government issued War Measure 142 of 1942 prohibiting strikes, which the FCWU publicly condemned for depriving the workers of their only means to act against low wages.<sup>35</sup>

### The Organisation of Dried Fruit and Fish Canning Workers

There then followed a period of rapid expansion as the union entered unorganised industries for the first time. Branches in new towns were formed as dried-fruit packers and fish canning workers were organised. In these industries conditions were very poor, wages below those paid to other canning workers and the problems associated with seasonality acute. In the long-term it proved difficult to maintain organisation and these sections were to be episodically organised.

Dried-fruit workers were cited by the union as those most in need of wage improvements in its campaign for a national agreement. When they were signed up negotiations commenced, but without results and the matter went to arbitration. Here the union was confronted by entrenched agricultural-processing interests and state regulated bodies that took exception to labour organising in what they regarded as their preserve. The union faced private companies, farmers co-operatives and the Dried Fruit and Deciduous Fruit Boards. The latter maintained that wages must not exceed those paid to agricultural workers or farmers would object, and that if wages rose to unacceptable limits it would consider replacing workers with Italian prisoners-of-war at lower rates. The Chairman of the South African Dried Fruit Distributors Association complained about the effect of "foreign propagandists"<sup>36</sup> upon workers who had always been happy, contented and never before questioned authority. Alexander was strongly attacked by farmers who said she should not have the right to go into the country-side and demanded

<sup>34</sup> The Guardian, March 19 1942.

<sup>35</sup> The Guardian, February 2 1942.

<sup>36</sup> FCWU Central Committee minutes, 12.9.42. FCWU collection, Department of Historical Papers, Wits, AD 1175. File AI 5.

action from the government to stop this "subversive activity".<sup>37</sup> When the wage award was made the union objected, for the award merely reproduced the employers offer of very low increases. Nor did problems end there, as several workers in Worcester were laid off and told they would be replaced by white workers. The union responded with a letter to the Prime Minister supported by prominent liberals, sent a deputation to the local Labour inspector and succeeded in having its members reinstated. The union claimed this as a victory for the trade union movement in the fight for higher wages, better conditions and the right to work<sup>38</sup>, but it is doubtful if the bosses would have succeeded with their plan as prisoner-of-war labour was only available for farm work.

Next attention shifted to the fish canning industry which by a decision of the union's Central Committee in June 1942, was targeted for organisation. This was probably influenced by the short strike of fishermen that took place in May at the Maitland factory of Irvin and Johnson.<sup>39</sup> The first fish factories organised by Ray Alexander were Union Smokeries and the National Trawling Company, both in Cape Town. Extending beyond this required expansion up the West Coast where the bulk of the fishing industry is located. As Saldanha Bay was a restricted military area the first port of call was the far northern fishing village of Port Nolloth. When Alexander arrived there she found living conditions very poor: people lived in tin shacks and used sacking for clothes, they had to pay a penny for a paraffin tin of water and another to transport it out of wages of between 3s.6d. and 5s. per week, as work was scarce and very irregular. Many people only managed to survive out of government pauper rations.

Alexander called a meeting for fish-canners to hear what achievements had been won by the union and what they could achieve, also attended by fishermen. Members were signed up, a committee elected and instructed how they were to perform union work and Alexander returned home from where requests for immediate increases were made to employers, and a Wage Board applied for. At the meeting fishermen had expressed a desire to join a union so they were assisted in forming their own, a step the FCWU considered necessary as they worked for the

37 The Guardian, August 30 1942.

38 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 7.11.42. (Wits Collection File AI 5.)

39 The Guardian, May 7 1942.

same firms.<sup>40</sup> Undisguised hostility towards the unionisation of the canning workers was evident from the outset. The bosses tried to prevent Alexander coming to Port Nolloth, and the local police attended the meeting.<sup>41</sup>

For fish-canning workers wages varied from 2s.6d. to 3s.6d. per day for male packers, a shilling above female wages, the Board of Trade and Industry had found in 1934.<sup>42</sup> Eight years later there had been few or no increases. Housing was uniformly poor, without electricity, running water or proper sanitation. In addition these dwellings were overcrowded and, in the absence of health services, promoted the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis. Wage labour participation rates were low and very uneven, when catches were brought in they had to be processed, in which case work continued until it was over, often extending the shift to twenty-four hours or more. When there were no fish, no other employment was available. The results of this was a high rate of alcoholism and debt bondage. Workers had to buy goods on credit in the off season, on a system known as 'goods voor' (credit), and repay these debts when they started to earn again. Unity and collective action to redress these problems was urgently required, yet their vulnerability and structural weakness - low wage labour participation rates, lack of alternative employment, very low wages in the regional labour market - undermined their ability to engage in collective action, and made the maintenance of permanent organisation exceedingly difficult.

Expansion into the core of the fishing industry was delayed for some time. Only in September 1943 was Ray Alexander able to visit Saldanha Bay where she was enthusiastically welcomed and a branch was formed,<sup>43</sup> followed by branches at Stompneus Bay, St. Helena Bay, Paternoster, Hondeklip Bay, Doornbaai and Lambert's Bay.

Negotiations with the Crawfish Cannery commenced in earnest late in 1943 with demands for two to three times the existing rates against employers' offers of existing rates and improvements in housing. The union contended that profitability evident by continued investment in

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40 Support for fishermen to organise a union led to the formation of the Trawler and Line Fisherman's Union (TLFU), which co-operated closely with the FCWU.

41 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 7.11.42. (Wits Collection File AI 5.)

42 Board of Trade and Industry Report on the fishing Industry No.180 of 1934, para. 102.

43 The Guardian, September 30 1943.

canning warranted these increases, but employers refused to consider improved wages, imputing that three-quarters of fishermen's wages were spent on alcohol. This the union repudiated by asserting that improved health and domestic conditions were conditional upon wage increases and were the only way to provide workers with a life that did not require them to seek relief in alcohol.<sup>44</sup> An interim agreement, achieved under pressure from work stoppages in several factories, provided some relief, however, the Wage Board which met in January 1944 was the focal point of the union's attention.

The Wage Board, to which Ray Alexander had been appointed as a workers' representative, was made a forum for the union's economic agitation. The union challenged the notion that the cost of living was cheaper in the country as, apart from rent, all else cost more, and demanded "a radical change in wages and conditions of work"<sup>45</sup>: £3 a week plus COLA for labourers, three weeks paid leave, morning and afternoon rest-breaks, a forty four hour week and increased overtime pay. The determination did not reflect the union's ambitious demands, nor those of the bosses who had only offered existing rates. The lowest paid (female, juvenile grade four) received £1 6s., the higher grades, moderate increases of two to five pounds a week more and conditions across factories were standardised. The union's organising drive into the fishing branches had succeeded in bringing about major wage improvements. Attention was also paid to improving conditions in the factories and securing the observation of rights workers had to confinement allowances, sick pay and injury compensation.

With the union's expansion into the fish-canning its geographical spread stretched from Cape Town to Port Nolloth in the North West to Port Elizabeth in the East. By the start of 1944 the union had sixteen branches, having added the West Coast fishing villages, the towns of Ceres, Grabouw, Wolseley and accepted the affiliation of the Food and Canning Workers Union of Port Elizabeth, formed in 1942, as a branch.

<sup>44</sup> In conjunction with the TLFU the union campaigned along these lines to improve the conditions of workers on the West coast. The Guardian, October 28 1943.

<sup>45</sup> The Guardian, March 14 1944.

### Formal Organisation and Workings of the FCWU

Union practices will be elaborated upon in three sections below dealing with the constitutional structure, operation of factory committees and activities to improve members living conditions.

In the union's first constitution, ratified June 23 1941, 'aims' covered the usual clauses to regulate relations between members and employers and assist members. 'Objectives' concerned advising, supporting or opposing legislation and making representations to public and other bodies in the interests of members, and co-operating with other trade or industrial organisations in the interests of the working class movement. Membership was open to all employees in the food and canning manufacturing industry. This was defined as covering specific food operations, and required redefinition as new sections of the industry were organised. The union was later forced to define membership in terms of the racial clauses of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

The Central Executive Committee (CEC) was responsible for management, subject to direction from the Annual National Conferences. The CEC consisted of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and General Secretary and branch representatives, who met monthly. With time a new structure was inserted over the CEC, a National Executive Council (NEC) with representatives from each branch of the union. The CEC (later called the Management Committee) continued its management function and consisted of the officials and eight members elected from the NEC.

Ten or more members of the union in a town could establish a branch. An inaugural meeting would elect a branch executive consisting of Chairman, vice-chairman, Treasurer and Secretary and as many other members as the meeting may decide to administer the branch meeting monthly. General members' meetings were ordinarily to be held every three months and subscriptions were collected by the branch secretaries. The first constitution provided for 7,5 % of monthly income to go to head office for affiliation fees. Later this was increased to 20%.

No role was provided for shop stewards in the first constitution. A later amendment identified their role solely as subscriptions collectors, and that they should notify the secretary immediately in

the event of a dispute.<sup>46</sup> Branches were usually represented at Management Committee meetings by their secretary or chairman, who represented the views of the rank and file members. In constitutional terms and it seems in practice, senior officials had a strong influence over decision making. Meetings were conducted in English with Afrikaans and Xhosa translations. Commenting on who did most of the talking an interviewee has stated:

Frank Marquard en Becky Lan, meeste van die leiers. Daai tyd het die werkers nog nie so baie gepraat soos nou nie, nou praat die werkers baie. In daai tyd het ons nog nie so baie gepraat nie, het die mense maar geluister wat sê die voorste....Verduidelik hulle miskien nou van wat daar gebeur het of wat daar kort kom of so. Maar die werkers het nie eintlik baie gepraat nie. Nou is dit heel anders.<sup>47</sup>

It is worth dwelling upon the administration of finances, for this issue became a key, if not the key administrative issue in the later period when the union was struggling to maintain itself. From its inception a strict approach was adopted to financial accountability. This was influenced by the administrative soundness the Communist Party fostered in its union work and also derived from the experience of Ray Alexander.

When I came in organising, particularly food and canning workers, I found in the country areas after the ruins of the ICU, one of the first questions that was put to me by the workers in Worcester, by the workers in Paarl, by the workers in Walvis Bay even: "Will the union account for the money, or are you, your union, this union, going to be like the ICU where you use our money just for eating up and enriching others?" We gave them our word of honour that our union would not and we read them the constitution showing that we are responsible to see that the union funds are properly looked after.<sup>48</sup>

Strict financial accountability was inculcated into every official, regular statements made and branch books properly audited. This did not eliminate discrepancies altogether, either in the many instances where poor education and numeracy bedeviled branch secretaries trying to do there duties with occasional help from head-office, or where temptation evoked dishonesty. Policy in these cases was consistent: the offender was dismissed and outstanding money had to be refunded.

46 FCWU Constitution approved by the Industrial Registrar 27 August 1953.

47 Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley 21.01.86

48 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

As a function of the geographical dispersion into many branches, the organisational responsibility in the economic class struggle devolved to the branches. Branches had the responsibility of monitoring agreements, attending to grievances, discussing circular letters and corresponding with head-office. Branches were encouraged to deal with matters themselves and not to rely on the CEC or secretary. Thus, as a result of the structural position of the branches, local leadership had to play a greater part in running the union than would have been the case had head-office officials been in a position to respond to day-to-day issues at the factories. This aspect of the union is examined in greater depth in chapter six. In practice self-sufficiency varied, some branches being strong, well organised and stable, others weaker and more intermittently active. Notwithstanding the factors promoting local leadership there remained a considerable reliance on more experienced officials to assist with more complicated matters. When branches were confronted with serious problems they would call on head-office for assistance.

Dan het hulle maar altyd vir hoofkantoor gelaat kom. En kan hoofkantoor die saak kom uitstryk....Dit het baie lank gevat voor die mense lateraan besef, wag, as daai mense dit kan doen, dan kan hulle dit ook reg kry. En toe die fabriekbase nou eers sien maar die 'majority' van die mense is sterk aan die unie, hulle staan agter hulle se leiers, toe het hulle later aan, as die leiers ingaan, dan is dit so gou soos nou, dan is die saak opgelos.<sup>49</sup>

### Factory Committees

Within the factory a workers' committee would be formed comprising of representatives from the various departments in a structure through which grievances were handled and the union's shop-floor presence maintained. Workers elected the committees which were not racially divided.<sup>50</sup> Active workers displaying leadership "who know about the factory"<sup>51</sup> were selected and would represent workers in deputations to management.

49 Interview Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay 2.08.86

50 This was the intention and practice, despite the formal division into the registered FCWU and the unregistered AFCWU. In the later years employers promoted racial divisions by refusing to see joint committees.

51 Interview John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

Committees had the task of mobilising workers en masse, to decide on collective action and to give expression to decisions made by workers as Liz Phike explained:

If something has happened and its a serious issue, if something happen in the warehouse - maybe the workers been sacked for fighting with the foreman or so. Those workers try to contact the shop-steward and the committee members. At lunch- time the committee members used to shout and say there is meeting in the cloakroom. Now one-two-three the workers fall in at the meeting. That was why we organised our strikes very quickly in the early years. The workers did not even ask the employers for permission for a meeting. If the committee say there is a meeting in the cloakroom every body jump in the cloakroom and holds a meeting. They explain to workers that a certain worker has been dismissed for these reasons and then ask workers, how do you feel about this case of the worker being dismissed - is it right or wrong. If the feeling of the workers is that this worker is being dismissed wrongly, they just say they are not going in. Then committee members have to go to the employers and tell the employer we want that worker back, hear what the employer has to say, and come and give us a report back. Now the employers were sometimes stiff and workers did not go back in and then they had to give in.<sup>52</sup>

In the early period the nature of the labour process facilitated communication within the factory due to the extensive contact workers had with each other in doing hand work and permitted activists greater flexibility to consult their comrades. "You could move around. If you thought that you've got enough power to pull, you didn't care about what you are doing, going out when you want."<sup>53</sup> The effectiveness of committee deputations related to the strength of organisation. On dismissals in cases of theft, drinking or fighting they could only plead for reinstatement, but where they were strong "nothing was too heavy ... if the workers are a majority the boss can say nothing."<sup>54</sup>

While these structures served to mobilise democratic worker participation, there were limitations that arose not only from limits on leverage within the factory but also in the theoretical perspective of leadership on the relationship between shop-floor structures and industrial relations machinery. Where there were grievances pertaining to conditions these were mostly presented to the Department of Labour as complaints that would be investigated by inspectors. The union

52 Interview Liz Phike, Paarl, 4.06.85.

53 Ibid.

54 Interview John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

gathered the complaints and chased up slow inspections, but the bottom-line in these struggles was state regulations, and the principal actors state functionaries - not workers themselves. In the context the union acted in and the hostility it faced from the employers this use of state functionaries may be seen as a tactical one which delivered the goods, yet it did set up a series of relations with the state's industrial relations machinery the effects of which limited the capacity workers had for independent class action.

### Social Welfare Unionism

The other side to the branches, indeed the union as a whole, concerned their role beyond the factory gates where they agitated for improvements in the sphere of reproduction. The unions founders saw this as a pioneering role for the organisation to play in the country areas where it was not only the first trade union, but also the first organisation to agitate for improvements in the material conditions of the working class, making it necessary and desirable to tackle political issues. Branches were accorded a leading role in this activity, though in practice it was the union executive which dealt with many of the local issues identified by branches. This quote sums up the role ascribed to the branches.

Branches must also take part in the economic, political and social lives of the members in their areas, which means that it is the branch's business to see that the street in which the worker lives should be clean and lit at night, that the children should have creches, that there should be pre- and post-natal clinics, a district nurse and above all to see that the people struggle for democratic rights to vote and to be elected to all governing bodies in our country.<sup>55</sup>

Examples of early campaigns will serve to illustrate the above points. Early in 1942 attention was given the workers' housing as a severe housing crisis had developed that was accentuated by the war and the union conducted a housing and health campaign as a motivated part of its role in addition to improving wages. "We intend to see that the workers we represent get the other benefits they are entitled to - proper schooling, medical attention, housing and all other rights as

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<sup>55</sup> Memorandum prepared for branches by Ray Alexander positing the role branches should, rather than did, play. Published after her banning in Morning Star, vol.2. July 1957.

members of the community."<sup>56</sup> Conditions all round were bad, as comments relating to fish branches above pointed out, but at Ashton they were positively maleficent. In 1940 LKB erected a factory at what was no more than a railway siding among fruit farms, devoid of social infrastructure. Labour brought off the surrounding farms was accommodated in reed, clay, hessian-sack hovels and clay brick houses, having to make do with pit-latrines and a few communal taps. These conditions were detailed in a lengthy memorandum accompanied by photographic evidence which the union sent to the Social Welfare and Public Health authorities. In return the union was able to represent workers on the Rent Board and better housing was provided at Ashton.<sup>57</sup> Investigations into conditions at Worcester and Montagu followed .

Concern over local social issues was expressed by branches in the resolutions they tabled at the second annual conference. Immediate problems of housing, health and transport affecting workers in different towns were framed as resolutions calling for action from the relevant central or local state authority.<sup>58</sup> This was to set a pattern for the future as conferences became a forum for demanding improvements in social conditions wherever members were located. To implement such resolutions taken at that first conference a questionnaire was circulated to branches to gather information on conditions and recommendations from which head-office prepared a memorandum that was presented in an interview with the Health Commission. The recommendations covered the unions case for higher wages to eliminate poverty induced diseases, adequate housing, local health facilities such as dental and child-care clinics, regular visits by doctors to towns without clinics and the building and staffing of creches.<sup>59</sup> In many respects this made the FCWU unique. As Bill Andrews stated when opening the unions fifth conference in 1945:

On looking through your agenda I find it differs from that of many other unions. You do not only attend to the elementary duties of a trade union, but your agenda and the Secretary's Report covers a wide field and covers

56 The Guardian, July 23 1942.

57 Close, R. op.cit. p.42.

58 Resolutions of this nature calling for improvements in medical services, provision of crèches, clinics and communal feeding centers and for an enquiry by the Central Health Board were passed. The Guardian, January 21 1943.

59 Lt. Col. Gluckman, chairman of the Health Commission, complimented the FCWU on the careful preparation of its case. The Guardian, April 15 1943.

that which is of interest to the workers as a whole. That is right - the trade union must take an active interest in all that affects the people.<sup>60</sup>

What is evident from records and interviews is a concern for extra-factory economic and political issues, affecting FCWU membership and the oppressed people more generally. Nor were these isolated incidents, for the union was to campaign for improvements in health, housing, child care and educational facilities without respite over the years. 'Social Welfare Unionism' is the term I use to describe this aspect of the union's conduct to distinguish it from political agitation on issues of state power, and this concept is elaborated upon in chapter six. From the union's inception its left-wing leadership defined its parameters to include social and political issues beyond the struggle over the wage relations. The branches responded with a torrent of local demands for improvements in lives of working class communities.

Attention to housing and health along with a host of other social matters featured in the speeches leaders made when they visited the branches. Although Ray Alexander was a leading member of the CP her discourse concentrated on trade union affairs and social issues, broader political issues always being related to the former. Branches were urged to demand the provision of facilities for workers and to claim the rights that ignorance and subservience had deprived them of.

Sy het vir ons gesê wat ons die reg het om vir te vra. Wat ons mag vra en wat dit moontlik is dat ons kan doen. Ons kan beter skole kry vir ons kinders. Ons kan oordentlike kerke kry, ens.

Sy het vir ons gesê, "Kyk, dit is dinge wat julle kan vra, julle mag dit vra en hulle moet dit vir julle gee want julle werk vir die ekonomie van hierdie dorp"....Jy sien nêrens in 'n fabriek 'n blanke vrou of 'n blanke dogter nie. Nêrens nie, wat tussen daai klomp visse nag en dag sal loop werk nie. Dis maar net ons kleurling en swart vrouens en ons kleurling en swart dogters, en ons het die reg om te vra wat ons wil hê.<sup>61</sup>

Where workers were successful in their attempts to win improvements from local authorities or the bosses they treated these victories as a recognition of their power. Events at Lamberts Bay provide an example:

En ons het aansoek gedoen vir 'n nuwe danssaal en toe die danssaal halfpad gebou is, toe gaan ons, die 'Food and Canning leaders', en rapporteer ons aan onse werkers en toe sê hulle, hulle wil nie daai saal hê nie, hy is

<sup>60</sup> FCWU Annual Conference Minutes, 1945.

Also quoted in The Guardian, January 25 1945.

<sup>61</sup> Interview Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay 2.08.86

te klein. Toe moes hulle vir hom weer afbreek. Ons kan maar die saal so gevat het, maar ons wil net vir die baas wys, hy't al die jare gemaak soos hy wil, nou wil ons ook 'n slag maak soos ons wil. Ons het nou die mag om hom ook 'n slag te hiet en gebied. Dit was ons se 'trick' gewees.<sup>62</sup>

### War Time Strikes

Canning workers wages were regulated by agreements in force for a set period. When the award made in 1942 expired efforts were made by the food unions in the various centers to bring the employers to a national conference as before. This failed as only seven employers attended.<sup>63</sup> Instead a wage determination was published that cut wages and down-graded workers. Alexander specifically warned employers not to introduce the cuts ("if they did they would be playing with fire" she told The Guardian),<sup>64</sup> since rising costs and stationary wages were causing discontent that would certainly erupt if wages were cut. Most canners heeded the warning, but Rhodes Fruit Farm (RFF) in Groot Drakenstein did not and proceeded in January 1944 to drop juveniles' wages to £1 from £1 4s.6d. and others from £2 10s. to £2 5s. per week. Forty workers in one department clocked in and promptly sat down and refused to work, while the rest of the factory declared its readiness to join in. Management agreed to restore the cuts after intervention from the union and the Department of Labour. The Food Canners Council advised its members not to implement the cuts. Members from the Groot Drakenstein branch accused Wage Board personnel of being wage cutting "slave drivers",<sup>65</sup> asking who could possibly live on £1 a week. At the annual conference held that month the strike was hailed as an example and a victory for all, The Guardian reported: "most of the delegates seemed to think that lying passive and accepting low wages was quite useless. Many expressed the view that direct action was the only thing possible."<sup>66</sup>

Discontent elsewhere in the preserved food industry surfaced in three short strikes early in 1944 in Wellington and Stellenbosch over

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62 Ibid.

63 In addition to FCWU representatives, B. du Toit, G. Routh and J. Andrews attended from Johannesburg and P. Podbrey from Durban. FCWU Central Committee minutes, 4.04.43. (Wits Collection AD 1175 file AI 5.)

64 The Guardian, January 13 1943.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

lay-offs of old hands and victimisation of union officials. Workers won two of these.<sup>67</sup> More important was the strike in the dried fruit industry in the following year. Negotiations on a conciliation board ground to a halt as members told their representatives not to accept the employer's offer of a 25% increase in COLA, but press for improvements in basic wages to compensate for the leaps in the cost of living.

Dried fruit workers were among the lowest paid in the union, general workers in the country areas (Male) earning £1 13s. and labourers (Male) £1 6s. 5d. per week. In negotiations on a conciliation board the employers offered 7,5% increases for general workers and 10% for labourers and no increases for women against the union's demands for men and women of 15% for labourers and general workers.<sup>68</sup> No agreement was reached, nor did the Minister intervene to settle the dispute, thus permitting a legal strike. Strike ballots were held in branches with dried fruit members and they were urged to consider if they could strike without pay since the union had no resources for a 'strike fund'.<sup>69</sup> Available material does not indicate how this vote went. On the 14 of May eight hundred dried fruit workers struck at Worcester and Robertson. On the next day they were joined by a further two to three hundred dried fruit workers from Wellington. Employers aggressively threatened to lock out and dismiss workers. The workers were militant, adopting a hard-line position, declaring they were not prepared to continue under existing conditions. There would be "no compromise"<sup>70</sup> said Mr. J. April, Chairperson of the Worcester Branch. In public appeals through The Guardian the FCWU attempted to raise funds for strike pay and encourage support from the labour movement.

It is alleged that some of the employers hope to starve the workers into submission. They argue we are a poor union. We are a union of poorly paid workers, who cannot afford high subscriptions and therefore haven't a large reserve to fall back on., but we have been in existence for four years, and are affiliated to both the Cape Federation of Labour Unions and the SATLC. We are organised all over the Cape Province and will stand firm.<sup>71</sup>

67 The Guardian, January 27 1944.

68 The Guardian, May 31 1945.

69 FCWU Circular letter No.12/45. 19.4.45.

70 The Guardian, May 24 1945.

71 Ibid.

Although support was pledged by the CFLU and TLC, only 25 Guineas were forthcoming, so the FCWU had to carry the strike on its own resources. Urgent appeals were made in circular letters and pamphlets bearing the slogans 'EENDRAG MAAK KRAG! TWEEDRAG BREEK KRAG!' <sup>72</sup> urging members to prevent the bosses breaking the strike by starving the strikers into submission. Members were urged to take collections from friends, in factories and on the streets and to inform people about the struggle of the dried fruit workers.

The bosses, who were in a strong position, gave notice to all strikers five days after the strike began and were able to keep their factories working by using white workers and extra hired help. It was not mid season and they were accordingly better able to cope with disruption. In trying to reach a settlement the union proposed re-employment on conditions extant prior to the strike and wages to be regulated by the Wage Board. After consultation, the branches agreed to this proposal but it was rejected by the bosses who were determined not to have an agreement with the union.

These Dried Fruit bosses were similar in outlook to farmers and shared the highly reactionary, dictatorial and racist views of the most backward amongst them. Standard Fruit Packers was the exception. A deputation told the manager that Mr. Brink of Montagu and other bosses had made a remark to the effect "that they are not going to sit down and discuss things with Joodse, Hotnots and Kaffirs, ...We went to him and said: Are you prepared to co-operate and support this Nazi outlook?" <sup>73</sup> This moral attack was successful, producing an acceptable settlement with the firm. Four hundred workers were still on strike early in June, their position becoming increasingly desperate as the remaining bosses gave every indication that they were determined to crush the union and teach their workers never to strike. A week later all but one of the firms signed an agreement with the union on terms that accepted wages would be set by a forthcoming Wage Board. Sixty strikers at South African Dried Fruit in Wellington were not taken back and continued to strike into June, until their strike was called off. Thirty eight of these strikers were later charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act. Action from the TLC and FCWU succeeded in having these charges dropped. <sup>74</sup>

72 FCWU Circular letter No.14/45.

73 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

74 FCWU Circular letter No. 29/45. 27.09.45.

Critics from the Unity Movement, however, accused the leadership of selling out, a charge they were forced to withdraw when threatened with legal action.<sup>75</sup> Examining the strike at a branch delegates meeting the agreement was regarded "not as a total defeat nor a victory by any means, it is just a compromise."<sup>76</sup> Three key factors were identified: it was out of season which enabled the employers to ignore it; bosses got white labour to work the factories; farmers offered labour from their farms to break the union as they were not busy themselves. The key problem was in the timing of the strike, and here the militancy of the workers over-stepped tactical good sense and violated a fundamental principal of workers' organisation in a seasonal industry. Ray Alexander in retrospect commented:

The strike was unfortunately called out by a comrade not in a strategic time. Food workers must strike at a time when they work, when their labour is essential and when the season is off we should not strike, we must strike when the fruit season is on.<sup>77</sup>

Arbitration settled the dispute in the preserved food industry (covering canning and dried fruit), yet the rates recommended by the arbitrator were below the 10% increases offered by the employers. Labourers, comprising 70% of the workforce, had minimum wages of £1 to £1 17s. per week set for two years. This was less than the £1 10s. to £2. for labourers in fish canning. The union denounced the award in a press statement to The Guardian as a "deliberate concession to the shortsighted and profiteering section of the employers, and an attempt to conciliate the most backward group of industrialists."<sup>78</sup> Arbitration, as the union had feared, proved to be an unfavorable way to settle the dispute.

At the end of the war tentative moves were made to form a single food union and unite the small unions organising in the food industry in several cities. Support was given to the idea from the Johannesburg

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75 Unity Movement spokespersons accused FCWU leadership of betraying the workers. Threatened with legal action they withdrew the accusation and published apologies in all Cape newspapers. Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

76 FCWU Circular letter No. 17/45.

77 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

78 The Guardian, July 26 1945. The dispute was a national one and negotiations included unions from the other centers. Inability to reach settlement and opting for arbitration are possible signs of the national weakness of food unions. The poor final award reflects government policy to cut wage increases won during the war.

union. Inter-union discussions in Cape Town produced a statement from the 'Provisional Committee for the Establishment of One Food Union' stating that unions were small and would be strengthened by amalgamation. It was signed by the C.T. branch of the Milling Workers Union, Meat Trade Employees Union, Wine and Brandy Workers Union and FCWU.<sup>79</sup> This was sent to the branches for discussion but did not get beyond the first round of talks, and did not surface again, possibly due to the demise of those unions and ideological shifts towards anti-communism that accelerated after the war.

### Fruits of Organisation

A large part of the union's initial impact upon the lives of its members was to strengthen their ability to improve working conditions and ensure that members got what they were entitled to. The FCWU campaigned for the extension of the government Cost of Living Allowances (COLA) and unemployment-insurance benefits to workers in the country side. Partially as a result of its efforts the scope of these benefits were extended. Its vigilance over the administration of these rights ensured that workers gained benefits which ignorance and employer disregard had deprived them of in the past. For example, branches were informed how to administer confinement allowance applications and to ensure that all details were supplied correctly, with the result that women were able to receive maternity benefits for the first time.<sup>80</sup>

The fish canning workers' situation well illustrates the impact that the union had. Prior to union organisation conditions were extremely bad. No protective clothing was provided and workers became wet as soon as work commenced and remained wet for as long as the shift lasted. In extreme cases, with heavy loads to process, unbroken days of work were entailed. Punctured by fish spines and infected by toxins from crawfish carapaces, workers' hands became swollen and painful. Management was forced to provide protective clothing, gloves, boots, rest-breaks and paid annual leave only after organisation and protracted struggle.<sup>81</sup>

79 FCWU Circular letter No. 29/45. 25.9.45.

80 Considerable discrepancy existed in educating workers about their rights by means of branch visits and correspondence and what happened in practice. Liz Phike had been active in the union for several years before learning of her eligibility for confinement allowances.

81 Interview Mrs M. Wynand, Saldanha Bay, 2.08.86.

Afrikaner Nationalism and the Wine and Brandy Campaign

After the war when uncertainties about the future of the industry abounded, the FCWU faced a threat to its non-racial organisation from Afrikaner Nationalist agitation among its base. This coincided with an attempt on the part of the FCWU to organise workers in the wine and brandy manufacturing trade. A union in that industry, the Cape Wine and Brandy Workers Union had been founded in 1941 and formed branches at Paarl, Stellenbosch and Robertson.<sup>82</sup> To extend its base and confront the nationalist attacks, the union applied to amend its constitution to cover workers in grape juice, moskonfyt, wine and brandy manufacturing.<sup>83</sup> It is likely that consultation took place with the Wine and Brandy Workers Union, for they were welcomed to the 1945 conference and merged with the union as there are no further references to a separated union.

Non-racial unity had been a central tenet of the union's policy since its inception, and to the ranks of African and coloured workers had been recruited small numbers of white workers. While the composition of the workforce and the supervisory role that most white labour had within it, effectively excluded the majority of white workers from the union, it had succeeded in giving substance to its policies and numbered amongst its members a few white workers. N.J.Botes, vice-president since 1942, had attempted to recruit other white workers into the union but with limited success. These workers became the target of an attack upon the union led by a Mr. van Staaden, formerly a National Party organiser. Van Staaden, financed by the Nationalist Party and supported by the Dutch Reformed Church, (which a delegate from Paarl told the 1946 Annual Conference "are not

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82 The union had difficulty in establishing itself as a split at the 1943 conference indicates. The Guardian, March 11 1943.

83 The decision to amend the constitution, taken by the CEC in November 1945 was only passed in June 1946, indicating delays in the process. The Guardian, December 6 1945 and FCWU Circular letter No.12/45 6.46. Only after the scope of registration was changed, which had not yet happened by the end of 1948, would the union have the right to use the Industrial Conciliation Act for these workers. Laxness and reluctance to pay 'subs' on the part of wine and brandy workers prompted the secretary to write that there would be no improvements without hard work. "A union is not a train - when you buy a ticket only when you want to ride in it. The union is an organisation of the workers that you build up not in a day, not in one month and not for one year, but for the years to come." FCWU Circular letter No. 11/46. 29.05.46.

any more centers for the worship of God, but have become nests for activity against the trade union movement"<sup>84</sup>) proceeded to start up white workers unions. By whipping up racial hostility on a tour through the canning districts van Staaden quickly set up the 'Inmaakfabriekwerkersvereniging' in Ashton, 'Droëvrugte Unie' in Worcester, 'Christelike Federasie' in Robertson 'Blanke Werkers Federasie' in Paarl and the 'Wynwerkers Unie'. The FCWU leadership responded angrily to what they viewed as a fascist threat led by a nefarious man who:

Is running around the country slandering our union and trying to take away those European workers that have stood with us all these years. The fight is definitely on and we must not spare time and money to defeat the forces that are working to divide the working class.<sup>85</sup>

When the Industrial Registrar invited objections to the application for registration of 'Die Wynwerkersunie' and 'Inmaakfabriekwerkersvereniging' the union protested vehemently.

To improve the lives of wine and brandy workers the FCWU appealed to the Minister of Labour to convene a Wage Board. This was granted without delay for the wholesale wine and spirit trade, but a small portion of the industry. As the Wage Board only covered some of the industry's workers, the union cautioned its members that they would have to fight to extend it and overcome the obstacles that farming interests would put in their way.<sup>86</sup> Evidence was gathered through a questionnaire amongst workers to support the union's argument for "civilized standards of life".<sup>87</sup> When the Board made its recommendations it reduced wages below the cuts suggested by employers, a 25% reduction in labourers wages against employers suggestion of 10% for Paarl and Stellenbosch and 37.5% when employers recommended 20% for country areas. The FCWU protested strongly that the Board had singled out 'Non-European' workers and cut their wages where as the board should not have been influenced by the workers' race.<sup>88</sup> The Wage Boards recommendations seem to reflect political interests in the Western Cape wine industry. For the union's part interference from the

84 The Guardian, January 24 1946.

85 FCWU Circular letter No. 28/45 3.12.45.

86 FCWU Circular letter No. 15/46. 4.07.46.

87 This was the union's argument at the Wage Board's public hearing. Wages for adults varied from £1 3s. to £2 10s.

The Guardian, July 11 1946.

88 The Guardian, February 27 1947.

National Party and partiality from the Wage Board were seen as a combined attack.

Despite the objections lodged by the union to the registration of Afrikaner Nationalist unions in the food industry, the Industrial Registrar registered the 'Wynwerkersunie' and 'Inmaakfabriekwerkersvereniging'. This was seen as a direct threat to the union's ability to claim representivity of food workers and was a move calculated to assist employers. Members were urged to fulfill their duty and recruit fellow workers to preserve the union. The divisive and racist politics of the 'Blankewerkers Federasie', 'Ossewa Brandwag' and Nationalist Party was explained to membership through circular letters. Winery workers were urged in particular to recruit fellow workers to ensure that neither the bosses nor the Wage Board could declare the union unrepresentative.<sup>89</sup>

Appealing to the Minister of Labour simply drew confirmation of the Registrar's decision, and the union decided to take the matter to the Supreme Court where it was heard in August 1948. In the first case of the 'Wynwerkersunie', FCWU contended that it was sufficiently representative, and the dismissal by the Industrial Registrar of its earlier objections on the grounds it had African members was wrongful.<sup>90</sup> Difficulties arising from a division of legal opinion on pertinent points of law made an outright victory seem unlikely and as losing the case would have involved costs of a full bench the union's lawyers favored caution. Negotiations for an out-of-court settlement commenced prior to the hearing but only when the case was actually being heard were acceptable terms arrived at. The Minister consented to disregard the fact that the FCWU's membership included African workers, and that its registration certificate had not covered the wine and brandy industry at the time of the registration of the 'Wynwerkersunie' and agreed to pay costs. The Minister also agreed to reconsider the whole matter of the registration of the 'Wynwerkersunie'.<sup>91</sup>

In the second case of the 'Inmaakfabriekwerkersvereniging' at issue was the competence of the Registrar to register a union for one

89 FCWU Circular letter to Wine and Brandy Workers. 26.11.46.

90 An earlier investigation by Labour Department officials had shown the union to be unrepresentative in the industry and prompted a head-office call on the branches to reorganise workers. FCWU Circular letter No. 11/47 20.06.47.

91 Consent Paper FCWU versus The Minister of Labour and Die Wynwerkersunie in the Supreme Court of S.A. Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division. August 3 1948.

race group only in a particular district. An unfavorable decision had grave implications the union noted in a letter to the TLC appealing for support:

If this principle is allowed it will open the door to the Registrar to register unions based on religious and national groupings. If allowed it will lead to the smashing up of the trade union movement.<sup>92</sup>

The appeals had been set to run concurrently but in the two years it took before coming to court circumstances changed. Die Inmaak Fabriekwerkersvereniging had practically ceased to function and became moribund. It had only been established for ideological and political purposes to oppose the FCWU and never functioned as a trade union. To achieve settlement in the first case, legal opinion recommended withdrawing the union's appeal on this matter although it involved the FCWU in paying costs. This advice was accepted.<sup>93</sup> Legal costs totaling £428 18s. 9d. resulted from the two cases, for which the TLC donated £108.

Action to improve the conditions of wine and brandy workers had been suspended until legal action was concluded, whereupon the union began to set in motion the steps to secure an agreement for these workers. First it was necessary to apply for an extension of its scope of registration and simultaneously reorganise these workers. The CEC planned a comprehensive campaign involving branches and assistance from the TLC local committee.<sup>94</sup> Despite considerable effort and urging from the leadership the organisation of these workers did not succeed. The union failed to gain a support base and was eventually compelled to call off the campaign and declare that wine and brandy workers would have to decide for themselves if they wished to belong to the union.<sup>95</sup> In the end the union was left with heavy legal costs to pay for a campaign that failed to organise the wine and brandy workers.

At stake had been crucial issues for the trade union movement and the activities of Afrikaner Nationalist agents was a direct affront to the principles of non-racial unionism so important to the FCWU. What it

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92 Letter from R.Alexander to TLC. n.d. Quoted in Soudien, D.Y. op. cit.

93 Memorandum prepared by lawyers Frank & Bernardt on FCWU vs. Minister of Labour.

94 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 15.08.48.

95 A lack of response led the Paarl branch to stop efforts to organise the workers, and this position was stated for the union as a whole in the Annual Report of the Secretary, 1949. FCWU Central Committee minutes, 21.11.48.

did reveal were the difficulties the union faced in extending beyond its base in canning, and how time-consuming the class biased industrial relations machinery was. The wine and brandy campaign was a costly failure but the union had shown its determination to fight back against racist and reactionary attacks upon it.

#### Formation of the African Food and Canning Workers Union

At the same time the union was dealing with attacks from Afrikaner Nationalists in the wine and brandy campaign, it faced a crisis of its own over its non-racial composition. In the massive expansion in size of the labour force during the war, the number of African workers had also risen from a fifth to a third of the total by 1946/47. Pressure from the state against the inclusion of these workers in the union mounted and things came to a head in 1947.

Within the factories workers were not separated significantly on racial lines. African men tended to do the heavy labouring tasks assigned to men and African women performed the same preparation and canning tasks as coloured women. Workers wages were the same and outside the factory they lived in the same areas, a situation that was to alter later when African workers were moved into locations and coloured workers were moved under the Group Areas Act. Another unifying factor was that many of the African workers resided permanently in the Western Cape and thus were not oscillating between 'Bantustans' and factories on short employment contracts. Workers' recollection of this period is that employers did not make use of racial divisions until later.<sup>96</sup> The division of labour outlined above does show that certain patterns were evident from the outset but these were not rigidly racially defined.

When first registered the union defined membership as covering employees in the food industry, and this definition was retained when it extended its constitution to incorporate more sections of the food industry. In order to obtain conciliation boards the union was required to open its books to inspection by the Department of Labour, outside interference which progressed from bureaucratic meddling during the war to the threat of deregistration unless African members were removed from the union's books in the post war era. Threats of deregistration became an ultimatum after the Labour Department visited Berg River

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<sup>96</sup> Interview John Pendlani and W. Alla, Paarl, 11.02.83.

Mouth in 1946 to investigate complaints laid by the union and found that branch membership lists contained African, coloured and white workers chaired by Oscar Mpetha. Simultaneously a new bill was introduced which denied African workers the right to strike and bargain collectively, and which the secretary described as a foretaste "of the introduction of fascism on our country."<sup>97</sup> These matters came up for discussion in a Central Committee meeting where the minutes recorded.

The secretary submitted that the present position is very unsatisfactory and suggested that all Africans should in each area meet and elect their own committee and that a conference of delegates from these various areas be held where they could elect a committee and discuss other matters including a constitution.<sup>98</sup>

This matter had been discussed with Oscar Mpetha who agreed with the suggestion. Lengthy discussion ensued where some delegates felt that to form a separate union for African workers might mean acceptance of the principle of separation. Two possible choices were before the union, Alexander suggested.

In view of the persistent interference by the Labour Department with trade unions - constantly demanding to examine the books - there is one way, for the African workers to be organised in close co-operation with our union, and a second way is to leave the Africans out altogether and not include them as members of a union.<sup>99</sup>

Noting that some unions had expelled African members to get Industrial Councils and that this assisted neither African workers nor the trade union movement, Alexander concluded.

The best way of fighting against dividing the ranks of the workers, against the principle of separation, is to organise the workers and to co-operate with Africans and all other workers in the fight for a better life.<sup>100</sup>

After very lengthy discussion the meeting resolved to convene meetings of African members in the branches and elect representatives to a conference where a Central Executive Committee could be elected and a comprehensive plan of organisation be decided upon.

Branches were urged to hold emergency meetings with African workers to discuss the impending legislation, the racial provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act and elect delegates to the conference. By June the decision to form the African Food and Canning Workers Union

97 FCWJ Circular letter No.7/47, 12.05.47.

98 FCWJ Central Committee minutes, 18.05.47.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

had been made and branches were asked to assist in the formation of its branches.<sup>101</sup> The split involved starting a parallel union for African men to start with since African women, who did not carry passes, were not legally prevented from being members of registered unions. In 1956, with the extension of passes to African women, their legal status changed and their membership was transferred to the AFCWU. This is how the split was recalled by Ray Alexander.

When we organised the union we were all together in one union, white, coloured and African, but in 1947 we were informed by the Department of Labour, either to deregister the union or that we should have two different unions. Thereafter discussing between March and November by the union, by the branches, by the meetings and by the branch delegates conferences it was agreed to start the African Food and Canning Workers Union, but that we would be acting as one union and we have always acted as one union. It was only really on paper...<sup>102</sup>

In practice the AFCWU and FCWU had Alexander as general secretary until it was felt the AFCWU required its own organiser. In 1951 Oscar Mpetha became the first AFCWU general secretary. Meetings were held together, with minutes prepared to reflect the formal separation, recording AFCWU members as guests at the FCWU meeting and vice versa. Resolutions were passed with different movers and seconders recorded in the minutes. AFCWU minutes were not kept as fully as FCWU records.<sup>103</sup>

How the union was affected by this formal separation is crucial for a comprehension of the union's history, for while the split did compromise the union's non-racial principles, it did not result in a necessary racialisation of its activities. Continuing to refer to both unions as 'the union', for the sake of brevity, is also largely accurate. At a plant level the union had its non-racial committees which engaged in negotiations with management. Over time it became harder to maintain unity due to managements' action to racially divided workers. African workers were excluded from representing the union at conciliation boards but did attend these meetings as observers into the 1950s and always had agreements extended to cover them. To circumvent

101 FCWU Circular letter No.10/47, 16.06.47.

102 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

103 Liz Abrahams recounts how AFCWU minutes were maintained so as to provide evidence of the separation should the union be investigated by the Department of Labour to see if it were contravening the terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl 10.06.86.

the exclusion of AFCWU members from conciliation boards for many years the union employed a tactic whereby a Mr. Jacobs, a light skinned member of the AFCWU, was included on the negotiating team.

It would be wrong to gloss over the problems associated with the separation and the internal effects upon both unions. One recurrent topic centred upon financial responsibility and contributing to the union's administrative costs. Complaints of non-payment of the AFCWU's share of administrative costs surfaced regularly.<sup>104</sup>

The separation of the FCWU was distinct from the parallel unionism practiced by the TLC during the 1930s. It resulted from a formal separation within a union with very little internal differentiation with respect to racial and skills divisions and was not prompted by the need to organise black workers into a parallel branch to prevent undercutting.<sup>105</sup> In view of the speed with which the AFCWU was established, and not deriding the level of discussion that arrived at that eventual decision, the main issue seems to have been the threat deregistration posed to the unions negotiating methods. Using the Industrial Conciliation Act, as Alexander's comments show, was felt to be too valuable to forgo.

It wasn't our choice to separate, we were forced by circumstances, by the legal discrimination and the discriminatory laws of our country to have us separated. But the workers, the Food and Canning and the African Food and Canning, the branches and the factory workers, wanted we should be able to negotiate agreements and we did not have industrial council agreements like other unions.<sup>106</sup>

### Industrial Relations Machinery

As the union's negotiating strategy was in part based on use of industrial laws a closer examination of them is warranted. The union registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act in order to use the machinery of the Act to achieve legally binding agreements on wages and conditions with the employers. Registration entailed limitations on the right to strike and accepting a definition of employee which excluded African men, the latter aspect, as we have seen, was disregarded in the union's first constitution in terms of certain specified food

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<sup>104</sup> This started soon after the separation and continued into the future. FCWU Central Committee minutes, 15.08.48.

<sup>105</sup> See Lewis, J. op.cit. pp.65-67.

<sup>106</sup> Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

operations and in specific areas. The union was therefore required to amend its constitution as well as extend its scope of registration on each occasion it wished to make use of the industrial relations machinery in the Act for the organisation of new workers.

Employers in the canning and dried fruit packing industries had formed 'employers associations' prior to the formation of the union and this facilitated the union's use of the machinery. Food packing was an exception and dealings with these firms, in addition to being on a smaller scale, did not have the regularity of a well used negotiating procedure.

Legally binding wage agreements could take three forms.<sup>107</sup> A conciliation board could be appointed by the Minister to settle disputes, negotiate wages and conditions between the union and employers. It would be composed of employer and employee representatives appointed to resolve a particular dispute, the agreement reached between them would then be passed on to the Minister of Labour to be made legally binding and gazetted. The Minister of Labour was empowered to apply provisions of an agreement between some employers and employees on all employers and employees in a particular area. Labour Department inspectors were responsible for seeing that the terms of these agreements were observed. Conciliation boards were the union's preferred method of reaching agreements, as they involved industry wide negotiations with organised employers, lessened the influence of Labour Department officials and gave legal backing to the resultant agreement.

Industrial councils could be established as permanent bodies with representatives from trade unions and employers associations. On several occasions the union approached the fruit and fish canners associations with proposals to establish an industrial council, but these requests were turned down.

Should either of these two bodies fail to reach an agreement the Minister was empowered to appoint an arbitrator whose recommendations could be made legally binding. In the event of a failure to reach agreement on a conciliation board or industrial council and arbitration attempts were exhausted, strikes or lockouts were permitted after a 'cooling off' period.

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<sup>107</sup> See Bloch, J. 'Legislative Framework of Collective Bargaining in South Africa.' LL.M. University of London 1977. Chapter 3.

The other body the union used extensively was the Wage Board. Set up under the Wage Act this body held investigations in industries where insufficient organisation prevented the use of conciliation board or industrial councils. Appointed by the Minister to investigate particular industries the Wage Board took evidence from employees and employers and was intended to set 'civilized' wages taking into account the economic position of the industry. These recommendations could then be gazetted by the Minister as a Wage Determination. Wage Boards acted as instruments of state policy and set wages during the 1930s to protect white living standards as part of the 'civilized' labour policy. Later the Wage Board acted to cut wage levels, as the union was to find out. Since African workers were not prevented from giving evidence and 'using' the Wage Board, progressive trade unionists made extensive use of these bodies. In the union's case a Wage Board was sought where it was unable to gain a conciliation board due to low levels of organisation. Private or 'Gentlemen's Agreements' were entered into on occasions when the union was unable to secure a conciliation board agreement, but these were not favoured as they did not have legal backing.

#### FCWU Negotiating Strategy

A negotiating routine became established from the union's inception and became a well entrenched pattern for wage negotiations. First, steps would be taken to "make the branches strong"<sup>108</sup> which involved establishing or reviving branches through visits and urging members to pay subscriptions to ensure the union had sufficient members in good standing to be representative. Demands were formulated through factory, or general members meetings, or questionnaires and these would be submitted to the employer. Refusal entitled the union to declare a dispute and appeal to the Minister of Labour to establish a conciliation board to reach a settlement. After inspection by the Department of Labour to confirm the union's claim to representivity, a conciliation board would be appointed and the union's delegates elected, consisting of head office officials and branch representatives.

During negotiations workers would agitate for improvements and engage in collective action to increase their bargaining power. At such

<sup>108</sup> Interview John Mentoor, Paarl, 16.03.83.

a time, strikes of the demonstration stoppage kind occurred over specific demands and grievances at the factory, but deliberately were timed to put pressure on the bosses during negotiations.<sup>109</sup>

Negotiations generally ran over several meetings between which the union had the opportunity to consult members through general members meetings in the branches where mandates could be given to negotiators. In most cases the Central Executive Committee or Management Committee decided upon the final course of action.

As an industrial union the FCWU attempted to organise all canning workers, a strategic necessity where canners, although competing stiffly among themselves, were prepared to cooperate when faced by collective worker action. Agreements the union reached via conciliation boards were frequently extended to other areas which assisted the union's organising tasks.

The implications of following this negotiating strategy were to tie the union to the state's industrial relations machinery, affording the union protection and assistance in many instances, but also binding the union into an approach that offered no solution to problems emanating from the way the Department of Labour administered the system. Delays and bureaucratic obstructionism would show up weaknesses in this approach in the future. Legal agreements arrived at by the union required action by the branches to ensure that the terms were observed, obviating direct confrontation with the bosses over the full extent of issues covered by agreements. Members duties were outlined in these terms:

It is our sole responsibility to see that the employers carry out the terms of the agreements and determinations as well as conform to the Factories Act, Workmen's Compensation Act and other industrial legislation. The Department of Labour, while legally responsible for checking, only does so when requested to.<sup>110</sup>

Since branches were only required to police the agreement and use the Department of Labour to force employers to observe it, weaker branches were carried by the stronger branches who pushed wages higher than the weaker branches could have done on their own resources. The negative side of this strategy was that the imperatives of tighter

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109 Mentoor recalls organising such a strike expressly to pressurise the bosses during a conciliation board. Ibid.

110 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1948.

organisation and success in direct negotiation with the employers was never posed to the weaker branches.

### Problems on the Wage Front

So important had the war been to the growth of the canning industry that, when it was over doubts were expressed about the industry's future. Such thinking was not confined to the canning industry, for as early as 1943 the Board of Trade and Industry predicted problems for local production when the war ended.<sup>111</sup> Accordingly the government took steps to provide protection for manufacturing industry but these fears were not confirmed as international trade was not resumed in the volume anticipated.<sup>112</sup> However, an investigation by the Board of Trade and Industries in 1947 noted that while overhead costs had increased enormously, their importance in the overall cost structure had declined due to war-time expansion. Selling to the British Ministry of Food relieved the industry of normal marketing and selling expenses which in the post-war period meant any reduction in the volume of sales without a corresponding reduction in total overhead expenditure would threaten profitability. The Board concluded that the efficiency of producers must be increased and recommended the wider introduction of incentive wage payments.

Wage and incentive systems, though not general in the industry, have been applied with considerable measures of success in several factories, where the basic rate and output bonus have been so fixed as to allow employees, with reasonable effort, to earn the determination minimum.<sup>113</sup>

This thinking was echoed by the employers when they met the union in negotiations in August 1947, stating they would not accept the union's proposals for they would increase costs to the industry, which was experiencing a slight recession. The employers attitude was 'take it or leave it' and when the union asked for a postponement to get a mandate from its members the employers pressed for arbitration. The

111 Board of Trade and Industries Report No.279 on Customs Tariff Amendments, 1943. p.2.

112 Barker, H.A.F. The Economics of the Clothing Industry of South Africa 1907-1957. Johannesburg: Pallas, 1962. pp.47-48.

113 The Board implied that incentive payment was not widespread, yet piece-rates were paid in all factories. Basic and bonus rates were not. Board of Trade and Industries Report No.296 'Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry' 1947. para. 74.

union declared it had no confidence in arbitration from the Department of Minister of Labour, suggesting an independent arbitrator. Neither side accepted the other's proposal and the conciliation board was adjourned.<sup>114</sup>

Agreement was later reached on increases ranging between 4s. to 9s. on previous rates. The agreement was extended to cover African workers and was set to run for two years. New rates were already being paid when the Minister objected to the terms of the agreement and parties to the conciliation board were informed by the Secretary for Labour that, while the increases appeared justifiable in view of price rises, the Department opposed publishing the agreement on the grounds that:

the increases, while they appear to be justified, are on basic wages of the employees. It would be appreciated therefore, if the Board would consider making provision for increased remuneration by way of increased cost of living allowances instead of increasing basic wages.<sup>115</sup>

In response the union organised a deputation to see the Minister of Labour and the Prime Minister accompanied by the NEC of the TLC. At stake was the principle of non-interference in agreements reached between capital and labour provided for in the Industrial Conciliation Act. Such wage-cutting contradicting government policy on health and social and economic planning, and was seen as a threat to the union and the whole trade union movement the union claimed. The deputation received the Minister's assurance that he would sign the agreement. Forceful argument by Alexander at a conciliation board meeting convened to consider the Minister's recommendations succeeded in unanimously affirming the agreement arrived at previously.<sup>116</sup> Poor organisation at Mossel Bay and Wolseley excluded these areas from the agreement but it was extended to cover them by a gentlemen's agreement.<sup>117</sup>

Weak organisation among dried fruit workers in the aftermath of the 1944 strike when the union applied for a conciliation board during 1948 led to it being refused on grounds of being unrepresentative. "This is very serious", the secretary wrote, "we cannot expect to be granted a

114 FCWU Circular letter No.16/47, 15.08.47.

115 Letter from the Secretary of Labour to conciliation board. FCWU Circular letter No.1/48, 31.01.48.

116 FCWU Circular letter No.2/48, 5.2.48.

117 "It is very important to have legal agreements and not just gentlemen's agreements" FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1948.

conciliation board if we are not fully organised to cover workers on whose behalf a dispute is declared."<sup>118</sup>

Requests were submitted to fish-canners for improvements at the start of 1948 but these fell foul of the Department of Labour inspection as certain operations were not covered by the union's constitution. Steps to alter the constitution were initiated and branches asked to organise fishmeal workers. The suggestion of an informal industrial council for Cape Town was rejected by the employers.<sup>119</sup>

There was little comfort for sections of the food industry covered by Wage Determinations as the Wage Board followed a deliberate policy of cutting wages in the late 1940s.

The Wage Board seems to have adopted a policy of lowering the wage of labourers. At a time when the cost of living is rising steadily, there have been a number of instances lately where the Wage Board, far from helping the lowest paid sections of the community, has made recommendations which are lower than the prevailing scale of wages.<sup>120</sup>

Perceptions of this kind lay behind the FCWU refusal to support a suggestion from the FC&AWU in Johannesburg for a wage board for the whole food processing industry. The FCWU advised the FC&AWU apply for a local Wage Board if it was unable to have a conciliation board appointed.<sup>121</sup>

In the late 1940s the Department of Labour became increasingly less co-operative and delays in responding to the union's request for changes in its constitution lengthened. As the FCWU relied on conciliation board in the main to reach agreements, legal machinery which had to be set in motion which involved considerable correspondence with the Labour Department to fulfill the necessary requirements. This was particularly so in the food packing and fishing sections of the industry. Interviews with the inspectors from the Labour Department and delegations from the union and TLC to the Minister of Labour forced an official acknowledgment of slowness on the part of the department, but only improved the situation temporarily.<sup>122</sup>

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118 Ibid.

119 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 12.09.48.

120 The Guardian, December 9 1948.

121 FCWU Central Executive Committee, 18.02.51.

122 Interviews were held in April and October 1949. FCWU Central Committee minutes, 10.04.49. & 9.10.49.

Wage performance in sections other than fruit canning was poor in the early 1950s. Applications for conciliation boards in several sections failed, pressure to increase dried fruit wages succeeded but workers were left little better off for the bosses reduced wages by an amount equal to the increased COLA laid down by the government.<sup>123</sup> Applications for Conciliation Boards in the fish industry were refused on grounds of non-representivity indicating problems the branches had with intermittent organisation.

### Turnabout

The one bright spot on the wage front was the fruit and vegetable canning industry where the union made good progress in a conciliation board agreement during 1950.<sup>124</sup> Employers started by offering a 10% increase on COLA, but the union held out for real increases and succeeded in increasing basic wages by amounts ranging from 2s. 6d. to 4s. 3d. per week therefore increasing COLA as well. A number of other concessions were made, organising facilities were granted to FCWU and a Medical Benefit Fund (MBF) established for the industry.<sup>125</sup> The MBF, constituted jointly by the union and the employers, although independent from the union was run by union officials. The MBF received contributions from workers and their employers and after a six month period to accumulate funds started to pay out sick pay. Later other benefits were included.

Gains made in this section of the union strengthened it, permitting the purchase of a car, financing of more organising trips and helped build up the general level of organisation.

This work paid off when in a conciliation board agreement reached in the fish industry workers received 3s. 6d. to 5s. increases as well as corresponding COLA increases. A further total of £1000 in back pay was won which enabled the secretary to comment in her annual report

The wage increases obtained by the union through the conciliation board has helped to strengthen the membership of our union in the fish canning section, but

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123 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1951.

124 Real wages for canning workers prior to the 1970s peaked at this point. Refer to Figure 6.3 and the discussion of real wage levels in chapter six.

125 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1950.

much more must be done to bring about 100% organisation.<sup>126</sup>

In 1953 conciliation boards for dried fruit packing and food packing were established and the union was able to gain an agreement providing for increases in wages and conditions of work in both industries. In addition stop-order facilities were granted at seven of the major canneries,<sup>127</sup> which stabilised subscription incomes and was an important mark of recognition for the union. By the end of the period examined in this chapter the union's bargaining position was improving, it was gaining improvements in wages and a greater degree of recognition from the bosses. These improvements derived from actions to consolidate organisation and as the canning industry was experiencing a strong demand for its products, the union fared well.

It was here too that the Johannesburg and Durban food unions decided to affiliate as branches. Durban without canneries was to falter and never develop fully but the Johannesburg branch with several canneries to organise was far stronger.<sup>128</sup> In Port Elizabeth, a significant canning area, the branch had affiliated in 1942 and was a leading part of the union.

#### Political Activity and Trade Union Work

I will now outline some of the union's political activities as they occurred interspersed with trade union work from the early 1940s to the early 1950s. During the war official support was given to the war effort and conference resolutions called for full military training to be given to all races in order that all forces may be mobilised in the fight against the fascist threat of 1943.<sup>129</sup> Later the FCWU joined the Soviet solidarity group, Friends of the Soviet Union.<sup>130</sup>

Agitation against legal disabilities for African workers featured prominently in the union's activity. This included passing conference resolutions calling for full recognition of African workers under the Industrial Conciliation Act;<sup>131</sup> meeting with other organisations for

126 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1952.

127 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1953.

128 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1951.

129 The Guardian, January 21 1943.

130 The Guardian, October 7 1943.

131 The Guardian, January 21 1943.

the same, and campaigning with the ANC and CPSA against passes for Africans in 1945.<sup>132</sup>

Electoral activity, for parliament and Provincial Council seats was also undertaken by the union.

Political and trade union activity required financing and special attention was devoted to this issue. In 1946 a £1000 campaign was launched to raise funds to extend the union's organising activities further into the food industry. Eleven months later the fund stood slightly above £200 and branches were asked to hold executive meetings and discussions in and amongst workers to find ways to improve head office finances.<sup>133</sup> This was to be a recurrent problem for the union. Regular income was derived from subscriptions, but this was affected by seasonal fluctuations and necessitated the holding of special fund raising efforts such as dances to supplement subscription income. A proportion of the branch subscriptions were paid over to head office in affiliation fees but head office bore the bulk of the administration costs, organising expenses, as well as financing the union's political activities, which would then have to be recouped from the branches. Affiliation fees to the TLC were a case in point, head office would pay for affiliation in a lump sum at the strength that branches had committed themselves to, and then have to cajole the branches to reimburse it. In 1947 the Annual Conference voted £30 to the Communist Party's election fund, the sum being paid by head office which had to request branches to reimburse it.<sup>134</sup> Identifying impending threats to voting rights, branches were asked to ensure that all union members were put on the voters roll and urged to "do it now while the voters roll is still open."<sup>135</sup> Early in 1948 the CEC resolved to conduct trips to the branches for organising purposes and to register voters. In Worcester delegates reported the popular feeling was to vote against the Nationalist Party, as the Unity Movement's mouth piece The Torch, which advocated a boycott of elections, was little read.<sup>136</sup>

The Nationalist victory, seen as a very serious blow to the democratic and working class movement was given extensive coverage in

132 FCWU Circular letter No.8/45 28.02.45. and Simons, H.J. and Simons, R.E. Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969. pp.547-548.

133 FCWU Circular letter No.27/46, 6.12.46.

134 FCWU Circular letter No.3/47, 19.02.47.

135 FCWU Circular letter No.5/47, 5.04.47.

136 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 14.03.48.

circular letters. Members were informed of the dire consequences of the election result which:

..gave power to the most reactionary men of our country who had shown their intention of attacking the trade union movement and preventing the development of non-European liberatory movements through a system of Apartheid.<sup>137</sup>

Political discussion in CEC meetings covered events of the time. Endorsement given to the secretary's decision to associate the union with a public statement opposing apartheid on trains<sup>138</sup> became formalised in full endorsement for a Civil Rights Action Committee convened in Cape Town by the Institute for Race Relations. Full backing was given to the Train Apartheid Resistance Committee.<sup>139</sup>

The CEC had spent a lot of time mobilising opposition to reactionary candidates and putting coloured voters on the electoral roll. In Paarl five hundred coloured voters faced removal from the electoral roll due to objections lodged by the National Party. The union directly challenged this disenfranchisement and declared that it was members' responsibility to prevent the National Party succeeding. Every branch was urged to form a subcommittee of men and women to visit houses and assist voters in opposing their loss of voting rights as well as registering new voters. Due to the National Party victory better preparation for the 1949 Provincial Council elections was urged and political apathy strongly condemned.

Our aim is to extend democratic rights not only to all men but also to non-European women, and every defeat for the Nationalist Party will not only be a victory in the election but will also be a further step for democratic rights and against the curtailment of the existing democratic rights.<sup>140</sup>

In pursuit of these objectives the Paarl branch organised workers to attend court en masse to oppose their removal from the voters roll. Reviewing the results of this activity the secretary wrote in her report for 1948 that the results had been disappointing but these efforts had made many coloured workers conscious of democratic political rights and of the need to retain them.

137 FCWU Circular letter No.7/48, 25.06.48.

138 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 15.08.48.

139 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 12.09.48.

140 FCWU Circular letter No.15/48, 18.10.48.

### Education and Training

A large part of the union's political and educative work was conveyed through its journal. Produced regularly since 1942 it was the forerunner of the Morning Star newspaper which was started in 1953. Often running to four pages, it had stories written in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, it dealt with information on laws and regulations such as the Factories Act, workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance and health and housing regulations. Most news items were on current political developments, but the journal was never so didactic it had no space for tips on health and beauty. Head office produced the journal and distributed it to the branches where it was sold and the money returned to head office. A considerable amount of effort was put into the journal by the general secretary. In view of the distances involved and the lengthy periods when only postal contact was maintained with branches, the journal was a means to keep distant branches abreast of events.

Trade union training took two forms, ongoing 'on the job' training and occasional training schools. Through visits to branches where local officials were taught how to conduct union affairs and regular discussion in meetings, the basic principles of trade union work were conveyed to members. As many union members were illiterate, the union co-operated with the Adult Education Commission during the 1940s to combat illiteracy. Thus it was able to claim credit for spreading literacy skills in a memorandum it presented to the Industrial Legislation Commission of 1947.

Many members have been taught to read the agreements and to understand the problems. In many country districts where they had previously had no opportunities, they could now undertake a certain amount of correspondence and the treasurer could look after the branch finances.<sup>141</sup>

Formal training over a wider range of subjects was provided in a series of schools organised by head-office for branch officials to attend in the off season. The most intensive of these were a number of four day training schools held in the early 1950s. Assistance in running them came from CP members and persons active in running African

<sup>141</sup> FCWU evidence to the Industrial Legislation Commission of 1947. Quoted in Stein, M. 'The Food and Canning Workers Union 1950-1960' Department of Sociology Seminar Paper, Warwick University, n.d. p.20.

night schools. These schools covered industrial and trade union issues, political economy and South African history.<sup>142</sup> Organising such activities required considerable resources this proved to be the most serious obstacle to establishing a regular education programme. Head-office organised these schools and while interest from the branches was strong, the financial burden for them in the end fell upon head office. As they were organised in the off season due to the frequency that overtime was worked on weekends, the financial constraints imposed on the union during this time of the year was a further burden. Union education activities were limited due to problems associated with the union's structure, and only one interviewee recalls having participated in these trade union schools in the early years.<sup>143</sup>

### Struggle of Worker Benefits

Unemployment insurance was an early target for the new Nationalist government. On a commission investigating unemployment insurance in 1947, National Party members recommended the Act be changed to a voluntary one excluding African and seasonal workers. The FCWU had submitted evidence and, when the report was published, called for a national campaign to retain the old Act.<sup>144</sup> The union appealed to the TLC and Members of Parliament and called for nation-wide protest meetings. The secretary informed the members:

Our union and others consider the Unemployment Insurance Act as the only piece of social security legislation given to workers in South Africa as a reward for their services rendered during the last war. We must not allow this government or any other government to remove it.<sup>145</sup>

On the local committee of the TLC Alexander moved a resolution to campaign against tampering with the Act and drafted a memorandum to be issued under the name of the TLC, detailing objections to the Unemployment Insurance Bill. Response from the TLC NEC was poor, and Alexander commented at the union's CEC meeting in June 1949 that the TLC had failed to give a clear indication of its position on unemployment insurance, though it had protested vigorously against

<sup>142</sup> Annual Report of the General Secretary 1953.

<sup>143</sup> The majority of informants had not had experience of training schools and received their training from visits to branches and being taught how to function 'on the job'

<sup>144</sup> FCWU Circular letter No.15/48, 18.10.48.

<sup>145</sup> FCWU Circular letter No.8/49, 27.05.49.

changes contemplated by the government in 1947. This disparity reflected growing problems within the TLC as conditions which had permitted an alliance between older craft unions and a left-wing industrial unionism changed during the war, putting strain on the alliance and leading to an eventual break-up of the TLC in the mid-1950s.<sup>146</sup> The union, working with the local committee of the TLC lobbied all Members of Parliament but those from the National Party, who refused to see a non-racial delegation. A memorandum was sent to the Minister of Labour who chose to disregard them. The bill passed its second reading with limited parliamentary opposition.<sup>147</sup> The new Act excluded African and seasonal workers and empowered the Minister to exempt areas from its operations.

Wasting no time to press home the advantage, old enemy van Staaden, from the 'Blanke Werkers Federasie', with the assistance of Nationalist Party MPs, started to collect signatures to petition the Minister of Labour to exempt certain areas in the Western Cape from the Unemployment Insurance Act.<sup>148</sup> In response the union circulated a petition against the exemption of areas from the Act.

When notice of an intention to exclude certain areas in the Boland was given, based on the application of 3062 white contributors mustered by the 'Blanke Werkers Federasie', the union increased its efforts and requested the TLC NEC to investigate the legality of the 'Blanke Werkers Federasie' actions.<sup>149</sup> Further meetings with the Minister of Labour were held, public meetings organised in Cape Town and Johannesburg and branches urged to send telegrams to the Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and to get union petitions signed by canvassing house-to-house.<sup>150</sup> Neither these petitions, nor last ditch legal action was able to prevent the exclusions, and the following areas became exempted from the Act: Caledon, Ceres, Malmesbury, Montagu, Paarl, Picketberg, Robertson, Stellenbosch and Tulbagh. That struggle had been lost, the Annual Report noted, the Act was a farce that should be rejected and "We must fight for real unemployment insurance for all workers irrespective of race and colour."<sup>151</sup>

146 Lewis, J. op.cit. Chapter 9.

147 FCWU Circular letter No.9/49, 7.07.49.

148 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 5.02.50.

149 FCWU Circular letter No.3/50, 15.02.50.

150 FCWU Circular letter No.17/50, 10.07.50.

151 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1950. Previous contributors, now excluded, were still entitled to receive benefits due to them. Branches were to inform them of this.

### State Offensive and Responses

It was at this time that the Unlawful Organisations Bill was published. With a leading member of the Party as general secretary, and with close links with the CP, the FCWU was directly affected by what the future held in store under legislation that was to become the Suppression of Communism Act. A special CEC meeting resolved to visit the branches and explain the contents of the bill and urge the TLC to organise a conference to coordinate protest.<sup>152</sup> In Cape Town the union met the Civil Rights League and helped form the Democratic Action Committee, head-office contacted the World Federation of Trade Unions, and in Paarl a unity committee of trade unions, sports, church bodies, the Teacher's League and African People's Organisation joined forces to organise a meeting.<sup>153</sup> There are no further references to the activities of this body.

Under threats from laws on the one hand, police attention stepped up on the other. Like many organisations the union had been raided in the crack-down after the 1946 African miners strike, and it faced renewed harassment in the early 1950s. At Wolseley police invaded a union meeting, took notes of union records, and pointed out the meeting place to the factory manager.<sup>154</sup> As police interference grew in ferocity, leaders in the fish branches found themselves hounded by the police. In protest the Minister of Labour was interviewed, TLC asked for help and members were given a guide on how to cope with police from the unions lawyers.<sup>155</sup>

In the early 1950s the union entered into a series of alliances with other organisations and participated in broad front campaigns through the co-operation of its leadership. Such alliances were not confined to the head-office alone, as similar types of broad front politics were experimented with in larger towns like Paarl and Worcester. In these broad fronts the union maintained a stance critical of the compromises being made within the beleaguered TLC where right-wing break-aways induced a more conservative conduct. For its part the

152 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 6.05.50.

153 The Democratic Action Committee comprised trade unions, churches, SAIRR and the National Council of Women.

FCWU Central Committee minutes, 11.06.50.

154 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 10.09.50.

155 FCWU Circular letter No.25/50, 21.10.50.

FCWU kept up pressure from the left.<sup>156</sup> The motivation for this was expressed in these terms.

The majority of our members are coloureds who daily, in hundreds of ways feel the effect of colour discrimination. In dealing with the employer, police, municipal and government authorities, we constantly find colour prejudice the major obstacle in our work of improving conditions and living standards of our members. We cannot, therefore, separate the trade union activities in a narrow sense of our organisation from this wider political issue.

The union's organisation in country towns has laid the foundation and lit the road for other workers to be organised and win better conditions for themselves.<sup>157</sup>

In 1951 action was taken against the threatened removal of the coloured franchise. Support had been pledged earlier for the Franchise Action Committee (FRAC), branches were asked for their views on how to fight disenfranchisement, and the secretary authorised to serve on the FRAC executive.<sup>158</sup> A demonstration was held in Cape Town on the parade where thousands gathered to register their opposition to the Representation of Non-Europeans Bill, branches were encouraged to attend, supplied with FRAC manifestos and asked to send in donations for the campaign.<sup>159</sup> A political strike was mooted by FRAC for May 7 1951, which the FCWU CEC endorsed when it elected delegates to attend a FRAC planning meeting in April.

The planned stay-at-home met with little response in Cape Town, the union's members having been especially circularised to meet and plan for it, and though they struck in places, the effect was negligible. In the secretaries annual report the failure of the stay-at-home in Cape Town was attributed to the reticence of some black trade unions (unspecified) to give their support.<sup>160</sup> The response was somewhat better in Paarl, but in Worcester, where the branch was part of a local FRAC body, the strike was 100% successful as it was led by the FCWU and

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156 The union had encouraged branches to donate money to a legal defense fund for unionists opposing the Suppression of Communism Act. When it was discovered that the TLC fund was not extended to cover political affiliation the FCWU withdrew its donation and sent it to the Legal Assistance and Defense Fund. (Cape) FCWU Central Committee minutes 1.10.50.

157 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1950.

158 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 18.02.51.

159 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 4.03.51. Only Wellington and Worcester donated funds.

160 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1951.

the Textile Workers Union. Retrospectively the strike was seen as teaching useful lessons that would help in future struggles.<sup>161</sup>

### The Banning of Trade Unionists

When Solly Sachs became the first trade unionist to be banned under the Suppression of Communism Act the union convened a special CEC meeting. Head office officials had assisted in organising a protest meeting in Cape Town over the attacks on the trade union movement and the spate of banning orders issued to leaders of the national liberation movement. The Guardian newspaper was also banned. Branches were requested to be prepared to follow the lead of the TLC NEC and strike when called upon to do so.<sup>162</sup> No call was forthcoming, nor would it come, Frank Marquard told the branches when he reported back from the TLC special conference to discuss the effects of the Suppression of Communism Act. Only registered unions had been invited thereby excluding African workers, and pandering to the racists. As the conference had adopted a declaration without agreeing how to implement its aims, little could be hoped for from the TLC said Marquard.<sup>163</sup>

Early in 1953 when the TLC convened a conference on the Public Safety and Criminal Law Bills the FCWU received an invitation but not the AFCWU. Urgent correspondence between the FCWU and TLC set out the union's position that it would not attend without an invitation to the AFCWU. However, a special FCWU CEC meeting decided that the union should be represented notwithstanding the AFCWU exclusion.<sup>164</sup> At the conference Alexander moved that a one-day strike be held, this was not carried. In reporting back though a circular letter summarising the legislation Alexander informed the branches:

The government wants 'loyal subservient' trade unions. The government's aim is to smash the trade unions which are an important force in the fight against Fascism. The national liberation movement's fight for the right to vote must be supported by the trade union movement.<sup>165</sup>

161 Ibid. There are no references to earlier stay-aways in minutes such as the significant 1950 May Day meeting on the Grand Parade in Cape Town and the first observation of the June 26 1950 memorial day, called as a stay-away to protest the killing of 18 people involved in the may day stay-away on the Rand.

162 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 29.05.52.

163 FCWU Circular letter No.13/52.

164 FCWU Special Central Committee minutes, 12.02.53.

165 FCWU Circular letter No.4/53. 26.02.53.

Prospects of residential segregation loomed for the first time when the Group Area Board began its deliberations. Head office prepared a memorandum for the local committee of the TLC which was submitted to the Board and circulated to the branches.<sup>166</sup> Branches were advised to prepare representations against applications in their area.<sup>167</sup> Removals and the breaking up of worker communities was only just beginning.

The growth of political movements and campaigns directly impinged upon the union. Its leadership took an active role in the formation of the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO), attending the Coloured Peoples Convention which inaugurated the organisation.<sup>168</sup> Frank Marquard was elected to the SACPO committee, and the union pledged its support for SACPO in a CEC.<sup>169</sup> Branches were also informed of the appeal from ANC president Albert J. Luthuli to make June 26th a 'Dedication Day' to recall the struggle for freedom.<sup>170</sup>

In the midst of this growing political activity Ray Alexander and S.V. Reddy, the Durban branch secretary were banned and prohibited from attending gatherings for two years, and shortly thereafter Betty du Toit, secretary of the FC&AWU was also banned. Alexander was granted a two week extension to wind up her affairs and toured the branches she had helped to form one last time.<sup>171</sup> Wherever she went meetings were held, not all of which she could attend as on several occasions workers who were not members of the union joined these meetings turning them into large gatherings protesting the restrictions placed upon her. At RFF, H.Jones and Associated Cannery, delegations from union committees met management where they made plain their resolve to resist the ban imposed on their secretary. Public protest meetings were held in Paarl and Worcester, and short strikes took place in Paarl, Wellington, Worcester and Port Elizabeth after management had been informed "that

166 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 17.05.53.

167 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 14.06.53.

168 Karon, T. 'Vryheid nie op 'n skinkbord nie': The Coloured Peoples Congress and National Democratic Struggle in the Western Cape 1951-1962.' Hons. UCT, 1983. pp.49-52.

169 FCWU Central Committee minutes, 12.09.53.

170 A statement from Luthuli, calling on people to tell their children of the struggle for liberation and to light bonfires as symbols of conviction of the justice of their struggle for freedom, was reprinted without comment in a circular letter . FCWU Circular letter No.15/53. 1953.

171 Alexander was ordered to resign from all trade unions and prohibited from joining the ANC, TLC, Cape Peace Council, FRAC, Africa Club and Friends of the Soviet Union. Morning Star, 1(1) October 1953.

their strike was political and they had no quarrel with the employers."<sup>172</sup>

In her public farewell speech Alexander declared the banning an attack of the boss class on working men and women, "the same attack as the employer makes when he sacks one of the leading shop-stewards or members of our union because that person fights for the workers interests."<sup>173</sup> Trade unions were under attack as they were obstacles to the government's policy of hostility, she stated, "They are afraid of the unity of the working class and oppressed people, therefore it is your duty to unite more than ever today."<sup>174</sup> With conviction she declared it was her belief workers would continue to fight to win democratic rights for all. These themes were continued in her farewell speech to the CEC where her successor Rebecca Lan was elected.

I need not tell you how much I regret having to leave you, but I feel confident that the workers of this country will bring us together again..

Comrades, in 1947 our union was forced to start the AFCWU but we have always worked as one and this is the success of our work... Never separate the AFCWU from the FCWU. As soon as you do this you will break the unity and organisation of the FCWU. I know you will not do this but that you will be united as food workers should be, irrespective of race and colour in the struggle for a full and happier life...

I have given the union my very best and as much as I have given I have received from the workers the pleasure of knowing that the ideas and work have taken root among them. Our union cannot be broken by anybody. Our work and ideas have been like good seed on virgin soil. All of you are leaders in your factories, and leaders of your people. I am convinced that you will play your part in the struggle for a full and happy life.

Long live our union! Long live the unity of our workers! Long live working class solidarity!<sup>175</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter the foundations and principle features of the union have been examined. In so doing the discussion has ranged over structural features of the unions industrial base to some of the important events that occurred in the time from the union's foundation to the banning of Ray Alexander in 1953. In this chapter the canning

<sup>172</sup> The Guardian, October 8 1953.

<sup>173</sup> Morning Star, October 1953. 1(1).

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> FCWU Central Committee minutes, 7.10.53.

labour process has been outlined for the contribution an understanding of the nature of canning work makes towards understanding what life in the canning factories was like. The significance of women workers, numerically and socially has been identified and their militancy and related to the seasonal nature of the industry.

By examining the constitution of the union and its branch structure, greater clarity has been brought to the notion of the specific form that the FCWU took, being a non-racial and militant industrial union but organising in the country districts which necessarily modified how the union acted. Certain practices relating to struggling for improvements in members living conditions become firmly entrenched, and occupy more of the union's attention at its base than do involvements in political campaigns.

In this period the union is compelled to form the AFCWU but despite the formal separation continues to act non-racially. The implications of this separation are to become more severe, as will be shown in later chapters, when the employers and state actively intervened to undermine the union's non-racialism.

A pattern to the union's wage negotiation activity becomes evident early on, where the union combines conciliation board negotiations with expressions of collective power and on occasion short work stoppages. Good results are derived from this strategy but this is to change as the context alters from tolerance of trade unions, to greater interference in their affairs on the part of the Labour Department.

As the union spreads its organisation into the country districts tremendous improvements are gained, both in wage and non-wage terms as formerly unorganised workers learn the value of collective organisation. Organising in the country areas against employers who fiercely resist unionisation requires great perseverance which is witnessed in the strikes and struggles workers commit themselves to, and experiencing victories and defeats in the process. Repression ends this chapter, not suddenly as the banning of Ray Alexander implies but with gathering force in response to the tide of political mobilisation that the union became a part of. As the union entered the apartheid era of resistance, popular politics and repression, it did so on firm foundations laid by its founders over the first twelve years.

### CHAPTER III

#### **The Great Wolseley Strike Struggle and Strikes in the Cannery**

Strikes are great moments of class struggle, the major battles that turn workers and bosses into armies in open warfare, when 'important' things happen. For historical reconstruction such events provide a focal point for the examination of conditions of class struggle. But there are potential dangers in this, 'capturing the event' does just that - project strikes forward as an event, an eruption of class conflict frozen and mounted for the historian's microscope. This chapter examines the lives of workers in a small branch in town in the town of Wolseley and the gathering momentum of their struggles at work that erupted into the 'Great Wolseley Strike.'

Extensive use has been made of oral sources in addition to official documentation, union minutes, court records and newspapers.<sup>1</sup> By using the testimonies of leading strikers, a fuller picture of the lives of canning workers in Wolseley, their struggles and their relationship to the union is conveyed.

Several features stand out about this strike, which was really a series of struggles culminating in a major strike and its aftermath. The strike was the third major strike the FCWU had to contend with since the first strike in Paarl in 1941, a strike which succeeded in launching the union in the canning industry. Like the first, part of this struggle was the classic stereotype of a strike as a 'trial of strength.'<sup>2</sup> A protracted struggle in which the workers and bosses waged a war of attrition, both sides trying to hold out until the other capitulated. It was also the last major strike in the Western Cape country districts for a period of over twenty years.

The Wolseley strike was very important to the union, for it posed the crucial issue of the right of trade unions to organise in the small country towns. Union president Frank Marquard called it "a test case for the union" as it pitted the union against the most anti-union bosses in the canning industry who had steadfastly refused to recognize

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1 The methodology employed has stimulated an interest in the past among canning workers who are contemplating producing a play depicting the strike. It has indeed "provide(d) a means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history."

Thompson, P. The Voice of the Past. Oxford: OPU, 1978. p.18.

2 Hyman, R. Strikes. London: Fontana Collins, 1977. p.19

the union and were determined to keep the union out of their factory at all costs.

Set in the context of Wolseley, this chapter explores the union's early organising activities. Through workers' memories we see the advent of trade union organisation and the character of the union branch that was established. Out of the daily struggles of workers a pattern of growing confrontation emerges. This builds up into the strike and then events move quickly as workers contend with state intervention, assaults, scabbing and solidarity action.

The Wolseley strike is instructive for the way it poses the problems of organisation among the popular classes in the rural areas. Very little comparative material exists, for unlike the strikes in the Natal Midlands, led by the I.C.U. a quarter century earlier<sup>3</sup>, the workers in this drama are fully proletarianised, and their organisation proletarian, in the form of an industrial trade union, albeit with a special character as outlined in the previous chapter. Canning workers whose situation was most closely matched by workers in the textile industry formed a factory proletariat in the small towns. While the history of textile workers has been enriched by the work of Bettie du Toit, this lacks the detail to make deeper comparisons possible.<sup>4</sup> Finally, part of its uniqueness is that it is firmly set in the Western Cape. The majority of strikers were Coloured workers, African workers being a tiny minority and thus it contributes both to developing a history of trade unionism and showing aspects of working class lives in the small towns of the Western Cape.

### Wolseley - Village History

Situated in the Breede River valley, 120km from Cape Town, what was to become the village of Wolseley was established by the laying out of 300 plots on the farm of Goedgevonden in 1875. Four years later this development was named Wolseley after Field Marshal Lord Wolseley.<sup>5</sup> The village was principally a transport centre, linking Ceres to the main North-South railway line. The village was called Ceres Road Station

3 Bradford, H. 'Strikes in the Natal Midlands: Landlords, labour tenants and the ICU.' Africa Perspective, No.22, 1983.

4 The history of textile industry organisers' efforts which drew police harassment, the enmity of white townfolk, fines, banning and banishments, is mirrored in the experience of FCWU officials. Du Toit, B. op.cit.

5 Rosenthal, E. (Ed.) Encyclopedia of Southern Africa. London: Federick Warn, 1961.

until a railway to Ceres was built and the station renamed Wolseley in 1910.<sup>6</sup>

Wolseley remained a small village, with a district population of 1105 in 1936 which rose to 2027 in 1951, just under half of whom were White. Economic activity was limited - a wool washing plant was built close by at Waverly in 1908. In village itself in the mid 1930's there existed two hotels, a bakery and two abattoirs. This was the site chosen by Mr. J.P. Delpont when he established the Wolseley Fruit Canning Company (WFCC) in 1936.

I selected Wolseley as the site for a factory because it was a good fruit area, very central and supplied from Ceres, Tulbagh and Worcester. Railway transport made it very central and in easy reach of Cape Town. It also had a good water supply.

In the town itself, it was called 'uiedorp' there were onion growers only, nothing else. But it was central for transport and fruit.<sup>7</sup>

Industrial infrastructure was non-existent. The factory had to become self-sufficient in generating its own electric power, (the municipal supply stopped in the evening), build houses for workers and provide transport to acquire labour. This transformed Wolseley. The factory grew and came to dominate the economic life of the village as the principal employer which, in season, employed about seven hundred people. By the industry's standards the factory remained a small concern, but it prospered and created a strong position for its products on the local market at a time when the canning industry was expanding rapidly to meet war time demand.

#### Rachel Zeeman - a biography

Problems have been identified with the use of autobiographical oral collections but, as White (1981) points out in a recent article on South African oral research,<sup>8</sup> "Not only can such interviews add flesh to the bare bones of fact but censorship, oppression and fear have muted the voice of substantial groups of people in this country."<sup>9</sup> The biographical profile offered below is illustrative of trends of

6 Die Karoonuus, 29 October 1983.

7 Interview J.P. Delpont, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

8 Leaders' opinions can be overemphasized, verification be insufficient and even reproduce "superficial historical consciousness" White, J. 'Beyond Autobiography', in Samuel, R. People's History and Socialist Theory. London: RKP, 1981. p.35.

9 Manson, A.; Cachalia, D. & Sideris, C. 'Oral History Speaks Out.' Social Dynamics, 11(2), 1985. p.2.

proletarianisation and worker consciousness. The approach adopted was thematic, drawing out the complexities and contradictions in the interpretation of events through interviews.

Rachel Zeeman was born at Prince Alfred Hamlet on the 3rd November 1930 to the Sass family. Fifth in line in a family of four boys and three girls. When she was eight her parents moved to Wolseley in pursuit of a better future. Before the family settled in Wolseley her parents had moved frequently in search of work. Rachel's father was a shepherd and her mother worked on farms and in domestic service. When the family moved to Wolseley her brothers found employment in the town's abattoir. Her sisters initially engaged in domestic work in the village and later worked in the canning factory, a fairly common pattern of proletarianisation. The family had no relations in Wolseley and the only relatives that were visited often were in Prince Alfred Hamlet, over the mountains beyond Ceres. Her older sisters and brothers did not attend school due to the need to work to support the family. However, Rachel and her two younger brothers completed primary school. Her parents were Anglican and gave the family an Anglican religious background. Politics or political discussion did not feature in family affairs. This is how Rachel started factory work.

Toe ek nou 'n bietjie groot geraak het, by standard vyf, toe het hierdie fabriek al begin werk en dan kan kinders mos agtermiddag daar gaan help. Toe ek ook later daar by die skool uitkom, dan help ek my suster wat daar in die fabriek werk.

En toe later toe ek nou glad 'n bietjie nie wou skool toe gaan nie, het ek liewers begin werk.<sup>10</sup>

Rachel worked in the factory in the afternoon during the height of the canning season, which was the norm for children in canning towns. She was about 12 years old when she started, and worked in this manner for three years until she gave up school altogether.

Ek was seker so vyftien toe ek begin het by die fabriek vir vaste werk. Ek het nou nie meer skool toe gegaan nie. Toe begin ek by die stukwerk en later was ons by die sorteerbeelde.<sup>11</sup>

As part of the seasonal labour force her employment lasted from the beginning of December to the end of April, and alternative employment had to be found for the rest of the year. Rachel worked at various jobs, frequently planting trees at the Kluitjieskraal forest station near Wolseley. Women were also able to do farm work, a less favoured

<sup>10</sup> Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

<sup>11</sup> Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

option, domestic work in the village and for a lucky few, work in the factory's store during the winter. Rachel avoided farm work, and did not move to other towns in search of work like some of the women.

### The Factory and Early Union Organisation

Wolseley Fruit Canning Company was established and owned by Mr J.P. (Koos) Delpont, and run by himself and his younger brother Mr D.R.(Danie) Delpont, the general manager. Mr J.P. Delpont ran the factory under tight control. In his own words:

I wanted to be my own boss. In view of the high quality I wanted, I felt I could only attain my aim if I were master of the ship with no interference by shareholders who were only after income. My ideal was quality. The only basis I feel you can establish something is if you have no interference from money grabbers or share holders.<sup>12</sup>

In the industry, the firm stood outside the limited form of co-operation that existed between competing canneries, having their combined interests represented by the South African Fruit and Vegetable Canners Association (SAF&VCA). Although the firm was a member of the SAF&VCA, it refused to be party to agreements between employer representatives and the FCWU. These bosses ran the factory as they saw fit, and ruthlessly dealt with any 'money grabbers', be they unionists or workers seeking a increase. A company employee recalls:

In the early years it was a case of trying to get by with as little as possible. Now it is different, you know you have to give people certain benefits. In the olden days it was a question of wits.<sup>13</sup>

In 1947 Mr J.P. Delpont sold the company to C & E Mortons of London, part of the Beechams group, and became the director of their South African interest. He continued to run WFCC until it was sold to Langeberg in 1954.

Being a small village, Wolseley was not able to supply the seasonal labour needs of the factory from its permanent dwellers, so the factory drew workers from surrounding towns. People came from Saron, Porterville, Ceres, Tulbagh and Touwsrivier areas and non-residents were in the majority at the factory. This dispersal caused problems for the union's organising activities, it was compelled to use residentially based strategies in the surrounding towns to reach

<sup>12</sup> Interview Mr. J.P. Delpont, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

<sup>13</sup> Interview Mr P.J.F. Conradie, Paarl, 9.04.86

workers, as the hostility of the bosses precluded recruiting at the factory.

Workers that came into Wolseley from other towns were either transported back and forth each day, or lived in factory accommodation; in a location, or a number of houses known as the 'Dry Docks', or in tents. Two or three families would occupy a two roomed house or tent, overcrowding was extreme and there were no facilities.<sup>14</sup> Very few African workers were employed at WFCC, between 30 and 50 out of the 600 to 700 seasonal employees. Residential dispersal was the major division among the workers, there was little mutual assistance or contact, nor was there much co-operation and community solidarity between the workers resident in Wolseley and the non-resident workers. Maggie Fransman illuminates this point.

Dit is hoekom die unie miskien swak gewees het, want dit was nie net Wolseley se mense wat hier gewerk het nie. Dit was alles: Saron, Ceres, Touwsrivier, Porterville, Piketberg, Wittewater. Dit was baie ander plekke wat hier kom werk het. As hulle lorries vol gaan haal het, dan slaap die mense hier. Sien, nou die mense is ook verleë, hulle is bang om vas te staan in die unie want dis ook maar genade wat hulle kry om daar vandaan te kom om hier te kom werk.<sup>15</sup>

On seven occasions attempts were made to form a FCWU branch and each one failed.

From the very inception of our Union this firm has fought against the workers joining our Union. Every time the branch was formed and we brought about improvements in wages and conditions of employment, the management victimised our shop stewards and leading members and this succeeded in breaking our branch, and worsening conditions in the factory.<sup>16</sup>

Despite sporadic attempts at organising, the union's presence at Wolseley was virtually non-existent through the 1940s and it was only when organizing there was made a higher priority that this situation was to change.

The strategy the union employed to advance economic demands, as I have shown in the previous chapter, was to use the industrial relations machinery to secure legal agreements via conciliation boards. This involved getting membership in order, serving demands upon employers, and declaring a dispute upon their refusal and arriving at a

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14 Housing shortages were acute in all rural towns in this period and gave rise to considerable popular struggle in Worcester. Shandler, D. op.cit. Chap.2

15 Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 21.01.86.

16 FCWU Annual report of the secretary, 1954.

settlement via a conciliation board. This strategy achieved legally enforceable agreements, but did tie the union to a legalistic procedure that was later to create problems.<sup>17</sup> In view of the refusal of the Wolseley bosses to be party to the main agreements between the union and the canning industries' representatives, the WFCC undermined the united front the union sought to present in the canning industry, and its commitment to create a national union. This potentially depressed wages and certainly gave other employers a non-union standard to compare with. Thus it was of great importance to the union to 'plug the gap' in its organisation. In this context renewed efforts organise were embarked upon in the 1950/51 season, using volunteers from the stronger branches of Worcester and Wellington to come to Wolseley on weekends and visit workers at their homes, address meetings and sign up members.<sup>18</sup> This did not endure and workers interviewed have little recollection of it. It was to be a while before the union moved to centre stage.

#### Renewed Organisation - Bosses Hostile

By a decision of the Central Executive in 1953 the Wolseley branch was revived. Officials like the union's president Frank Marquard, secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers Union, Oscar Mpetha and Worcester, Wellington and Paarl branch members brought WFCC workers back to the union in numbers. The method employed started by corresponding with the workers in Wolseley with whom the head office had contact, informing them of a visit and asking them to arrange a meeting place and to publicise the event. Any possible contacts were used, even workers who had resigned from the branch were contacted and urged to assist the union.<sup>19</sup> The head office also corresponded with sympathetic members of the community prepared to assist the union,

17 Economic demands being blocked by bureaucratic obstruction to the appointment of conciliation boards was a weakness of this strategy. Problems with this approach became more evident in the 1960s and are examined in chapter five.

18 This method of organising was extensively used by the union and was one of its most creative strategies, involving not only office-bearers but also volunteers from the strong branches. Organising Wolseley required intensive work, and Frank Marquard devised an approach which was referred to as the 'Wolseley method' thereafter. However, Rachel Zeeman only has recollections of head-office staff coming to visit the branch and says that it is only from the mid-1980's, with the growing strength of the labour movement, that rank and file contact between the factories is growing.

19 This technique was also used at the branch in Ashton.

particularly with regard to venues for meetings. In Wolseley it had the co-operation of Reverend D.J. van Rooy of the AME church.

Normally the secretary of the union wrote to the branch and asked them to convene a meeting, book a venue and inform the workers so that the head office could come and address them about relevant issues, be it forth-coming agreements, negotiations or to take down their complaints. Costs incurred by the branch would be refunded by the head office out of organising levies. If requested the head office would print pamphlets with details of meetings and send them to the branch to distribute.

Building organisation was not a smooth process. In addition to bosses frightening workers away from the union, there was the state. Police harassment had been a problem since the union's inception. It took the form of police raids on meetings, noting the names of those present or questioning workers about unionist's activities. Fears aroused by this harassment needed to be assuaged, thus we find Oscar Mpetha writing to comrades Ambrose Khoane and Jim McDonald "Please do not be intimidated by the police. There is no reason to be frightened. Our work is legal and we are not doing anything we should not do."<sup>20</sup>

It is here that workers who were to play an important part in the struggles to follow had their first contact with the union. Their individual experiences hold for canning workers generally, revealing the details of organisation.

Broad political and economic restructuring of the early apartheid period induced a drop in real wages of black workers. The rate of inflation rose and food prices shot up to peak in 1953.<sup>21</sup> A crisis was looming as international overproduction created problems for an industry wholly dependant upon exports. It was only overcome by very rapid monopolisation and rationalisation in 1954-55. Thus while the economic squeeze fuelled worker militancy, it hardened the bosses resolve to keep wages down.

During the winter of 1953 Frank Marquard, Ray Alexander FCWU general secretary, and Oscar Mpetha visited Saron and held meetings for the dozen or so workers who went to Wolseley. Ray Alexander wrote to Mrs. Rachel Williams who she knew from working in Cape Town and urged her to become a leader. At the third meeting Rachel Williams was elected to chair the Saron group, about which she had reservations. "Ek

20 AFCWU Wolseley branch correspondence. 15.07.53.

21 South African Statistics, 1982. fig.8.4

wou nie voorsitter wees nie want ek was bang. Die voorsitter is altyd die een wat by die eerste moeilikheid tronk toe gaan." 22

It was through this organising drive that Rachel Zeeman also joined the union. She had been working in the factory for several years before she became aware of the union. This is how she describes this contact, and the motivations she and others had for joining the union.

Ek het seker al baie lank gewerk in die fabriek, voordat ek eers gehoor het van die unie...Daai tyd dat hulle kom organiseer het, ek kan nie meer onthou nie of dit 1940's of 1950 was nie.

Toe was dit die eerste wat ons gehoor het van die unie. Die hoofkantoor het maar altyd by ons gekom om vergadering te hou en om vir ons te verduidelik wat die unie is en toe het ons nou later aangeskryf by die unie.

Dit was nie maklik gewees om 'n unie te stig nie want die mense was onbewus van die unie gewees en wat dit is en wat dit beteken. Maar later is darem die meederheid georganiseer hier in die fabriek. Die base het dit nie aanvaar nie want die base het nie daarvan gehou nie. Toe die baas nou uitvind ons behoort aan die unie toe het hy nou probeer om die leiers uit te werk uit die fabriek uit.

Ek het aangesluit by die unie omdat ons baie min lone gekry het. Ons het hard gewerk, die base was onbeskof in die fabriek, en hoofkantoor het vir ons kom verduidelik wat dit kan maak, en dat ons ook meer geld kan kry, ens. En toe ons nou al die feite het en toe sien ons, maar dit is iets goed wat ons aan kan behoort. En toe het ons aan die unie aangesluit.

(Wat doen die Base?) Hulle vloek vir ons! Jaag jou sommer nou weg! Jy het miskien net iets klein gedoen, dan word jy sommer net weg gejaag. Jy word gevloek van more tot vanaand. Jy moet net jou kop op jou werk hou, jy mag ook nie opkyk nie. Jy is aangejaag, jy doen nooit genoeg nie.23

A close-up view of the difficulties of organising and the harassment of union activists is given by Rachel Williams.

Toe sê die baas vir my. "As jy hier is om die mense op te stook, dan steek ek jou in die pad, as dit die waarheid is."

Toe sê ek "Nee!" (Omdat dit 'krismas' is; ek het kindertjies.) Toe sê ek vir die baas. "Nee, ek is nie 'n leier nie." Nou maar ek is die leier, en ons gaan deur veg.

Lateraan laat roep hy my weer. Toe sê ek vir hom, "Moenie vir my 'nonsense' gee nie. Ek het gekom om te werk en nie vir stories nie."

Ons het buite die huise vergadering gehou en buite Rachel Sass se huis vergadering gehou. Ons organiseer net altyd. Soos ek daar werk vra ek net vir die mense. "Het julle nie al aan die unie aangesluit nie? Die unie

22 Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

23 Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

is 'n voordeel vir ons. Wil julle nie saamstaan nie?" En dan sê die mense, "Ja, sit my naam op!"<sup>24</sup>

The union was organised along the following lines in Wolseley. There were two formally distinct branches, the unregistered AFCWU and the registered FCWU but in practice they worked together. The branch consisted of an executive of elected officials, shopstewards and the signed up members of the union. Before the strike the Wolseley branch was about four hundred strong out of a factory employing six to seven hundred people at the height of the season. Out of season, the membership dwindled and the branch ceased to be active. Due to the hostility of the bosses, union subscriptions could not be collected at the factory, so shopstewards each covered a portion of the village houses where they collected subscriptions after work. Overt union activity was risky, dismissals were not merely threatened - they occurred regularly. Of union conduct in the factory Rachel Zeeman comments:

Hulle was te bang om te praat. Ons kan nooit in the fabriek praat van die unie nie, want die werkers is te bang. Wanneer ons meesal bymekaar kom vir 'n vergadering dan het ons nou geleentheid om te praat van die unie.<sup>25</sup>

The union had no official organised presence at WFCC, such as a workers' committee, to take up grievances as they occurred. Under these circumstances, lacking an organised backing within the factory, the union's ability to defend worker's interests on a day to day basis was curtailed. On complaints and grievances Rachel Zeeman explained:

In daai tyd was dit nog nie soos ons nou werk nie. Dat ons dit opneem na die base en iets daaraan doen nie. Danie was altyd te bang....En so dit het nooit by ons gekom dat die werkers gaan kla by die baas nie, want die baas erken nie die unie nie. Hy wil niks daarmee te doen hê nie.<sup>26</sup>

On the fate of complaints and the reliance of the branch upon head-office, Zeeman commented.

Dit het maar net sommer verby gegaan, dit was nie opgeneem na die base nie...

In daardie tyd was die klagte meesal vir die hoofkantoor gegee. As hulle uit kom dan gee ons die klagte vir hulle. Maar ons persoonlik self het nooit na die baas toe gegaan nie want daar was nie so 'n kans nie, omdat die baas nie die unie erken het nie. Hy wil

<sup>24</sup> Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

<sup>25</sup> Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

<sup>26</sup> Rachel Zeeman is referring to some office-bearer in the union, possibly Danie van Wyke, who was the branch chairperson in 1950. Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

niks van die unie hoor nie. As ons 'n klagte het dan gee ons dit net vir die hoofkantoor. Ek glo hy het ook maar skraal kans gehad in daardie tyd, om die probleme op te los, want die baas het nie vir hulle aanvaar nie.<sup>27</sup>

At this rather crucial time the state intervened and banned Ray Alexander under the vicious Suppression of Communism Act and removed her from the union, under protest from the entire workforce of the canning industry. As mentioned in chapter two demonstrations and protest-strikes were carried out by workers wherever the FCWU was organised. Wolseley workers had to defy the police and their foreman to attend her farewell meeting. In her place Rebecca (Becky) Lan was elected as acting general secretary.

A ruthless attitude by the bosses to keep the union out meant real risks for members. At the start of the 1953/54 season the branch secretary's sister Maria Crotz and activists Elizabeth Zeeman and Christena Stoffels were given one week's notice and fired. In response the union collected affidavits from them to take this up with the Department of Labour and simultaneously launched an appeal for funds to support them, circulating collecting lists. Mr M. Jantjies, of the central executive, motivated the appeal with these words.

It is imperative that whenever our workers are victimised for trade union organising, or any other struggle in defense of workers' conditions, the comrades must be given support and working class solidarity must be mobilised to assist these comrades.<sup>28</sup>

Greater mobilisation on the part of the union drew from the bosses a correspondingly stronger response. 'Interference' had happened in the past, and had been nipped in the bud. From their position, challenges to 'mastery of the ship' were intolerable. For J.P Delpont the union just brought trouble to his domain.

They were a more satisfied, better understanding worker because they were not instigated. In many instances they were better paid, yes, in many instances they were better paid. You took who you liked, not every Tom, Dick or Harry. We had a better, more satisfied, more reliable group of people.<sup>29</sup>

Because of the difficulties experienced with Wolseley, Oscar Mpetha and Annie Adams, of Wellington, were mandated by the executive to work at the factory to gather first hand information. They were fortunately able gain employment, Oscar as laborer and Annie in the canning department. During the day they sized up dynamics and conditions in the

27 Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

28 FCWU Central Executive Committee minutes. 7.10.53.

29 Interview J.P. Delpont, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

factory and at night went to workers at their houses, laying the basis for organising this factory which, in Oscar Mpetha's experience, was the most difficult factory to organise.<sup>30</sup> Annie Adams returned home after falling ill, leaving Mpetha to carry on. Not for long though, the bosses somehow discovered his real intent and Oscar was identified and dismissed on the spot. In the altercation Delpont threw Oscar's pay on the floor, ordering him off the premises that instant. Oscar Mpetha, showing the metal that made him a famous trade unionist, said "By god I'm not going to pick it up. I am not leaving here without you giving me my money." Delpont eventually capitulated and gave Oscar his notice pay, whereupon he left. This incident increased the growing tension and looming conflict in the factory.<sup>31</sup>

Terrorized by the bosses, Wolseley workers felt an urgent need to improve their working conditions, pay and job security. Soon after the branch was revived the union had collected grievances and submitted demands to the firm. These had been ignored and the union accordingly declared a dispute and applied for the appointment of a conciliation board. As FCWU was in the process of concluding an agreement with the bulk of the employers in the canning industry, it was of great importance to succeed with the campaign to bring this anti-union factory under an agreement. Frank Marquard, speaking for the whole union, summed up the importance of their task at Wolseley when he said to a Central Executive meeting:

This firm is an enemy of our union and would like to see our organisation destroyed. We have to see that the workers in this factory are 100% organised and united in their determination to bring about better wages and improved conditions of employment in the factory. We must not allow this firm to carry on without an agreement with our union.<sup>32</sup>

Although those victimised found work, arbitrary dismissals continued.<sup>33</sup> Despite the problems, union officials were optimistic.

30 Interview Oscar Mpetha by Alan Hirsch, 5.06.82.

31 Oscar Mpetha described his dismissal as the cause of the the first lock out. Interview O. Mpetha by Alan Hirsch, Cape Town 5.06.82. Annie Adams does not recall Mpetha being dismissed, Interview, Wellington, 9.04.86, nor does Rachel Williams. Interview Saron 13.04.86. However unfolding of events point to this as a contributing factor.

32 FCWU Central Executive Committee minutes. 29.9.53.

33 Rachel Williams informed head-office that bosses continued to fire workers as they pleased, causing consternation among the workers from Saron who depended on the factory for work, and drawing blame to herself from parents who's children lost jobs. FCWU Wolseley branch correspondence, 30.10.1953. Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

The branch sold the progressive weekly newspaper, Advance and the involvement of the FCWU with the formation of SACPO spilled over into branches like Wolseley. A letter from head office read "Dit is hoog tyd dat die nie-blankes 'n organisasie van hul eie het, soos die Indiërs hulle Suid-Afrikaanse Indiërs Kongress en die naturelle hulle Naturelle Nasionale Kongress het."<sup>34</sup> The Wolseley branch was informed that the SACPO would be asked to forward application forms.

#### The Conciliation Board and First Battle - A Lock Out

The board first met on the 17th of November and with negotiations under way there was much activity in the branch. Oscar Mpetha and Bekky Lan met the Wolseley workers to clarify details of the union's argument, elect representatives to the negotiations and arrange for report back meetings.

While all this was going on, the daily abuse, and the harsh and arbitrary rule of the bosses continued, breeding a resentment that gathered momentum. Workers particularly resented the irregular breaks, their length determined by foremen, and physical abuse. On these matters Rachel Williams stated:

Ons eet nog so en dan kom die baas, voor jy kan sê dis klaar. Dan sê hy net, "Yes! Yes!" Daar was nie 'n hoeter gewees nie. Daar was nie 'n hoorlosie daar teen die muur gewees dat jy kan sien dis uitval tyd of inval tyd nie. Partykeer werk jy so, dan loop die mense oor die pad, dan weet jy nie dis eet tyd nie. Hoe laat dit is, of so nie.

As daai baas wil slaan, dan slat hy vir jou. As jy verkeerd gedoen het, dan moes jy hardloop, jy moet net so hardloop.

Toe sê ek een dag. "Maar dit is nie reg nie. Dit is nie 'n hond nie, dis nie slawe tyd nie, om so aan te gaan nie!" Toe praat ek met die kleurling voorman, Jack Benjamin. Toe sê ek vir hom. "Maar hoekom is jy nie in die wet nie, hoekom kan jy nie 'n hoeter sit nie. Hoekom is dit so, en hoekom is dat so." Toe sê hy vir my ek moet maar vir die baas vra. Daai baas het baie gevloek. Ons almal was vir hom bang.<sup>35</sup>

On Monday 14th December, when the conciliation board met in Cape Town, Mr. D.R. Delport offered a 1/6d increase on cost of living allowances, this the union found unacceptable and the board was adjourned. That same afternoon, workers held a meeting during the lunch-break where the underlying tensions burst into the open, resulting in a lock-out.

<sup>34</sup> FCWU Wolseley branch correspondence, 2.11.53.

<sup>35</sup> Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

Conflicting interpretations of the reason for the lock-out are given by workers and management, but this is because of each citing only one of the combination of factors in the web of conflict between capital and labour. These views can be collated with interviews due to the union and court records kept of the events.

That morning workers, Rachel Williams among them, had gone to the coloured foreman Jack Benjamin to ask for more money. "Om 'n punt te hê" during the negotiations. In the view of Mr. P.J.F. Conradie, the clerk of works who accompanied Mr. D.R. Delport to the negotiations, this was the cause of the 'strike'.

We had a strike once. A new lady came out of the university (Bekky Lan) and she was not so well informed. There were negotiations going on so she thought 'lets organise a strike'. Delport said, "If this is the way you behave - I was going to give you 1/6 - I will give you nothing now. I am going home!"

I think Lan overstepped herself.<sup>36</sup>

Sworn statements taken by the union allow a graphic reconstruction of the scene, the stage for this lock out and the strike to come. When the factory lunch-break started at 12.30 on that Monday the seven hundred or so workers streamed outside. As usual those that lived in Wolseley went home for lunch, the rest congregated in a fenced off area of factory property where the worker's cloak rooms stood and separated from the factory by a road. At 1.20 pm, when all the workers were back from lunch they were brought together to discuss the conciliation board and worker grievances. During this discussion a factory foreman, Mr D. van Schalkwyk, shouted: "Wat gaan hier aan. Kom julle werk of nie?" The workers ignored this as it was still their lunch-hour.

At the trial where Rachel Williams and Annie Mackenzie, the main union activist among the African workers, were charged for inciting a strike, Annie Mackenzie alleged that the foreman came out again and repeated the question to which the workers all shouted no, as it was not yet 1.30 pm. Mr. D. van Schalkwyk then said, "Those inside are inside, and those outside are outside" and half closed the main door.<sup>37</sup>

Rachel Williams adds another dimension to her recollection, by incorporating the anger and frustration over the daily practices of the supervisor's treatment of worker's breaks.

Toe sê ek, "Nee, dit kan nie so aan gaan nie. Ons is nie slawe nie, ons gaan nie so maak nie." Daardie oggend

<sup>36</sup> Interview P.J.F. Conradie, Paarl, 9.04.86.

<sup>37</sup> Annie Mackenzie giving evidence in the case of Queen versus Velapie, Mackenzie and Williams. Wolseley, No.539 of 1954.

toe van Schalkwyk sê "Yes! Yes!" Toe het ek nog nie ontbyt geëet nie. Maar nou het ons dit klaar bespreek, ek en Mackenzie en Pop en nog 'n ander paar. Ons gaan nie in nie want ons moet weet wat is die uitval tyd, wat is die eet tyd, en weer die inval tyd en so aan. En hoekom is hier nie 'n hoeter nie...

En toe die mense ingaan, toe bly ons so sit, 'n klompie van ons sit en ons wou nie ingaan nie.

Toe vra hy, "Wil julle werk, ja of nee?" Dit was van Schalkwyk "Wil jy werk ja of nee?" Toe gee Annie uit die middle antwoord, "Ons eet nog!"

"Dan kan julle maar vreet!" sê hy.

Toe het die anders ingegaan en wat daar buite was, het buite gebly.

Oubaas Koos Delport het die vensters toe gemaak. Oubaas van Schalkwyk het die deur toe gemaak. Die wat binne was het aangegaan met werk. Hy staan in die deur, as jy wil dan moet jy vra as jy wil uitgaan toilet toe en jy moet maar gou maak as jy weer in wil kom.

En toe ons, wat buite was, gesien het dis tien minute wat ons nou 'breakfast' hou, en ons wil terug gaan om in te gaan, vra baas Koos vir my, "Waar gaan julle." Toe sê ek, ek gaan werk, ons wil inval. Wag dat ek kan inkom.

Toe sê Delport vir my, "Julle kan nie inkom nie, julle tyd is verby."38

FCWU head office received a phone call at 2.30pm informing them that the workers were not working. The officials immediately contacted the workers and advised them to go back to work. While officials were out of the office Mr. Delport phoned and left this message, recorded verbatim by Miss Yon, the typist.

Tell Miss Lan we had a conciliation board this morning and were granted an adjournment until tomorrow a week. I believe this strike was organised last night by Cape Town Officials of your union who came to Wolseley.

Tell her that whatever concessions I have made and was prepared to make I WITHDRAW completely, and I am going to Wolseley and no further concessions will be made under any circumstances. If the workers want to strike they can "Bloody well" stay on strike for six months. I lay this claim and charge at her feet.39

Back in Wolseley dramatic happenings were underway. According to Rachel Williams, while she and Annie Mackenzie sat together on a box, feeding their children, lorry-loads of police arrived from the surrounding towns. This is her story.

Annie sê, "O God! Vanmore is hier 'nonsense'. Rachel wat gaan hier aan?"....

38 Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

39 FCWU Statement relating to the contravention of the Industrial Conciliation Act by Messrs. Wolseley Fruit Canning Company of Wolseley.

As die mense, die wat buite gewees het, sien dat die polisiemanne kom, toe hardloop die mense uitmekaar uit na die deure om binne te kom - toe gaan werk hulle.

Toe werk die mense weer. Die meeste van hulle het weer terug gehardloop so dat hulle by hulle werk kom.

Ek het daar gesit. Toe sê Mackenzie "Ons gaan nie in, ons sit nog..."

Toe kom een polisieman en hy skop die kisse onder ons uit. Hy vra vir ons, "Werk julle twee dan nie?"

Toe sê ek, omdat dit nog nie my tyd is nie, "Hoe lank kry ons om mee saam te eet?"

Toe sê hy "Tien minute na kwart oor sewe."

Toe sê ek, "Ons het nou eers hier gekom. Ons moet net eers vir ons kind bors gee, dan eers 'n stukkie eet en dan gaan ons in."

"Hoekom dan nie in gegaan nie. Die baas by die deur sê julle wil nie ingaan nie."

Toe sê ek, "Ons wil ingaan as die tyd klaar is. As ons klaar geëet dan sou ons weer ingegaan het. Teen die tyd wat ons klaar geëet is was die deure toe en ons kan nie deur die vensters klim nie."

Toe sê hy, "Jy hou jou slim." Toe stoot hy met die kolf hier aan die agterkant van my kop (patting the back of her head).

Toe sit ek my kind neer en sê "Jy sal nie nog 'n maal vir my so stoot nie. My kind kan jy dood geslaan het met daai kolf."

Hy's onbeskof die polisie. Hy was 'n blanke gewees....Hy wil nie hê ek moet vir hom 'jy' sê nie, hy wil hê ek moet baas sê. Toe sê ek vir hom. "Jy is nie my baas nie, God is my baas."

Toe sê hy "Wat is julle plan, gaan julle werk?"

Toe sê ek, "Ja, ek gaan werk." Ons het toe vir die derde maal by die deur gekom, ek en Mackenzie, toe sê oubaas, "Ek het gesê julle twee kom nie in nie. Die anders kom in, maar julle kom nie in nie."<sup>40</sup>

Head office officials, Lan, Mpetha and Marquard arrived posthaste from Cape Town to witness the scene of police, C.I.D., Department of Labour officials and locked-out workers. They organised the election of a committee to negotiate with employers but they refused to meet a workers committee. Even the efforts of Mr. G. Crous, a Labour inspector from Worcester, to initiate negotiations failed. He also suggested that Mpetha should go in to negotiate but Mr. D.R. Delpont became very angry and threatened to assault Oscar.<sup>41</sup> As Mr. Crous' efforts failed he was told by workers the manager should come outside and deal with them himself. Bekky Lan spoke to the workers and they returned to work.<sup>42</sup>

During the afternoon Mr. J.P. Delpont threatened the workers that they would never receive increases and his firm would not re-employ

40 Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

41 Interview Oscar Mpetha by Alan Hirsch 5.06.82.

42 Mr. Crous giving evidence in the case of Queen versus Velapie, Mackenzie and Williams Wolseley No.539 of 1954.

union members. According to the union's report, he told workers to leave the union as "the officials are taking your ninepences and that is why you see them wearing nice ties. Leave the union and I will look after you" he called. To Becky Lan Mr.D.R. Delpport shouted, "We will do to you what we have done to Ray Alexander." He also said that he wished she were a man, so he could put on gloves and fight her.<sup>43</sup>

Mr. Delpport had the benefit of a sympathetic press in the Worcester Standard & Advertiser which published, in full, a statement the company issued. The newspapers' story on the strike stated that no complaints were received by management, nor were strikers prepared to appoint representatives and that the Labour officials were just as unsuccessful in finding the true cause of the trouble. Mr. Delpport's version claimed that:

Throughout the afternoon workers broke away from the strikers and resumed work, in spite of threats. In one case a striker actually entered the factory and injured a worker - fortunately not seriously, thanks to the timely arrival of the police and their firm but tactful handling of the situation, no further violence occurred.<sup>44</sup>

And in addition to this:

He further told the strikers that the company would rather work less fruit than re-engage them, but if they wanted to resume work unconditionally on the company's terms they could do so immediately; otherwise the doors of the factory would be closed to them forever. The strikers returned without further trouble.

It is known for certain that union officials visited workers in Wolseley location on Sunday evening on December 13, and that they were fully aware of what was about to happen. The company is therefore not at present prepared to negotiate with the union as it feels that the union is not only irresponsible, but had violated the fundamental principles of free negotiation and has destroyed any reasonable basis for proper employer - labour relations.<sup>45</sup>

The lock-out was over in an afternoon but the struggle was far from over. The confrontation had been a victory. All but Williams and Mackenzie, who resumed work later, were taken back that day, and as a result of worker action a hooter was installed and workers were supplied with coffee and soup during breaks. Despite the gains, the union leadership was well aware that they faced an employer who had

43 FCWU Statement relating to the contravention of the Industrial Conciliation Act by Messrs. Wolseley Fruit Canning Company of Wolseley.

44 Worcester Standard & Advertiser, 18 December 1953.

45 Worcester Standard & Advertiser, 18 December 1953.

declared war on their organisation. At the general members meeting held soon afterwards, all talk was of unity and fighting the threat of a company union the Delports proposed to start. Bekky Lan congratulated the workers on their unity and called Mr. Delport's rival 'union' a mere sham to draw support away from the FCWU. Frank Marquard speech was in a similar vein, "Waar het jy ooit gehoor van 'n baas wat 'n unie stig. Meneer Delport dink dat die werkers is 'n klomp bobbejane. Ons wil nie Delport se unie hê nie. Ons wil 'n unie hê wat vir ons kinders veg."<sup>46</sup>

So ended round one, with the lines very clearly drawn. The WFCC had used every means possible to undermine the union. Although events moved too fast for a company union to be established, even if it were ever seriously considered, the FCWU had to overcome this challenge or lose Wolseley, leaving a crucial gap in its organisation. Already evident are features of state intervention and worker militancy that were to govern the strike and maintain it over so long a period. We have been introduced to the militant shopstewards, at the forefront of the union's activity in the factory. The lock-out with its multiple causes; of which the demonstration stoppage aspect to strengthen the union's hand in negotiations was not the least, while possibly unstrategic, reflects worker militancy.<sup>47</sup> The fact that this event was not initially recalled by Rachel Zeeman, suggests that the importance of the event of the major strike in January, overshadows the preceding events and obscures the processes of protracted struggle that major, well remembered events are embedded in.

### The Strike

In January the factory commenced its peak period. Conciliation board negotiations progressed, the firm made an offer in line with the other canneries and for the moment calm pervaded Wolseley. However, the union was by no means solidly established in the factory, and while this was the most persistent assault management had yet experienced, it proceeded to deal with it in a manner which had proved effective in the past - by driving out the union's key supporters.

Close up, the reign of victimisation, harassment and intimidation is portrayed in the experiences of Rachel Williams. Previously this had been tolerated, with no prospect of altering the balance of power in

<sup>46</sup> FCWU Wolseley Members Meeting minutes, 17 December 1953.

<sup>47</sup> Strategic strikes in season were employed by the union on several occasions. Interview John Mentoor, Paarl, 17.02.83.

the factory, but this situation was changing. Among the leaders, a determination to alter their subservience was growing. In the new year Rachel Williams was called into Mr D.R.Delport's office.

Hy sê hy wil die unie vrek weg. Toe sê ek. "Jy kan hom maar vrek weg as jy wil, maar ek sal hom nie laat vrek gaan nie!" Dit het ek vir hom gesê. "Ek sal weg tot dat die unie lewe."

Hy sê "Ja, hy (die unie) het sewe maal gestaan om my. Hy het sewe maal gevrek. So sal hy weer vrek."

Toe sê ek. "Dit is goed baas."<sup>48</sup>

Soon afterwards, when workers from Saron waited for transport back from their fortnightly visit to the town, Margariet Bastiaan, a shopsteward, and Rachel Williams were informed by the foreman, Jack Benjamin, that they had been sacked.

Ek het net my kinders en my 'case' ingepak - my kos en my klere en my kindertjies en ons is hier op na die lorry toe. Toe ons daar by die lorrie kom, toe sê Jack Benjamin vir my, ek kan nie op klim nie....want daar is nie werk vir my en vir Pop Haas (Bastiaan) nie.

Toe vra ek vir hom, hoekom nie. Toe sê hy ek moet maak soos die voorman sê. Soos baas Danie gesê het. Toe sê ek, (ek was so hartseer en skaam.) "Jou baas het my nie notice gegee nie. Die fabriek het my nie notice gegee nie en ek het nie notice gegee nie."<sup>49</sup>

Following this Annie Mackenzie, who was a forewoman, was demoted to working on a peach pitting machine on a lower grade, a move which angered workers. Not content with the demotion, management fired her.

With the union under attack, workers had to respond promptly, while they were massed at the height of the season. They were up against a boss that was doing every thing in his power to scare workers away from the union, driving out FCWU leadership, foisting a sham company union on them and denying them the right to a union of their own choosing. This is how Rachel Zeeman describes the unfolding of events on Monday January 19 1954.

En een dag toe het die base besluit, hulle gaan nou vir haar (Annie Mackenzie) af pyp, want hulle sê toe dat... daardie tyd het sy by die pit masjiene gewerk en hulle beweer toe dat sy het 'n kis perskes in die dwarste gepit. Nou U kan self dink, 'n kis vol in die dwarste sal die masjien breek! En toe het hulle nou besluit dat hulle gaan vir haar bedank omdat sy die verkeerde werk gedoen het. Ons het toe bymekaar gekom as unie en toe vergadering gehou. Ek was die voorsitter daardie tyd gewees. Ons werkers het toe nou besluit, dat hulle gaan nou lede kies om na die baas toe te gaan en met hom te gaan gesels oor die afdanking van Annie. En

<sup>48</sup> Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

as hy nie vir haar terug neem nie dan gaan hulle staak. Dit was ek wat ingegaan het, en nog 'n man, sy naam was Ben Plaatjies, na die baas toe, om met die baas te gaan praat. Ons het toe by die base gekom, en die base het toe met ons gesels en verduidelik dat sy het 'n kis perskes in die dwaarste gepit, en dis daarvoor gaan hulle haar nie meer in diens neem nie. En ons het toe aan hulle gesê dat die werkers het besluit dat as hulle nie vir haar terug neem dan gaan hulle op 'n staking. En hulle het toe gesê ons moet gaan mooi praat met die werkers en die werkers sê dat hulle moenie op 'n staking gaan nie, ens.

En toe het ek vir hom gesê, "Maar ons kan nou niks hier besluit in die kantoor nie. Ons moet terug gaan, want die werkers het vir ons gestuur." Ons kan nie nou vir hulle sê, ja, die werkers gaan nie staak of so nie, ons moet vir die werkers die boodskap gee, want kyk, hulle het vir ons gestuur.

Ons het toe terug gegaan en na so 'n kort entjie loop het die hoofvoorman agter ons aangekom en ons voorgekeer agter die kissies en toe sê hy vir my:

"Sass (my van was Sass), julle moet sê die mense moenie staak nie. Moenie wees soos 'n klomp Springbokke nie - as een die grond afspring, dan spring die hele lot agterna."

Ek kan dit mooi onthou, ek het vir hom gesê, "Meneer, ons gaan net rapporteer wat julle tee gesê het, want die werkers het ons gestuur."

Ons gaan toe report aan die werkers dat hulle wou nie vir Annie terug vat nie. En die werkers het toe besluit hulle gaan staak en die werkers het toe gestaak.

En ons het daar op die perseel gaan staan. Party mense het binne gebly, party het gestaak. Daar het ons maar gewag en unie liedere gesing. So, toe later nog die 'Africans', toe hulle sien ons hou aan het hulle ook nog mees van hulle bygekom en die staking het aangehou.<sup>50</sup>

Although none of these workers had personal experience of a strike other than the December lock-out, where the mere arrival of the police had caused a retreat, they were better prepared this time. Union leaderships first task had been to inform the workers of the correct tactics to strengthen their hand in the battle they were going into. The strike was not a spontaneous one, like the first demonstration stoppage. Says Rachel Zeeman:

Ons was bereid vir die staking want ons was ingelig, ons het gesels voor die staking. Hulle (Hoofkantoor) het vir ons verduidelik as dit 'n wettige staking is en wanneer dit 'n onwettige staking is. Daarom het ons eers met die baas gaan praat en gesê dat ons werkers gaan staak as hy nie vir Annie terug neem nie.<sup>51</sup>

50 Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

51 Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

Nonetheless, for all the workers this was a strange experience. Maggie Fransman, who had started work for the first time that year was taken unaware.

Daai dag toe dit gebeur het, kom ek mos nou van die waskamer af, al klaar geëet. En toe ek by die waskamer deur kom, to sê my vriend vir my, "Waarnatoe gaan jy? Mense gaan staak vandag" Ek sê, "Wat is staak?" Ek weet nie wat staak is nie. "Nee kom, kom!" sê hulle. Ja, en toe is ek ook maar nou in the bolling in.<sup>52</sup>

As before the workers, numbering about 400, gathered in the factory yard, across the road from the main factory building. When Ms. Lan and Oscar Mpetha arrived from Cape Town, the police were already there. As they had been warned off factory property by the police, the union leadership conferred and strategised with the workers through the fence. A strike committee was elected consisting of Rachel Williams, Janetta Crotz, Margarieta Bastiaan, Annie Mackenzie, Sophie Kriger, Abraham Smit, Jackson Swanie and Rachel Zeeman. Oscar Mpetha immediately set about teaching the workers songs.

Mr. J.P. Delpont refused to meet with the the delegation, on the grounds that it contained members of the FCWU. No meeting was held as the workers were not prepared to allow the the committee to meet with Mr. Delpont if he would not see Ms. Lan or Oscar Mpetha. Mr. Delpont addressed the strikers at the end of the afternoon giving them one hour to leave their houses and to hand in their factory overalls, knives and spoons. At first they workers refused to hand in their overalls, as they said they were still working in the factory, but later they complied.

When the workers gathered on the following day Mr.J.P. Delpont informed them that they were dismissed and should collect their money. Workers did not do this, as Ms. Lan had advised them collect their money on Friday as usual. Striking workers kept themselves busy and their spirits up by singing:

Ons het huis toe gegaan saans en soggens het almal  
weer terug gekom en saam weer op daai perseel kom staan.  
En daar het ons liedere gesing soos 'come and join us'  
en 'Senzenina'.

Come and join us, come and join us,  
Come and join us, come and join us,  
come and join our happy crowd!<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

On the third day of the strike the workers had gathered as usual, and the police and Labour department officials came to the factory as before, but the C.I.D. arrived to take down the workers names. At 10.30 am Mr.D.R. Delpont addressed the workers and said:

Julle het ontwettig gestaak. Julle het juisself  
ontslaan, nou verslaan ek julle weer - dit moes wees  
ontslaan. Ek sal julle nie weer ontslaan nie, gaan haal  
julle betaling. Ek gee julle vyf minute om te beweeg.  
Dit is al.<sup>54</sup>

Workers were surrounded by a cordon of over fifty policemen armed with rifles. At noon police vans and company lorries were driven into the enclosure and strikers were ordered to board them by the District Commissioner, Major van Niekerk. Frank Marquard reassured the strikers and advised them to go peacefully.<sup>55</sup> The strikers calmly helped each other onto the lorries and three hundred and eighty were driven away, singing and waving to those workers who remained. For some of the strikers this was a bewildering experience.

Toe ek nou sien dis sulke groot lorries en 'vans', toe  
sê ek, "Ek is baie jammer, maar (ek huil) ek gaan nie in  
die 'van' klim nie, ek klim liewers op 'n lorie. Nou is  
ek klein, die mense moet my help om op die lorie te  
kom.<sup>56</sup>

Thirty African workers, who had not been on strike, refused to return to work in solidarity. They were ordered off the factory premises and told to leave the factory houses in one hour. Department of Labour officials attempted to persuade them to return but they refused and stated, "We stand together with Mackenzie!"<sup>57</sup>

The village of Wolseley had never witnessed such happenings before and was agog with curiosity, the streets full of people and a great buzz of excitement in the air. Outside the police station there was turmoil as families tried to locate their members and secure their release. Bail money was collected from families and fellow workers and the union sent for money to be brought from Cape Town, as the bank was closed. Mothers with babies and young workers were soon bailed out for a pound, the rest were sent to the old goal at Kluitjieskraal where they spent the night.

Maggie Fransman remembers how she got bail.

54 Becky Lan giving evidence in the case Queen versus Abraham Smit. Wolseley Magistrates Court, no.38 of 1954.

55 Cape Times, January 22 1954.

56 Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

57 Advance, January 28 1954.

Een polisieman kom toe en hy vra vir my:  
 "Meisietjie, maar ek het jou op Wellington gesien, is jy nie van Wellington?"

Ek sê, "Nee Meneer, ek het net daar skool gegaan."

Hy sê "Toemaar, die tronk is nie gemaak vir 'n hond en kat nie. Jy kan net vastaan vandag laat jy nie moord gepleeg of iets anders gedoen het nie. Jy staan vir jou reg en jy staan saam met jou mense."<sup>58</sup>

An Advance reporter was in Wolseley covering the strike and was able to interview the people. Frank Marquard, who was also interviewed, was able to make the first of many appeals for help.

The fight of the Wolseley workers to be organised in a free trade union of their own choice is not only the fight of the Food and Canning Workers Union, but of the whole trade union movement in South Africa. Every one who values freedom and wants workers to have the right to be organised must give the Wolseley workers not only moral but material support. They need money, food, transport and plenty of friends. A friend in need is a friend indeed.<sup>59</sup>

#### Digging in - a trial of strength

After the arrests the strike moved onto a new stage, for the strike was no longer a struggle waged on the factory premises, the police had put paid to that. Both sides dug in. The bosses took every opportunity to break the strike and rout the union. The FCWU, for its part, sought to support the workers morally and materially, to generate trade union solidarity on the widest possible front, to combat the employment of scab labour and continue negotiations with the firm through the conciliation board. As is often the case in South Africa, a strike over victimisation and recognition of a trade union also becomes a struggle for reinstatement of dismissed strikers. As Mr. Delpont vowed that no strikers would be re-employed in his factory, if the union was to survive in Wolseley, it was essential that striking union members return to the factory and the many still unorganised workers there.

For three months, from January to March, all else was put aside and the entire union was mobilised to assist the Wolseley strikers. For officials, particularly Frank Marquard who was a full time worker at H. Jones & Co in Paarl, as well as the strike committee in Wolseley, there was little respite as they worked ceaselessly to carry the strike forward. Pamphlets were issued such as this one in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa which explained the strike and ended: "Support the Wolseley

<sup>58</sup> Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

<sup>59</sup> Advance, January 28 1954.

workers. Their fight is your fight. Their fight for a living wage and human rights is your fight."<sup>60</sup>

Appeals for support were made to the South African Trades and Labour Council (SAT&LC) executive, who in turn circularised all affiliates. Food trade unions in Australia, England, Canada, USA and the Food Department of the World Federation of Trade Unions were also appealed to.<sup>61</sup>

The union's branches around the country provided financial and moral support, collected money and made donations from their reserve funds. The Paarl branch applied a strike levy of 2/6d per member for the duration of the strike. Branches also provided solidarity by blacking fruit sent from the WFCC. Later they helped to provide strikers with jobs. Advance reported the establishment of solidarity committees in the canning towns of the Western Cape, however, these committees are more likely to have been no more than union branches.

For the strikers the struggle meant considerable hardship which increased over time. Tenants in factory houses were the most vulnerable, thus fewer of these workers joined the strike. However, those who did, lost their houses. Even though the union assisted with strike pay, as this was below their normal earnings, it was a lean time for the strikers and their families. Many of the strikers were young and could rely on relatives to help them, but there were those like Rachel Williams with eight children and an invalid husband to support. Community support was tremendous, the strike was a culmination of years of abuse and low wages that many non-striking families had direct experience of. During the day the strikers met in the AME or NG church halls to maintain their unity, food being provided by fellow workers. This support by and large kept the strike going. Maggie Fransman describes the situation:

My Ma het in Waverley gebly. Daar was ander mense wat vir my die middag kos gebring het. Toe was daar van hulle bygewees. Baie mense het niemand van hulle eie wat daar is (op staak), maar hulle het kos gemaak en gebring vir die mense.<sup>62</sup>

Union leaders were with the strikers all the time and the whole strike was a tremendous learning experience for the workers who were

60 'WORKERS ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS'. Pamphlet, exhibit 3 in the case of Queen versus Abraham Smit. Wolseley Magistrates Court, no.38 of 1954.

61 Advance, February 4 1954.

62 Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

taught more about trade unionism, law and politics. Rachel Zeeman states:

Ons het baie geleer deur die staking. Hulle (hoofkantoor) was elke dag by ons. Daar was nie een dag dat hulle ons alleen laat staan het nie. Elke dag by ons. Hulle het ons geleer wat dit beteken om te staak.

En dat ons nie net kan staak nie, dit het hulle vir ons geleer. Jy moet eers met die baas gaan praat en vir die baas nou vra - jy moet eers vir hom sê, "Nee, die mense gaan staak." Daarom was dit 'n wettige staking.

Hulle het ons baie geleer. Hulle het vir ons geleer van prokureurs. Ek dink sy naam was Friedman. Hy het vir ons lesse gegee, soos van ons kommittees, hoe jy hulle moed antwoord in die hof, hoe hulle vir jou vra. Ek is goed ingelig daaroor.<sup>63</sup>

#### Harassment - Police and otherwise

Trade union organisation in small towns drew regular police attention. Officials were hounded as they went about their work in the canning districts of the Western Cape and beyond. It was treated as an interference, which the union protested against and where possible ignored. However, when the strike broke out the level of police surveillance and harassment intensified dramatically.

High on the list of targets were union meetings, both in the location and in the halls where the strikers held their main meetings. Detectives patrolled the location, listening outside houses and sent spies to meetings held in the AME hall. On at least one occasion plain clothes detectives were found at these meetings with tape recorders and were summarily ejected. Rachel Williams particularly remembers a sergeant Sauerman in charge of these operations. Once detectives even approached her.

Twee het vir my gesê hulle staan aan ons kant. Hulle staan vir die unie. Hulle werk vir die unie. En ek moet nou sê hulle wil ons arme mense help.

Baie mense, van ons unie mense, het nou vir hulle die inhoud van die grond van die saak gegee; vir die speurders gegee wat vir die base werk en teen die unie werk.<sup>64</sup>

Physical intimidation was also used by the police against strikers. At the time Rachel Williams told Advance that workers living in the location were being terrorised and was quoted as saying "Police are in the location day and night. They take off their coats so that we cannot

<sup>63</sup> Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

<sup>64</sup> Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

see their numbers and then they hit the people."<sup>65</sup> Summing up her recollections, she said, "Hulle was baie sleg vir ons kleurlinge, die dae, baie sleg." Other strikers have corroborated these events.

It is in this context that the union decided to move some of its members out of Wolseley to protect them. African workers, now on strike, were liable to be arrested under the pass laws, and therefore were moved clandestinely to Montagu, Paarl, Laaiplek and other towns. So great was the danger for Annie Mackenzie and Rachel Williams that they went into hiding from the police. In disguise, Rachel Williams with her youngest child, the two of them were taken by Oscar Mpetha and hidden from sergeant Sauerman under a bridge on the Bree river.

Annie is 'n mansmens, sy het mansmens klere aan. Ek dra nou die swaar kind agter op my rug. Ek het nou 'n doek op soos die bantu vrouens. Annie het nou weer die broek aan. Sy is nou die man en ek is nou die vrou. En dan as ons nou stap of so, of ons nou wil uitkom van onder die brug dan ons is nou 'n man en 'n vrou.

En Mpetha en Mafeking en Frank ry en bring hulle dan vir ons kos, koffie of tee, of wat, of 'n flas met melk, of babatjies melk.

Ai! ons tyd is uit en ek vra maar net vir die help van die Here. Ja, en hulle jaag net so vir ons, jaag net vir ons twee. As hulle ons kon vang... Dan gaan die polisie 'van' om en dan gaan die polisie 'van' om.

Partykeer gaan ons daar by 'n plaas. Daai plaas waar die perdjie staan.... Daai baas het altyd vir ons kos gegee. "Outa", hy sê vir ons. Outa is nou Annie Mackenzie.

"Outa, Outa moet dit doen en dit doen en dan sal ek vir Outa dit en dit gee."

Nou ja, dan vir so 'n half kry Annie nou vyf shillings nou 'n half Kroon. Nou ja, dan kan Annie nou iets goed koop vir haar kindertjies. "Dankie my Baas, dankie."

Nou ja, ek help nou bedags by die wingerd. En vanaand is ons weer onder die brug.<sup>66</sup>

All the while the two of them were on the run other members of the union assisted by providing them with food and clean clothes. They arranged rendezvous by phoning Bekky Lan from various stations in the vicinity of Wolseley. Still the police continued to search.

Hulle gaan verby ons. Hulle ken mos nie vir ons nie. Nou ja, hulle het 'n photo van my, maar ek het my swart gesmeer.... Ek het van die gries op my gesig gesmeer. Dit gaan nie af nie, dit sit vas. En my doek sit nou so vas agter soos die bantu's nou hulle doeke dra. En Annie Mackenzie het 'n 'moustachie'. So 'disguise' ons nou altyd, nè.

Ek het swaar gekry.. Ons moet gaan wegkruip want hulle soek ons.

<sup>65</sup> Advance, February 11 1954.

<sup>66</sup> Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

(Hoekom ?) "Hulle het moeite vir die polisie gegee" (Maggie Fransman) Hulle soek leiers, hulle wou die leiers dood maak. As hulle nou die leiers het en hulle in die tronk opsluit, dan, dan val die unie. So het hulle gemaak met Wolseley se mense wat gesukkel het om die unie se bestaan te maak.<sup>67</sup>

Is this perhaps over dramatised? Were there good grounds for believing that union activist's lives were in danger? It seems not, for Mr. J.P. Delport in the same breath as calling Oscar Mpetha a trouble maker, always "instigating violence," said he saved Mpetha's life once.

Mpetha, he owes his life to me. I saved him once. During all these troubles five farmers who knew he had been in the location, holding meetings there, were going to kill him. My brother was among the farmers. Anyway, the police tipped me off and I got word to Mpetha to get out.<sup>68</sup>

These incidents expose the campaign of harassment, including physical violence, directed towards the union. Repression of this kind was not confined to Wolseley, nor to unions, it was a general measure directed against political and trade union organisation where ever they challenged the dominant classes. Only in the countryside farmers and white townfolk were liable to shoot leaders.<sup>69</sup>

#### State Intervention - Workers in Court

Five court cases arose out of the strike, as the juridicial arm of the state followed up naked harassment with a string of charges against workers: for trespassing, striking illegally, for not having passes, for inciting a strike and the union President for contravening the Urban Areas Act. The union engaged the services of advocate George Friedman in all cases and took them on appeal to obtain the best possible decisions. This involved the union in hundreds of pounds of legal costs but was regarded as an essential "part of our struggle against the ruling class who want to keep the workers in oppression."<sup>70</sup>

The first case to be heard arose from the mass arrests when Abraham Smit appeared before the Wolseley magistrate Mr P.N. van Rhyen on a charge of trespassing, his a test case for all the arrested

67 Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

68 Interview Mr.J.P. Delport, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

69 Popular struggles led by the ANC in the Boland from 1929-1930 were smashed by repression, much of it initially from enraged whites and not the State. Hofmeyr, W. 'Rural Popular Organisation and its Problems: Struggles in the Western Cape, 1929-1930.' Africa Perspective, No.22, 1983. Also Du Toit, B. op. cit. in relation to the harassed of TWIU organisers for their non-racialism.

70 FCWU Annual Report of the Secretary, 1954.

strikers. The court case was another big event for Wolseley. As the strikers and their families and friends gathered round the court building to hear the proceedings white residents jeered at them. The prosecution argued that the strike was illegal and that the workers had trespassed on company property. The defence rejected this and argued that workers were prepared to work when the management reinstated Annie Mackenzie. Rachel Zeeman was one of the defense witnesses and told the court "Ons het op die perseel gebly omdat ons onself as werkers beskou het. Ons was van plan om weer te gaan werk."<sup>71</sup> Smit was found guilty, and with him all the remaining workers, and fined 1 pound or seven days imprisonment with compulsory labour, a sentence which was confirmed when the case went on appeal.

Next charges of illegal striking were brought against the workers in two related trials where the state divided the workers along racial lines. The first, against fifty seven Africans for contravening War Measure 145 of 1941 (prohibiting strikes during the war, and still applicable) and in the sequel against Hester Kruger and 130 others for contravening sections of the Industrial Conciliation Act.<sup>72</sup> The magistrate found the workers guilty in both trials and gave identical sentences - a fine of 10 Pounds or 30 days with labour, of which 7.10 Pounds or 21 days was suspended for three years.

In both these trials the state attempted to inflate the ages of the workers to make them fully culpable, the charge sheet listed the youngest workers as 19 years old. The defence called a doctor to testify as to the workers real ages and as result three workers were found to be 14. They were cautioned and discharged, the magistrate stating they should never have been brought to court.<sup>73</sup> Forty two of the accused were found to be under 19 years old and their sentences were wholly suspended for three years. On appeal the workers were found not guilty of striking illegally, a decision the union felt was a victory.<sup>74</sup>

71 Rachel Zeeman giving evidence in the case of Queen versus Abraham Smit. Wolseley Magistrates Court, no.38 of 1954.

72 Annie Mackenzie appeared in four trials, the police trying to use every opportunity to have her jailed. She was tried under War Measure 145, then reclassified as a coloured person and included in the second trial for illegal striking. Then charges of incitement were brought against her and Rachel Williams.

73 Advance, 11 March 1954.

74 Appeal on the case of Queen versus Hester Kruger and 130 others of Wolseley. No.502 of 1954, heard at the Cape Supreme Court 23.06.54. I do not know if the case against the African workers was taken on appeal.

When the police finally caught up with Annie Mackenzie and Rachel Williams, they and one other, were charged with illegally inciting the strike which caused the previous year's lock-out. This case took an interesting turn when the chief state witness, Mina Demingo repudiated her sworn statement in court. She claimed that she had been called to the managers' office where she had been questioned by sergeant Sauerman of the C.I.D., Mr van Schalkwyk and Mr.D.R. Delport, and she said in court:

Ek het die verklaring gemaak wat nou aan my uitgelees is omdat die C.I.D. my gevors het.

Die sersant het die verklaring afgeskryf. Die C.I.D. het gesê ek moet sê wie het gesê ek moet 'strike'. Ek het gesê ek weet nie, die C.I.D. het toe gesê ek weet en dat ek nie moet leuens vertel nie. Die C.I.D. sê toe dit is Mckenzie wat gesê het ons moet strike, Dit is daarom dat ek gesê het dat dit Annie Mackenzie is wat so gesê het. Ek het so gesê omdat ek nie geweet het wat om te sê nie.<sup>75</sup>

Further consternation followed when a witness claimed she was only 11 years old. The FCWU took this matter up with the Department of Labour and several children were found to be working illegally in the factory.<sup>76</sup> Charges against Henry Velapi were dropped at the start of the trial, Annie Mackenzie was found not guilty and Rachel Williams found guilty and fined 15 pounds or 30 days suspended for three years. She was acquitted on appeal.

Lastly there was the case against Frank Marquard under the Urban Areas Act. Late one night Frank Marquard picked up the last load of AFCWU members next to the Breede River and headed towards Paarl. Police were waiting for them at the foot of du Toit's pass and Marquard and 18 workers were arrested. When they were brought to court, the workers who had been refused bail and kept locked up were discharged and released. Three alternate charges brought against them were thrown out by the court, despite the frantic activities of officials who were heard to whisper "we must find another charge!"<sup>77</sup> Frank Marquard was charged with, "Introducing into the urban area of Paarl eighteen Natives without permits."<sup>78</sup> He was later found guilty under the Urban Areas Act and fined 7.10 pounds.<sup>79</sup>

75 Mina Demingo the in case of Queen versus Annie McKenzie. Wolseley Magistrates Court, No.539 of 1954.

76 Ms. Lan took child labour up with the Department of Labour and succeeded in having the practice stopped at several factories.

77 Advance, 11 March 1954.

78 Cape Times, 6 March 1954.

79 FCWU Management Committee Minutes, 4.04.54.

## Union Tactics

Meanwhile negotiations on the conciliation board continued, and by persistent argument the union succeeded in pressurizing the WFCC to accept the same wage rates as were agreed upon in the main agreement for the canning industry. However, Mr.D.R. Delpont stubbornly refused to accept two clauses the union proposed: the granting of trade union facilities and agreeing to consult the union prior to downgrading grade I and II workers during the off season.

When the FCWU Management Committee met to decide whether or not to accept the agreement or hold out for more, the resulting debate reflected the union's assessment of its strategic position. Comrade D. Jantjies argued against accepting the agreement as it stood, for the deletion of these clauses was part of Mr. Delpont's plan to belittle the union. Frank Marquard argued for accepting the agreement, flawed as it was, as it represented a great victory for the union and the workers that the firm conceded to wage increases.

It is known that Mr. Delpont is planning to leave the factory, he is not prepared to swallow his pride for he does not care what happens at the factory and stubbornly refuses to sign the agreement with those clauses. We have at this stage to weigh our forces. If all the workers in the factory were out on strike and if there was no scab labour, we could have forced him to sign the agreement as a whole and reinstate the strikers, but unfortunately this is not the position.<sup>80</sup>

Marquard pointed out that Mr Delpont's willingness to sign the agreement constituted a recognition of the union, itself a concession, as he had refused to sign the previous arbitration award and concluded his argument by saying: "If we get the agreement signed we will be able to show the scabs and all workers that it is the union alone who brought about the improvements. It will also assist in bringing about

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<sup>80</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 7.02.54. Just how much of a concession this was for Mr. Delpont is reflected in the firm's attitude to the conciliation board, expressed after the December strike in a statement which read: "It is a regrettable fact that the use of this Act is fast becoming an abuse. Apparently it is only necessary for a union to make wild and impossible demands to an employer, and to have these turned down, to obtain automatically a conciliation board. No consideration of the actual merits of the union's claim appears to be given before a board is appointed and this fact is well known to the FCWU who at Wolseley have not a single European member, but who none the less made full use of this powerful and unfair weapon." Worcester Standard & Advertiser, December 18 1953.

one hundred percent organisation in the factory."<sup>81</sup> The Management Committee decided to sign the agreement with the WFCC.

It was time to take stock of the situation and devise a suitable strategy for the strike. The FCWU was well aware that their ability to bring pressure to bear by stopping production was limited, in the first place only half of the workforce had joined the strike and secondly the factory was actively recruiting scab labour to handle the fruit. Even though the factory's output was limited, it was still operable. Janetta Crotz, Wolseley branch secretary, told the Management Committee that the strikers would not ask to be reinstated and that they were determined to carry on the struggle. She also claimed that 'scabs' employed at the factory had been unaware of what they were doing and when the strike was explained to them, many went home and wanted to stand with the strikers, . As the arrests had put paid to direct pressure at the factory, and as picketing was illegal, a decentralised approach was proposed. After much discussion, the Management Committee decided to apply for a 2000 pound loan and implement a three fold strategy:

- 1) To try and find employment for as many strikers as possible.
- 2) Concentrate on organising the scab labour in the factory, assisted by the new agreement to show what the union has accomplished.
- 3) Increase awareness of the strike, by means of special meetings, concentrating on areas where scab labour was recruited.

#### Scab Labour

Soon after the workers were arrested, the firm sent lorries to surrounding towns to round up as much 'scab' labour as possible. Through the union's efforts to build solidarity and probably more significantly, seasonal labour shortages, insufficient were forthcoming. The factory had to go further afield, recruiting from Porterville, Touw's River and the Cape Town over a long period. In Cape Town the union singled out Elsies River, Rylands Estate and Grassy Park for special attention, holding meetings there to inform people about the strike.

<sup>81</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 7.02.54.

From the perspective of management, the strike only lasted a short time, and ended with the arrests. Thereafter it was a matter of restarting the factory with replacement labour. In Mr J.P Delpport's words this is what happened with the strike.

When the union came, then the trouble started. Once, when they went on strike I closed down the factory, the factory stopped operating.

Eventually we came to an agreement, we met with the leaders of our own people and gradually took them back.<sup>82</sup>

This perspective brings out two of the central themes in the bosses approach: a lengthy search for labour and attempts to bribe strikers back. Their other tactic was to make exaggerated promises of higher wages and 'jobs for life' to persuade workers to remain loyal. Rachel Williams believes Magriet Bastiaan was turned away from the union by visits from the bosses bearing boxes of food and loaning her money. Here she describes the fantastic promises made to those at the factory.

Baas Danie.. Die baas sal vir hulle vyf pond op 'n dag gee so lank as wat daai fabriek staan. Maar hulle moenie; hulle moet belowe hulle moenie met die unie gaan nie, want die unie is iets wat nie goed is nie. So, gaan hulle in die tronk beland as hulle in die unie gaan. Hulle moet nie in die unie gaan nie.

Nou ja, hulle sal nie werk kry nie, soos ons sou hulle nie werk kry nie. Nêrens sou hulle werk kry nie, soos ons, want ons behoort aan die unie. Dis nou om die unie dood te maak.

En vir Lilly het hy gesê hy wil vir haar 'n voorvrou job gee en vir Sally van der Venter sal hy 'n voorvrou job gee, so lank as wat hulle lewe, sal hulle voorvroue wees. Al werk hulle nie, maar vir hierdie hele jaar sal hy hulle net gaan pay. Dit het hy vir hulle gesê.

Hy het so veel moontlik die mense omgerokkel, affrokkel van die unie af, so laat die baas in die meerderheid is en ons in die minderheid ... 83

Most canning work is not classed as skilled, but the skill and dexterity that canning workers do possess was not matched by the scabs brought into the factory and their output was low. Bad conditions at the factory did not encourage scabs to stay, and many did not last the season. The factory worked very inefficiently with untrained workers and lost a lot in the process. Fruit was dumped in the location and at the height of the peach season, when other factories were working overtime late into the night, WFCC worked half days.<sup>84</sup> Reports were

82 Interview Mr.J.P. Delpport, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

83 Interview Rachel Williams, Saron, 13.04.86.

84 Advance, February 4th, 11th and 18th 1954.

published in Advance claiming scabs were leaving the factory after a short time.<sup>85</sup> However, Rachel Zeeman's experience shows that action against 'scabs' was no simple matter. On the one hand Wolseley strikers had a limited ability to influence scabs. On the other, the union, aware of its weaknesses, did not wish to further alienate the unorganised workers, so it used the conciliation board agreement to demonstrate improvements it had achieved to these backward workers.

The union was only partially successful in its action against 'scabs' as, as some people were dissuaded, others took their place. The effectiveness of direct dissuasion was also limited as 'scabs' tended to disregard these approaches. The union estimated labour turnover at about a 1000. In Wolseley itself, Zeeman and Fransman felt anti-scab action had little success. They discussed the issue in these terms.

Ek dink in daardie tyd was daar nie eintlik 'n kans teen hulle nie. Die unie het miskien met hulle gepraat maar hulle het hulle nie daaraan gesteur nie.

Hulle, hulle was ook maar baie bang vir ons mense. Want hulle het so baie gejoj. Dit was gesê dat ons het hulle met die mes gesteek en alle lelike dinge wat ons nie eers gedoen het aan hulle nie."

(Wie het so gesê?)

"Baie mense nê, hulle is bang. Miskien nou sê daai klomp "moenie daar gaan - daai mense sal julle met die mes steek." Hulle was altyd bang vir hierdie mense wat gestaak het. En die staking; daar was nie bakleiery en klip gooi vir daai mense wat gewerk het nie."

(Was dit moeilik om met hulle te praat?)

"Nee, dit was nie moeilik om met hulle te gaan praat nie, want ons kry mos vir hulle buite en so."

(Het julle aan die 'scabs' verduidelik dat hulle julle werk neem?)

"Ons het dit nie gedoen nie."

(Het enige van die 'scabs' weggegaan toe hulle leer dat hulle julle werk vat?)

"Nee.. ek weet nie. Ons het nie eintlik met hulle gepraat nie. Ons het oor die staking en oor ons werk gepraat. Ons het maar aangegaan met ons manier om te staak.<sup>86</sup>

### Solidarity action

Union members in other branches gave material and active support to the strike. Fund raising activities were held and members blacked fruit

85 Rachel Williams is quoted as saying "Scab workers are leaving the factory after a short time. They say they are dissatisfied with the work. This (Saturday) morning I counted 45 workers waiting for a train to Elsie's River and 25 leaving for Worcester and Touws River. They all told me they were not coming back to work here." Advance, February 11 1954.

86 Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 21.01.86.

that the WFCC attempted to have worked at other factories. Only after a month of using scab labour did the firm resort to sending material to competitors - indicating their efforts to carry on with scab labour were not succeeding.

Early in March, a lorry arrived one morning at the United Enterprises cannery in Wellington and proceeded to unload peaches in cases belonging to the Wolseley Fruit Canning Company. A foreman told enquiring workers that both canneries obtained their fruit from the same source, and this was a mere coincidence. Workers were not satisfied with this explanation. Next morning when more cases were delivered, workers met and refused to touch the peaches from Wolseley. This was explained in a deputation to the management. Workers were unconvinced by management pleas that the peaches were not from the Wolseley factory, they remained adamant, they would not undermine their fellow union members. After half an hour the management replaced the fruit from Wolseley and work began.<sup>87</sup>

The Delports, having been blocked at United Enterprises tried to have their fruit worked at H. Jones in Paarl where they were again defeated by solidarity action. The same applied at Associated Cannery in Hugenot and Rhodes Fruit Farm in Groot Drakenstein. As the fruit could not be processed at other factories it was dumped in the Wolseley location.<sup>88</sup>

Financial contributions to sustain the strikers came from a large number of the SAT&LC affiliates as well as a few individual contributions. Support had been motivated on the grounds that the strike was a test case for the survival of trade unions in the country districts. It was felt that support received from the trade union movement confirmed this. Support from the international working class movement was especially welcome. Messages were received from many organisations affiliated to the Food Department of the WFTU. In addition the union received a substantial donation for the strike from overseas unions.<sup>89</sup>

87 Interview Annie Adams, Wellington, 9.04.86 and Advance, March 4 1954. Rachel Zeeman could not recall such incidents suggesting that the importance and the extent of inter-branch action was limited, such that no lasting impressions were left.

88 Interview Oscar Mpetha by Alan Hirsch, Cape Town, 20.06.82.

89 FCWU Annual Report of the secretary, 1954. Advance, March 25 1954.

### Jobs for strikers

As the firm was adamant they would not reinstate the strikers under any circumstances, part of the union's strategy was to find alternative employment for as many strikers as possible, especially for the remaining part of the canning season, their main earning period. Jobs were found for AFCWU and FCWU members in Groot Drakenstien, Paarl, Ashton Montagu and the fishing branches.

Rachel Zeeman was one of the group who went to work in Ashton, but as she says, the initiative ran into difficulties.

Ons het na Ashton gegaan. Net na die staking het Ashton van ons stakers gevra om daar te gaan werk en 'n paar van ons het daar gaan werk. Ons het net 'n dag gewerk want, toe wou hy nie die mans wat hier- vandaan kom, in vat nie. Toe sê ons, as hy die mans nie kan invat nie, dan moet ons ook weer huis toe gaan. En toe het hulle vir ons 'gepay' en weer huis toe geneem.<sup>90</sup>

When Rachel returned from Ashton she did not find factory work until the next season, instead she reverted to her normal winter work - planting trees on the forest station.

Work-seeking strikers also had to contend with police harassment. Most of the African workers had gone to St. Helena Bay's canneries where they were already working when their employers were contacted by the C.I.D. from Cape Town. They were then sacked and had their permits endorsed: "Wolseley illegal strikes - no work."<sup>91</sup> The Special Branch of the C.I.D. took a special interest in harassing strikers and attempting to black list militant workers wherever they sought employment.

### Union assessment - strike ended

On all fronts the union had been waging the Wolseley struggle, gains were made. Strikers were found jobs, funds raised, organisation in the factory attempted and numerous meetings held in areas the factory was recruiting labour from. While the meetings succeeded in spreading awareness of the strike, they failed in their main purpose in keeping out scabs, for as one lot of scabs left the factory, new ones from elsewhere took their places. Armed with the new agreement, the union managed to recruit fifty new members in the factory.

<sup>90</sup> Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 9.01.86.

<sup>91</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 4.04.54.

The strike could not go on indefinitely, a strategic assessment to decide on ending the strike was called for and dominated the deliberations of the March Management Committee meeting. Frank Marquard stated all had learnt a great deal through the strike.

Wolseley workers have learnt how to fight and even the scabs who have never heard of a union before, have learnt what the union stands for. Wolseley has been like a school for us. At least one thousand new workers have learnt about trade unionism, as during the past weeks of the strike a thousand new workers have come and gone from the factory.

We are disappointed that not all our workers have played the role they should have played. Many other unions have given us more money than our own branches have, and this is due to the fact that the leaders in our branches have not fully explained the issues at stake. Our Paarl branch collected 213.7.6 pounds by levying themselves, but this amount was raised only by the workers of H. Jones and company.<sup>92</sup> This shows what leadership can produce. The Wolseley strike must be regarded as a test case of the Food and Canning Workers Union.

Mr. Delpont has invited other employers to visit his factory and in this way he tries to influence them to take the same steps as he has taken.

It is our duty to explain the issues to the workers and make them understand that the struggle of Wolseley workers is also their struggle.<sup>93</sup>

In response to the president's statement that support from Paarl factories was uneven, A. Carolissen of Paarl said that the Associated Cannery workers felt that the Wolseley workers were wrong to have gone on strike. Oscar Mpetha countered this by asserting the workers were right and it was the law that was wrong, the strikers had fought not only for themselves, but for the union as a whole. After much further discussion it was decided to call the strike off at the end of the March and continue strike pay to the remaining unemployed strikers until then.<sup>94</sup>

#### Aftermath of the strike

There is no doubt that the factory lost a great deal through the strike. It had performed poorly during 1953 and the strike exacerbated

<sup>92</sup> Financial contributions show the unevenness of support. Of the approximately £1060 the union raised from its own branches, half came from Paarl and most from only one factory. SAT&LC affiliates, individual and overseas donations amounted to £640.

<sup>93</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 7.03.1954.

<sup>94</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 7.03.1954.

this. This was a major factor prompting C & E Mortons, the controlling company, to sell WFCC to the Langeberg Co-operative.

The workers victory was not without cost. There was the economic hardship of lost wages and having to survive on much less and some lost more than their wages. Rachel Williams could not make the payments on her house and had it sold out from under her, others possibly fared similarly. One striker, Magrita Franz, gave birth to a still born child on a train whilst evading police, the price she paid for her involvement.<sup>95</sup>

Negotiations with the new management commenced as soon as they took over the firm, and the union was pleased to obtain full recognition with trade union facilities at the factory. It was also given an undertaking that strikers would not be victimised and would be rehired strictly on merit.

Rachel Zeeman did not resume work at the factory in the next season. A new factory was opened at Tulbagh and she was one of the many who went to work there. The following year when she returned to the WFCC, conditions were much improved.

After that momentous struggle things were not the same. When the season resumed the branch became more active, seeing to it that the conditions of the agreement were adhered to. The hope that Wolseley would become a bastion of strength and deeply rooted union organisation was not realised. The principle reason for this was the eventual phasing out of production at Wolseley. Despite the initially good reception from the new management, exchanges between the union and the bosses returned to the more acrimonious form normally evident in the union's work. Contrary to assurances there would be no victimisation, many of the strikers were re-employed on starting grades. In January 1955 the Wolseley branch requested the appointment of a workers' committee. The firm refused, postponing it to a "later date"<sup>96</sup> and the branch was never able to secure official recognition for a factory committee. A few years later canning work ceased and the factory became a storage depot.

This account gives some impressions of the courage and determination of Wolseley workers, who stood together to struggle against class oppression and defend their organisation and its leaders.

95 Personal suffering and class solidarity is expressed in contradictory sentiments from Rachel Williams. On the one hand she expresses regret at having strengthened the union at personal cost, on the other, pride in her leading role.

96 FCWU Correspondence with LKB Wolseley 14.10.1955.

Attention needs to be drawn to the aspect of gender to make clear an issue that has been implicit in this strike narrative - the leading role taken by women. Local leadership was almost entirely comprised of women, there were only two men on the strike committee. As an indication, of the 131 tried for striking illegally only 18 were men, and while female employment exceeds male employment at Wolseley, nationally the ratio is close to even. Even Ben Plaatjies, a former branch executive member, who accompanied Rachel Zeeman to the boss that eventful day, did not join the strike.

Die mans was nou nie so sterk soos die vrouens nie.  
Dit was meesal die vrouens wat op staking was. Daar was  
nou 'n paar mans maar... maar die mees van die stakers  
was vrou.<sup>97</sup>

Male participation in the strike was limited. This serves to emphasize points made in chapter two about the militancy of women workers and the interplay of seasonality and union strength which are apparent in the Wolseley strike.

### Conclusion

A "test case for the union" is the way the FCWU conceived of this strike at Wolseley. What this account shows is indeed how much of a test this was for the union - a struggle testing the union's resources, strategy and determination. The issue which precipitated it affronted the very core of trade union combination - victimisation. What followed gave substance to the working class slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' Once underway the strike was transformed into a 'trial of strength' to which new dimensions of physical and legal harassment, inter-union solidarity and sacrifices were added.

Examining the functioning of the branch several important features and problems come to the fore. The composition of the workforce, coming from many different areas created problems and lines of division that were only partially or not at all overcome. The branch employed a residentially based approach for collecting subscriptions, and in that way maintained contact with the rank and file in the absence of such facilities or opportunities in the factory. However, the branch had not yet achieved unity by the time of the strike. Thus the union was seriously weakened when representing workers at the WFCC. When on strike this weakness was evident from the outset, for union did not

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97 Interview Maggie Fransman and Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 6.01.86.

have the ability to completely halt production in the crucial early phase.

Related to this was the lack of rewards for the union's anti-scab efforts. In the case of the meetings held in areas where scabs were recruited from, unorganised workers were conscientized, even if meetings were only able to serve the major purpose obliquely. In the more crucial area of dealing with the workers in the factory, the union seems to have had only limited success. Strikers being unable to bring effective pressure to bear upon scabs. Organising the workers inside the factory was made a major objective, to re-establish a presence in production, and bring those lacking worker consciousness into the union and which tempered the appeal to scabs to leave their jobs.

Critical assessment must also be made of the uneven mobilisation of the union's own branches in support of the strike. The Management committee attributed this to a failure of leaders to fully educate the members on the issue. Underlying reasons for this lay in the very real obstacles to developing inter-branch solidarity: limited amounts of inter-branch contact imposed by their geographical distribution and the high cost of such contact; seasonal fluctuations in organisation, rendering branches weak during the off-season and limiting time for meetings in season due to overtime demands. In addition, the workings of the Wolseley branch bear witness to the reliance of small branches upon head office. Such branches were apt to rely a lot on the head office and thus, while union officials threw themselves wholly into the strike, these branches were not carried with them.

The pre-eminent feature of the struggle was the courage strikers displayed in maintaining their unity and their determination not to be intimidated into succumbing to the dictates of a reactionary management. The FCWU, which rightly claimed a victory in the strike, acknowledged at the same time that, like most trade union work, this involves compromise with the bosses. The magnitude of the strike is borne out by the fact that thousands of workers throughout the canning industry remember it. Those memories are based upon the work at solidarity contributed by branches, whose industry wide organisation defeated the bosses attempts to break the strike by relocating the processing site. This demonstrates the power of industrial unionism and showed how important it was for the FCWU to cover the whole canning industry.

The Wolseley strike is a story rich in the details of canning worker's struggle and suffering. This account provides a glimpse of class struggles in the Western Cape rural towns and points to some problems organisations had to contend with when operating in the country districts.

## CHAPTER IV

### **War of Manoeuvre in the 1950s**

Methods of organising and practice evolved in the 1940s and early 1950s apply to the way the union related to the growing political momentum and mass campaigns in the years between 1954 and 1960. Much that has been written concerning trade unions during this period has examined their relations to political movements in general terms to analyse the role played by the labour movement in an unfolding national liberation struggle. In this period the attention of the union remains upon its main economic functions, but this occurs in a context altered by an upsurge of popular political campaigns. This chapter therefore focuses upon the basic activities of the union but includes some contextual aspects.

#### Political and Economic Restructuring

Thus far in the narrative, the narrow focus upon the union, has precluded much discussion of aspects of the national economy or changes in the regime. The 'organic crisis' of the late 1940s, which produced a realignment of class forces and the apartheid government, does not warrant elaboration in this study save for brief mention of pertinent political and economic developments which were to affect the union with increasing significance during this period. Three factors predominate: new labour legislation and greater control over the movement of African labour; the emergence of monopoly capital in the economy with specific reference to the canning industry; and the development of mass political movements.

The genesis of labour legislation well illustrates divisions within the power bloc which were resolved by the emergence of a new alliance of class interests in the apartheid state.<sup>1</sup> Extensive growth of manufacturing during the war years, of which the canning industry is a

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1 Theorising the apartheid state is extensively dealt with by Kaplan, D. 'Class Conflict, Capital Accumulation and the State.' D.Phil Sussex, 1977. Davies, R. Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900 - 1960. Brighton: Harvester, 1979. and O'Meara, D. Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948 Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983.

good example, had prompted organised industry to call for relaxations of influx control and for the recognition of African trade unions as a means of curbing their militancy and preventing disruptive politicisation. These were the intended aims of the Industrial Conciliation (Natives) Bill of 1947 which sought to promote responsible trade unionism and foster a bureaucratic leadership.<sup>2</sup> The Bill was never passed, falling prey to the collapse of the Smuts government in 1948 which ceased to balance the conflicting interests of different fractions of capital. Mining and agricultural sources claimed that labour supply to the low wage mining and agricultural sectors was under pressure due to rising manufacturing wages and that trade union rights would exacerbate this. In the white labour movement a position of accommodation towards African trade unions was replaced by opposition, as groups of white workers experienced the erosion of their monopoly on skills and the potential of replacement by cheaper black labour. In addition to this the fading power of African unionism on the Rand as the Council of Non-European Trade Unions' (CNETU) failed to adapt to post-war conditions, tempered calls from industry for recognition.<sup>3</sup>

For manufacturing capital, large and small, South Africa's position in the world economy, which had benefited from decreased competition during the war, now faced severe competition, requiring restructuring for successful accumulation. Larger firms had the ability to increase their rate of relative surplus extraction by increasing their organic composition of capital. Not so for the smaller firms. Kaplan argues that, those firms with a low organic composition of capital, which tended to be both small-scale and undercapitalised, were reliant upon a reduction in the value of variable capital i.e. wage rates, if they were to survive in the new post-war situation where international links were necessitated.<sup>4</sup> The program to achieve this was to lower black wages and increase control over the popular classes,

2 Davies, R. 'Class Character of South African Industrial Conciliation Legislation' in Webster, E. (ed.) Essays in South African Labour History. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978. and Lewis, D. 'The South African State and the African Trade Unions 1943-1953.' mimeo, 1976. pp.22-24. Lewis sees the 1947 Bill as resulting from a 'defensive' state responding to calls from fractions of industrial capital.

3 CNETU Claimed 119 Affiliates and a membership of 158 000 in 1945, a paper claim certainly, which dropped to 17 269 in 1950. Horrel, M. South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class. Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1961.

4 Kaplan, D. op.cit. p.282.

urban and rural and in particular through checks on African urbanisation and proletarianisation. Several interests converged on a program to restrict African urbanisation as the growth of large squatter settlements around major industrial centers challenged racial segregation and represented a major political threat to the prevailing order. Farm labour supplies were threatened by such movement to the cities.

Tighter labour controls were implemented through increasing influx control and the establishment of labour bureaus in 1953 to serve the dual function of more systematic distribution of labour to agriculture and mining and to arrest the flow of people to the cities.

These developments were reflected in the industrial legislation that was eventually passed by the National Party government. When a Nationalist appointed commission on industrial legislation made its recommendations in 1951, it proposed recognising African trade unions. These recommendation were rejected and two years later a diametrically opposite direction was taken. The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 fully illustrated the government's new approach to labour legislation. It excluded African workers from the apparatuses of the central state and sought to contain their struggles via a parallel set of apparatuses. The Act banned African workers from striking, deliberately excluded direct union representation and set up a racially separate structure for dealing with disputes, an extremely patronising and bureaucratic structure under the direction of 'Bantu Labour Officers'. It also prevented stop-order facilities for trade union subscriptions. This measure was a foretaste of the tighter racial segregation of labour organisation to be applied in the future.

First tabled in 1954, and passed in 1956, amendments to the Industrial Conciliation Act prohibited the registration of 'mixed' trade unions; required existing 'mixed' unions to separate into uni-racial unions or form separate racial branches under white executive control; provided for industries to be declared essential industries, so prohibiting strikes; and empowered the Minister to apply statutory job reservation.

Labour organisation faced far less favorable conditions during the 1950s as the measures outlined above took effect. Real wages declined between 1948 and 1953 by close to 5%<sup>5</sup> as the apartheid state attacked

<sup>5</sup> Bloch, G. 'The Development of Manufacturing Industry in South Africa 1939-1969.' MA. UCT, 1980. p.217.

wage gains made during the war years. In meeting the imperatives for capital accumulation by means of the extraction of relative surplus value, the apartheid state helped to promote the development of monopoly capital. Measures to facilitate the transition to monopoly capital involved the application of a set of fiscal, protection, infrastructural, research and loan policies as well as, indirectly through the reduction of black wages to increase surplus extraction.

### Canning Industry Monopolises

How did these trends manifest themselves in the canning industry? Experiencing similar imperatives to increase the organic composition of capital as other manufacturing capitals, the industry stood apart in its relation to world markets. With an established export base the industry's crisis of profitability turned upon how to maintain competitiveness to retain its share on these markets, in contradistinction to a nascent manufacturing industry faced with international competition.

In 1954, with a rapid series of acquisitions, the Langeberg Koöperasie Beperk (LKB) took over four major canning companies. Impetus for this came from the deregulation of the British market in 1954 when sales to Britain reverted back to private importers. After the war British factories resumed production and competition increased, with a resultant decrease in demand for South African goods, leaving some newly installed plant idle. On the Rand three large canning factories, H. Jones, Standard Cannery and one other operated in a local market too small to support them with the decline in exports of vegetable products. On the Rand production was mostly of vegetable products for the domestic market and did not have a large export component which distinguished it from the Western Cape; as vegetable products were not exported in quantity after the war. Standard Cannery management proposed an amalgamation of producers on the Rand and this set in motion a series of take-overs on a national scale. Wolf Heller, owner of Standard Cannery made bids to take over canneries on the Rand and elsewhere. Since LKB was a co-operative, owned by its members, it could not be taken over like the other private companies with the result that Heller agreed to merge his firm of Standard Cannery with LKB. In December 1954 this merger went into effect with Heller appointed joint

general manager along with George Whitehead, a position he retained for one year only.<sup>6</sup>

Acquisitions within the industry were made easier by uncertainty about its future, prompting several companies to realise their canning assets. LKB stated that fruit farmers stood to lose the most.<sup>7</sup> Within LKB "it was thought that the South African industry had to limit numbers and had no choice than to become more streamlined. For co-operative members this was a very major question as they were reliant upon canning exports."<sup>8</sup> LKB had the advantage of low interest loans from the Land Bank and used its access to credit facilities made available to agriculture to acquire Standard Fruit Co., Associated Canners, Wolseley Fruit Canning Co. and United Enterprises. This gave LKB fourteen factories in the Western Province, one in Port Elizabeth and two on the Rand. Early rationalisation resulted in the closure of a canning plant in Wellington and one in Germiston. LKB had a total turnover of £2,5m prior to the acquisitions and it took over companies with a combined turnover of £6m per annum. This required very large capital loans, giving it a weak capital structure. As a result of this expansion, and since operating capital also had to be borrowed, LKB's financial position was unsound and consequently when the canning industry experienced a recession in the late 1950s, bankruptcy followed.

The implications of these mergers and the emergence of LKB as the leading producer in the industry, were significant for the union. LKB was formally constituted as a co-operative of fruit farmers. However, it assumed the identity of a canning company which was concerned to show profits as a cannery early on. It did not function as an agricultural processing concern solely for the benefit of farmers. Farmers supplying the co-operative with fruit received the same payment other canneries gave. On labour matters LKB followed farmers' attitudes and strongly resisted wage increases which would affect farm labour supplies.

LKB enjoyed a privileged position with the government as a result of its political connections and numbered among those who were members of its board, several Members of Parliament. Fully conscious

6 Interview Mr. G. J. Viljoen, Bellville 30.04.86.

7 Hjul, P. 'Consolidation moves in Unions food canning industries.' Food Industries of South Africa, March 1955. p.25.

8 Interview Mr. D. du Toit, Bellville 27.01.86.

that LKB's dominance in the industry pitted the union against the most anti-union firm of all and that its political connections linked it to the National Party government; the union commented in 1954: "Farmers are gaining more economic power and will have more political power to influence the government against workers, especially canning workers."<sup>9</sup> The union's newspaper, Morning Star informed members of the mergers' effects and of the need for greater unity on their part.<sup>10</sup>

#### Political Resistance Gathers Momentum

An increase in the size of the working class and the proportion of black workers within it during the economic development in the 1940s had deep political ramifications. The Rand saw the growth of a number of squatter movements and a struggles over issues such as bus fare increases which brought a new political dimension to resistance politics, giving it a mass character and greater working class participation. Within the ANC a conservative leadership came under pressure from the Youth League, which contributed to the rejuvenation of the ANC and succeeded in having its more militant tactics adopted by the mother body in the 1949 Programme of Action.<sup>11</sup> Within the Indian Congresses in Natal (NIC) and the Transvaal (TIC) a struggle for control between conservative and radical factions saw a communist backed leadership emerge to take control of these nationalist movements. Communist Party members became increasingly active in the ANC, TIC and NIC, paving the way for the adoption of more militant tactics by these organisations and for greater co-operation between them. When the Communist Party was banned in 1950 many of its former members devoted their energies to these organisations. Through undertaking joint campaigns such as the 1950 Freedom Day strike and more importantly the Defiance Campaign, separate Congresses constituting the national liberation movement coalesced in the Congress Alliance. The Congress Alliance (CA) consisted of the ANC, South African Indian Congress (SAIC), South African Coloured Peoples

9 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 31.10.54.

10 Morning Star, 2(4) December 1954.

11 Lodge, T. Black Politics in South Africa since 1945. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983. p.26.

Organisation (SACPO) South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD)<sup>12</sup> and was joined soon after its formation by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

These developments and the realignments of opposition movements were largely based upon activities in Natal and the Transvaal, from where most of the political direction of the Congress Alliance was to come during the next few years. Regional variations existed and these had a considerable effect upon the union as the branch in Cape Town operated in a different milieu to those in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

In the Western Cape the ANC was weak, internally divided between Africanists and those sympathetic to the Communist Party and favouring multiracialism. In Cape Town there was minimal activity on ANC campaigns through the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> As a result towns like Paarl and Worcester assumed a greater role as the ANC was more cohesive in those places. Worcester took a leading role in the Defiance Campaign.<sup>14</sup> However, the Defiance Campaign did not serve to revitalise and unify the ANC in the Western Cape and the region was suspended from the Cape Congress in the mid-1950s as a result of an assessment by the provincial executive which favour the Africanist criticisms of branches in the Western Cape.<sup>15</sup> Oscar Mpetha's role in these activities is of considerable importance. While Mpetha was secretary of the AFCWU he became active in the ANC. Positioning himself on the left, Mpetha was deeply embroiled in this politicising and his own election to presidency of the Cape ANC was in a disputed election.<sup>16</sup> Outside of the turmoil with the ANC in Cape Town, ANC branches in the smaller towns like Paarl and Worcester were more unified, and were places where a closer relationship existed between the union and local ANC branches.

12 These organisations came together in 1954 to form the National Action Council for the Congress of the People. Lodge, T. Ibid. p.70. This council was the forerunner of the CA's National Consultative Committee.

13 Lodge, T. op.cit. p.214.

14 Shandler, D. op.cit. pp.55-60.

15 Tshurungwa, E.T. Letters to the Provincial Executive recommending the suspension of the Western Cape Region. Carter and Karis collection, microfilm reel 3B 2:DA17 12:41.

16 Karis, T. and Carter, G. From Protest to Challenge. vol.4 'Political Profiles 1882-1964.' Stanford: Hoover Institute Press. 1977. p.103. Also Biography of Oscar Mpetha by Ronald Segal in Carter and Karis collection, microfilm reel 12A 2:XM150.

In contrast to the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape was one of the Congress Alliance strongholds and there, as we shall see later, the union experienced very considerable support for its struggles from Congress organisations.

### Dissolution of the Trades and Labour Council

We rejoin the FCWU at start of 1954, to resume the examination of its internal affairs and its role in the labour movement. At this time the union was simultaneously in the throes of the Wolseley strike, involved in the campaigns initiated by the Congress Alliance and fighting to preserve a progressive unity in the registered union movement.

The effects of repressive labour legislation had been examined by Ray Alexander in her articles in The Guardian and its successor Advance. In one such piece she quoted E.S. Sachs,

It is a common tactic of all fascist governments to launch an attack first upon the weakest and most defenseless section of the people and having achieved their aim, then proceed to deal with the stronger sections. One may state with certainty that if the Native workers are deprived of their freedom today, the European, Coloured and Indian workers will be deprived of theirs tomorrow.<sup>17</sup>

This warning was repeated frequently in union meetings and publications. In February 1954 the FCWU Management Committee (MC -the renamed Central Committee) urged members to acquaint themselves with the contents of the recently published Industrial Conciliation Bill and called for a campaign to oppose it.<sup>18</sup> First steps taken were to circulate copies of a pamphlet produced by the ANC, CPC and COD after which the Paarl branch convened a meeting of trade unions to discuss the Bill.

Labour legislation was the type of matter the union had traditionally dealt with through the TLC. As a small left-wing union, it felt effective opposition required a much broader base than its own resources could muster. To appreciate the capability of the TLC to resist the ban on mixed unions requires an understanding of the composition of the TLC. Lewis (1984) argues that by the early 1950s the basis of unity between the industrial and craft trade unions had been

<sup>17</sup> The Guardian, May 11 1952.

<sup>18</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 7.02.54.

eroded by changes in the division of labour and work organisation, and the appeals for unity from the left could not arrest the move to racially based sectionalism. The TLC, Lewis argues, maintained a progressive policy over the years, from the 1930s to the 1950s, as craft unions resisted encroachment into their trades without respect to colour and were able to co-operate with the militant industrial unions which organised non-racially for maximum bargaining strength. Problems the FCWU had with TLC reticence in dealing with unemployment insurance and the suppression of communism Act, discussed in chapter two, show a growing conservatism evident in the TLC in the 1940s. TLC unity failed as a result of changes in the labour process which undermined craft work through deskilling and evoked from these unions new demarcation along racial lines. Similarly, non-racial unionism came under pressure within the industrial unions as rapid changes in the racial composition of the labour force and the reorganisation of production made African labour a threat to white workers. Coupled with the political and ideological dimensions of the class struggle affecting the white labour movement, unity in the TLC was under pressure. In 1947 a number of right wing unions left the TLC and three years later the craft unions disaffiliated.<sup>19</sup>

When a 'Unity' conference was called to campaign against the Industrial Conciliation (I.C.) Bill in May 1954 the TLC adopted a position of excluding African unions entirely in an effort to retain support from the pseudo craft unions<sup>20</sup> as this was regarded as essential to the successful opposition of the Bill.<sup>21</sup>

As no invitation to the 'Unity' conference was extended to the AFCWU, the FCWU refused to attend the conference without the AFCWU and demanded that the TLC stick to the non-racialism of its constitution. Significantly, the union for the first time started looking beyond the TLC and expressed a willingness to support CNETU, should it call a conference on the Bill. This was followed up shortly afterwards in a speech Frank Marquard made to the MC where he stated the 'Unity' conference had shown that the country's workers lacked class conscious leaders.

19 Lewis, J. op.cit. p.156.

20 Pseudo craft unions are defined by Lewis (1984) as those where craft control had been diminished, African workers excluded and Coloured and Indian workers organised in skilled and semi-skilled grades to prevent under-cutting. Ibid. pp.101-110.

21 Lewis, J. op.cit. p.172.

It is therefore important for the rank and file to rise to the occasion and become leaders in their areas and work-places. Our union gives leadership in the country. We all remember what conditions were like without the union. Therefore we must take the lead in the struggle to defend the trade unions. We must form Councils of Action in every area to mobilise the workers and must show our opposition to the Industrial Conciliation Bill.<sup>22</sup>

These views were endorsed and the union resolved to work with CNETU to form Workers Councils of Action to oppose both the I.C. Bill and the Native Labour Act. Councils were started in Paarl, Worcester, Johannesburg and Durban. Records report the formation of councils but there are no references to what action they undertook.<sup>23</sup>

Concern with trade union unity did not isolate the union from national political developments. When approached by the National Action Council for the Congress of the People the FCWU responded enthusiastically to the campaign. Management Committee members attended the planning conference in Cape Town where they all volunteered to work for the Congress and the head office donated £2 2s. Speaking in support the campaign Frank Marquard reported back to the union.

The conference was called to work for freedom. Volunteers are necessary to gather the peoples' support. This is the first time in the history of South Africa that all the organisations have come together to liberate South Africa. The Congress of the People appeals to all democratically minded people, both European and Non-European to work for freedom. Therefore the future depends upon the people, especially the women because they have contributed so much to our country.<sup>24</sup>

The campaign was taken to members through meetings and through the pages of Morning Star, which appealed to members to become volunteers, spread the message and "rouse the people to discuss what they want of freedom."<sup>25</sup>

In the midst of this rising tide of political activity, FCWU president Frank Marquard and a branch secretary, Gus Coe, were ordered

22 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 30.05.54.

23 These were referred to in the 1954 Annual Report and in MC minutes where the FCWU donated funds for their establishment. How long they functioned for is not clear.

24 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 9.09.54.

25 Morning Star, 2(4) October 1954.

by the Minister of Justice to resign from their union positions and prohibited from attending meetings for two years.

Ms. Coe had been active in the trade union movement for a decade, was on the TLC Local Committee and had been appointed FCWU Port Elizabeth branch secretary in 1951. She also worked for the Textiles and Distributive workers union's.<sup>26</sup> The AFCWU president Mr. M. Mapangwana declared, "we, the workers, shall never allow our secretaries to be removed by a person who did not elect them, and we shall not be terrorised. These Nationalist dictators will not stop the peoples' struggle."<sup>27</sup>

Frank Marquard, FCWU president since 1944, was amongst the most significant leaders to emerge from the union in the early period. He had committed himself fully to the workers struggle, undertaking organising trips, spending his weekends visiting branches and taking a leading role in the unions political activities, addressing meetings and involving himself in other organisations in addition to union work. He had also represented the union at the World Federation of Trade Unions conference in 1954, touring Eastern Europe in the process and meeting trade unionists from many countries. For most of his term of office he was a full-time worker at H. Jones in Paarl, only becoming a full-time union official in 1953. In the memories of canning workers Frank Marquard stands out as one of the union's founders and most inspiring leaders.<sup>28</sup> His banning removed him from the FCWU, World Peace Movement, Cape Peace Council, Civil Rights Congress, CPC and ANC. In his farewell speech to the MC he declared the banning of himself, Gus Coe, Ray Alexander and other trade union and national liberation leaders as part of the government's move towards a police state. The unionists' only crime had been to bring about improvements in the lives of thousands.

I ask you workers not to forget the past. Tell the conditions of the past to the younger people at the factory so that they too can know what our union means to you and to them. They too will learn to understand and to defend our union, to defend our union, to defend the workers organisations who struggle for freedom,

26 Gus Coe replaced the previous Port Elizabeth secretary, Mr. M. Desai, who was removed for financial corruption. The recuperation of union funds misappropriated by him took several years.

27 Advance, September 2 1954.

28 Those interviewed refer to Alexander, Marquard and Mpetha as key organisers and treat Ray and Frank as a team who came to spread the message of organisation amongst them.

peace and harmony between peoples. Organisations like ourselves struggle so that our children may have bread and butter, warm clothes, decent homes, schools and grow up in freedom and not in slavery.

By freedom we mean freedom to do the work we want to do... to live where we please... the right to vote, the right to elect and be elected, both men and women to the governing bodies of our country.

Long live the unity of the workers!<sup>29</sup>

When the TLC called a second 'Unity' conference, Becky Lan and Delores Telling represented the FCWU and Oscar Mpetha the AFCWU. Their mandate was to fight amendments excluding African workers from a new federation and if that failed, to oppose the dissolution of the TLC to form a new racist body.<sup>30</sup> At the conference and the last TLC conference held immediately afterwards, the union joined several other industrial unions in denouncing the capitulation of the TLC to racism. Oscar Mpetha made these points in a speech to the conference.

The African worker is here to stay as an important part of industry. The trade union movement made the grave error in the past when it accepted the definition of employee under the first Industrial Conciliation Act. Furthermore only a truly united trade union movement including African workers can defeat the fascist policy of Malan.<sup>31</sup>

Becky Lan appealed to delegates not to accept dissolution and warned what was happening to African trade unions would be applied to coloured and Indian workers organisation in the future. "Don't think you can hide your head in the ground like ostriches. You will be attacked from behind."<sup>32</sup> Their efforts came to naught, as the TLC conference voted to dissolve itself.<sup>33</sup> In its place the South African Trade Union Council (SATUC), which excluded African unions, was formed. Unions that opposed dissolution issued a joint statement afterwards expressing their determination to "struggle against the policy of racial discrimination and work for the achievement of a single trade union organisation embracing all sections of the working class."<sup>34</sup> These unions in food, chemical textiles and tin set up a working committee to establish a new union centre.

29 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 9.09.54.

30 Ibid.

31 Morning Star, 2(4) October 1954.

32 Advance, October 14 1954.

33 Lewis, J. op.cit. p.173.

34 Saamtrek, October 8 1954.

Having already experienced two rounds of bans on leadership there was no respite for the union as Becky Lan and Oscar Mpetha were both prohibited from attending meetings for two years in 1954.<sup>35</sup> The ban caused great difficulty for them as the very nature of trade unionism requires collective action and decision making, and labouring under these bans necessitated using proxy spokespersons to carry their views to meetings. To add to this the FCWU secretary in Worcester, Sarah Wentzel, was ordered by the Minister to resign and banned from gatherings for two years.<sup>36</sup> Union members in the Transvaal held a meeting that packed the Johannesburg Trades Hall, protesting attacks on their leaders.<sup>37</sup>

At this point the union also had its first experience of the application of pass laws directly affecting its activities. A Paarl factory requested that women workers be permitted to work night shift as the Native Labour Board had refused permission for contract workers to be brought in for the short pea season. The union response was to oppose women working night shift, as this opposition would strengthen the African worker's fight for work.<sup>38</sup>

### Gains and Setbacks

The outcome of wage negotiations in the mid-1950s reflect the state of trade union activity around the country and indicate different levels of organisation. A favorable agreement to run for two years, starting in 1953, was reached for canning factories in the Western Cape, bringing wage increases of between 3/9d. to 5s. per week, upgrading some operations and providing union facilities.<sup>39</sup> Piece-rate negotiations, undertaken each season at factory level did not get off the ground in 1954 as the banning disrupted the union and local leadership were insufficiently prepared to negotiate on their own.<sup>40</sup>

35 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 31.10.54.

36 In denouncing these bannings, articles which appear in Morning Star implicitly countered anti-communism by pointing out that the Suppression of Communism Act was being used against people never listed as communists. "Under the pretext of attacking Communism, the government will attempt to destroy the National Liberation and trade union movement." Morning Star, 2(4) December 1954.

37 Morning Star, 2(4) December 1954.

38 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.09.54.

39 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1954.

40 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1955.

In Johannesburg the application for extension of registration failed as the union was not sufficiently representative of white workers there and so reapplied to represent black workers. The Johannesburg FCWU branch was very weak with the bulk of its financing coming from the AFCWU. Proceeding with caution, lest the employers invoke the Native Labour Act, a gentlemen's agreement was reached extending increases gained in the Cape.<sup>41</sup>

In Durban results were mixed. The union achieved the first wage increase for food packing workers at Hinds since 1943, but a lock-out, which occurred while negotiations were in progress at another factory, led to the entire workforce being dismissed.<sup>42</sup>

Port Elizabeth suffered organisational setbacks as a result of the banning of Gus Coe. Only after several visits to assist and train the secretaries, did the situation improve. A conciliation board agreement brought increases in the COLA into line with the Cape after a strenuous fight by the branch assisted by Leon Levy, the Johannesburg branch-secretary.<sup>43</sup> Demands for fish canning workers were submitted and plans made to organise trips to ensure that the branches would pass inspection. At the same time the union leadership expressed their intention to improve organisation of fish workers in Namibia.<sup>44</sup>

To tackle the fish branches renewed organising was embarked upon, but in the process the union was subjected to increased police harassment, hindering their every move. At Lambert's Bay police intimidated officials and prevented the union obtaining a venue, briefly detaining Oscar Mpetha. At Stompneus Bay the police closed in arresting Becky Lan who was sitting in a car whilst a union meeting was in progress in a nearby house.<sup>45</sup> In a separate incident shortly afterwards Oscar Mpetha was called to attend to a dispute at a factory in the town and, in what appeared to be a deliberate trap, was invited by management to address the workers. As soon as he did so he was arrested by waiting police.<sup>46</sup> Both secretaries were charged with

41 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 12.02.55.

42 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.07.54.

43 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 12.02.55. Leon Levy was the National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dying Workers (NULCDW) secretary and managed the Johannesburg branch in addition to many other trade union responsibilities.

44 Luderitz Bay had been organised by Marquard in 1950. It was active for some time in the early 1950s.

45 New Age, February 17 1955.

46 Interview Oscar Mpetha by Alan Hirsch, Cape Town, 5.06.82.

breaking their banning orders and found guilty by a Vredenberg magistrate. Lan was given a short prison sentence,<sup>47</sup> and also charged for attending a meeting in Tulbagh. In reviewing this harassment the FCWU MC discussed the need for new ways of organising that would overcome this expensive and time wasting situation.<sup>48</sup>

Both took their cases on appeal. Mpetha's case was handled by Lionel Foreman and the judgment was successfully overruled.<sup>49</sup> Lan was acquitted on charges of attending a gathering in Tulbagh as the crown's case collapsed when statements ostensibly taken from workers by the C.I.D. were admitted to be false.<sup>50</sup> In her other case, after a lengthy wrangle over the definition of a gathering for a prescribed person, her appeal was dismissed.<sup>51</sup>

#### The Formation of SACTU - Political Campaigning Steps Up

Continuing the course mooted immediately after the dissolution of the TLC, several of the unions which had issued a joint statement at the close of the conference formed a Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee, and proceeded to formulate a new non-racial trade union centre. CNETU was involved from the outset and resolved to jointly call the proposed conference for a new federation.<sup>52</sup>

The Co-ordinating Committee drew up a draft constitution which was presented to the union in February 1955 when Piet Beyleveld addressed the Management Committee on the need for a new co-ordinating body based on the principle of 'no apartheid in the trade unions'. Discussion on the draft constitution was held and whole-hearted support given to the proposed new centre. Mr. J. Fillies, FCWU vice-president, was elected as the Cape representative of the union and, since there were insufficient funds to send up more delegates from Cape Town, the

47 She was sentenced to three months with compulsory labour, two months suspended for three years. New Age, March 17 1955.

48 It was suggested that experienced people organise alone, and that others be taught to drive the union car. FCWU Management Committee minutes, 9.01.55.

49 Mahlakahlaka, B. 'The Legendary Oscar Mpetha.' Unpublished biography, 1985. p.33.

50 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 12.06.55.

51 New Age, September 1 1955.

52 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. Organize... or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980. p.91.

Johannesburg branch was asked to elect other representatives to make up the union delegation.<sup>53</sup>

At the inaugural conference of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in March 1955, head office was represented by Vice President J. Fillies while Leon Levy and two workers represented the Johannesburg branch. No AFCWU representatives were recorded in the minutes. Levy was elected SACTU treasurer and J. Fillies a member of the first SACTU NEC.<sup>54</sup> Reporting back to an enthusiastic MC in Cape Town, comrade Fillies told delegates of the SACTU constitution and resolutions taken at its inaugural conference, whereupon the MC resolved to give SACTU its full support and assist in formation of a SACTU local committee in Cape Town.<sup>55</sup>

Similar enthusiasm was expressed at the FCWU NEC in March where the decision to affiliate to SACTU was formally made. Delegates greeted the resolution, pledging support to building a truly united and independent trade union movement free of racialism, with applause.

... a trade union movement which will be capable of defending the working people of South Africa against the persistent attacks of the Nationalist Government upon their civil liberties and rights, and to advance the interests of the workers.<sup>56</sup>

There then ensued the process of encouraging branches to affiliate their members to SACTU. By July only Paarl and Groot Drakenstein had paid affiliation fees for 1380 members, by August this rose to 1600. Two members from the Cape Town branch were elected to serve on the SACTU Local Committee.<sup>57</sup> Many union officials were to serve on SACTU bodies and the union's financial strength supported SACTU.<sup>58</sup> Implementing the call to extend organisation to agricultural workers the union started the first of several attempts in this direction. Branches were urged to start organising farm workers, but as delegates

53 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 12.02.55.

54 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.96.

55 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 27.03.55.

56 New Age, May 5 1955.

57 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 12.06.55. & 17.07.55.

58 Financial support from the union was particularly evident on the Rand where SACTU's head office was. Main financial contributions coming from A±FCWU and NULCDW sources. Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.216. Leon Levy became SACTU president and union secretaries in Boksburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth served as secretaries of their respective SACTU Local Committees. FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1957.

to the November 1955 MC reported, farm workers although keen to be organised, were afraid of loosing their jobs and houses.<sup>59</sup>

The following year overtures to the farm workers were again made in an effort to implement the SACTU call to 'organise the unorganised' but without success. Branches were urged to provide funds for SACTU strikes that took place in Cape Town. Poor responses from the branches prompted head office to cajole branches for their lack of working class solidarity, the benefits of which they had experienced in their own strikes.<sup>60</sup>

In light of the growing activity and political involvement of the union it was decided to transform the union's journal into a regular newspaper. Accordingly the Morning Star Publishing Company (Pty) Ltd. was formed in February 1955 to publish Morning Star. Costs per issue came to roughly £30, a considerable sum for which the head office had to be reimbursed by the branches. This was a financial burden and later on the union gladly accepted SACTU's offer to share expenses.<sup>61</sup>

At meetings and in publications attention had been given to the Congress of the People campaign, urging members to mobilise support for the forthcoming congress and send in their demands. The union was officially represented at the congress by J. Fillies, branches being represented by a regional delegation. George Peke of the CPC opened the annual conference in September 1955 with a keynote address on the Freedom Charter which was unanimously adopted by the union on a resolution proposed by Leon Levy.<sup>62</sup> An effort was made to popularise the Charter among the members through circular letters and in the newspaper. When approached by the Congress of the People Campaign to participate in the Million Signature campaign to popularise the Charter, the FCWU undertook to complete three hundred forms.<sup>63</sup> Records do not indicate how many signatures were collected. Involvement in the Congress of the People campaign and subsequent follow up was uneven, as Liz Abrahams has commented.

A delegation from our branches went and then reported back. The delegates came home, and it were a bit 'finish and klaar'. That is my feeling about it. They bring the

59 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 19.11.55.

60 FCWU Circular letter No.26/56. 16.08.56.

61 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.03.56. The paper was then published under the name Morning Star - Workers Unity later pages were given over to 'Nete - Truth', a TWIU publication.

62 14th Annual Conference of the FCWU 27/28.11.55.

63 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.03.56.

Freedom Charter back, and read and discuss a little. But it was not serious enough.<sup>64</sup>

Despite other commitments, the union's over-riding concern as always was to build worker organisation. On the positive side, in the mid-1950s, food packing and milling workers in several factories had conciliation boards appointed and won improvements. A new pineapple factory in East London expanded the potential of the branch in that city and members there were keen to have a full time official. At the same time there were also problems, as when LKB in Port Elizabeth informed the union it was now company policy not to grant stop orders on subscriptions the union protested strongly as stop-orders were regarded, "as a symbol of recognition of our union which we are determined to retain."<sup>65</sup> This move was a foretaste of greater opposition from LKB in the future. In addition, a poor fishing season on the West coast prevented the union from getting sufficient members in good standing to succeed with a conciliation board forcing it to withdraw it's application.<sup>66</sup> In the past these workers had been able to sign for unemployment benefits when they were without work, but a new ruling required them to be given notice by employers. The union took up their case, publicising their plight in New Age and meeting with employers. The result of this was an agreement that a fish workers provident fund would be established.<sup>67</sup> It was to be several years before this was achieved.

It was at this point that two further features of the apartheid state's restructuring began to directly affect the union - the removal of African people from the Western Cape and Group Area removals. On both these issues the union campaigned on behalf of it's members and more broadly, in alliances with other organisations. African women were ordered out of Lambert's Bay and a struggle for them to remain with their husbands ensued. Protests were made to several organisations and negotiations with factory management conducted to resist removals. Strong motivation for supporting the branch's struggle were made as the leadership fully realised that many of the union's members were directly under threat. The Management Committee stated "Only the unity

<sup>64</sup> Suttner, R. & Cronin, J. Thirty years of the Freedom Charter. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986. p.108.

<sup>65</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.09.55.

<sup>66</sup> FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1955.

<sup>67</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 19.11.55.

of the women in all areas will bring about the freedom of women to live where they choose together with their families."<sup>68</sup>

Threats of loosing homes built up over many years loomed as the Group Areas Board made its proposals for Paarl and Wellington. A FCWU memorandum countering these proposals was submitted by the secretary<sup>69</sup> and members were encouraged to organise support in their areas for SACPO's campaign against the Group Areas Act.<sup>70</sup>

Extending passes to African women on a larger scale commenced in 1956. The union resisted, and in Paarl and Port Elizabeth AFCWU members and their respective secretaries, Elizabeth Mafeking and Francis Beard were in the forefront of the anti-pass campaigns. African women in Paarl found themselves expelled from factories for not having passes. One factory sent African women workers to the pass office where a few were issued with passes and the rest ordered to leave the town. At another factory all women who were not in possession of a pass were given notice. Confronted by this deliberate manipulation of racial divisions in the workforce, to break workers unity and weaken organisation, the union campaigned all out for unity. Elizabeth Mafeking, president of the AFCWU, was reported as saying:

We can fight all these troubles only by unity. I want to appeal to all coloured canning workers not to stand idly by while these things happen to the African sisters. They must join us and fight this evil.<sup>71</sup>

With other SACTU and political activists in Port Elizabeth, Francis Beard struggled against the tightening controls placed on women. They picketed the pass unit and staged demonstrations in protest.<sup>72</sup>

This resistance, led by the AFCWU and Federation of South African Women (FSAW),<sup>73</sup> continued even after employers made the possession of a pass a condition of employment. Women used deception and other tactics to avoid taking a pass.

68 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 15.01.56.

69 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.09.55.

70 Morning Star, 3(1) June 1955.

71 New Age, March 1 1956.

72 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.323.

73 Close links existed between the Federation and the Union. Ray Alexander actively promoted the organisation of women and the large female membership of the union and the active pursuit of campaigns lead by the FSAW made affiliation to the Federation a significant influence upon the union.

Action to defend municipal voting rights co-ordinated by FSAW had union support.<sup>74</sup> Although the union was affiliated to the Federation and members from the union participated in the mass demonstrations against the extension of passes to women on August 9 1956, it was not officially represented at the event.

In March 1956 Becky Lan's conviction for breaking a banning order was confirmed, with a sentence imposed for three months compulsory labour, suspended for three years. When this was made public, workers in Grabouw, believing she had been taken to prison, refused to work until they saw her in the flesh.<sup>75</sup> More significantly, a conviction under the Suppression of Communism Act paved the way for her to be listed and removed from the union. Anticipating this, the Management Committee decided to elect Elizabeth Abrahams of Paarl to the position of Acting General Secretary and take steps to ensure more leaders were trained to take up positions in the union. The precautions were not in vain. In July Becky Lan was ordered to resign from her post and Liz Abrahams replaced her as Acting General Secretary,<sup>76</sup> becoming the first worker from within the ranks of the FCWU to take the post.

During the main wage negotiations in the canning industry in 1956, the union pressed for, and secured, a conciliation board covering more factories than were covered by the Food Canners Council. Employers first offered to extend the 1954 agreement, they then offered a 25% increase on COLA. Workers instructed their negotiators to hold out for a 6s. increase on all grades and when negotiations met in deadlock branches were visited to discuss what action to take if employers refused. Head-office officials discovered that the bigger factories were attempting to pressurise workers committees into accepting the offer, a situation which the union vehemently rejected.<sup>77</sup>

Settlement was achieved on an agreement that involved consolidating the additional COLA in the 1954 agreement with basic wages, a new COLA on the now higher basic wages, plus additional COLA. The agreement was to last for two years. It was a very tough conciliation board, and the Management Committee concluded that, had the branches been better

74 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 28.04.56.

75 FCWU Circular letter No.13/56. 16.03.56.

76 Since the banning of Ray Alexander and Frank Marquard, the incumbent had been an acting official, as they were re-elected to their positions by the annual conferences.

77 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.11.56.

organised, increases could have been greater.<sup>78</sup> This agreement also displayed a tendency in the union's wage negotiations to raise wages by means of increases in the COLA and not on increasing basic wages. The union's task was not made any easier by the loss of its main negotiator, Leon Levy, who was among those arrested and charged with treason in the 1956 Treason Trial. Three other union officials were included: Mr A. Mhlangu, Johannesburg AFCWU secretary, Francis Beard, Port Elizabeth AFCWU secretary and Billy Nair, Durban FCWU secretary.<sup>79</sup> Levy was banned shortly afterwards and restricted to Johannesburg, as a result of which no agreements for Cape Town or East London were reached.

Learning the lessons of the previous year's piece-rate negotiations, better preparations were made. A special conference was called for the purpose and as a result bosses were forced to withdraw from their initial position of 'no increases'.<sup>80</sup> Union branches in the Western Cape canning districts consolidated their position, as did those in Johannesburg. Action against unfair dismissals involved the union in strikes at Worcester and Johannesburg, in both cases they were charged for striking illegally, but the Johannesburg workers were found not guilty.<sup>81</sup> Healthy organisation was by no means the rule. The West Coast fishing branches were in a very poor state and none of them were represented at the 1956 annual conference. Port Elizabeth which had for some time been weakened by internal divisions continued to require the attention of head office. Workers expressed dissatisfaction over the administration of the Medical Benefit Fund, claiming that Ms. L. Diedericks, the administrator, showed partiality to workers at one factory.<sup>82</sup> Divisions continued to plague this branch for several years.

### The First Registration Debate

When the Industrial Conciliation Act that had precipitated the break up of the TLC was passed in 1956, strategic questions, concerning the use of industrial relations machinery, registration and parallel unions, that had occupied the progressive union movement in the past,

78 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 16.12.56.

79 FCWU Circular letter No.10/56. 19.12.56.

80 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1956.

81 Ibid. and FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.03.56. .

82 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 5.08.56.

resurfaced in a debate within SACTU. In many respects this debate was truncated from the start, the majority of SACTU affiliates were unregistered and not directly affected nor powerful enough to be influential, and unity of the broader trade union movement, necessary for effective opposition to the Act, was ruled out. Despite attempts on SACTU's part to co-operate with SATUC, the latter refused and actively set out to undermine SACTU.<sup>83</sup> SACTU's registered affiliates, those which carried SACTU financially and were its most organised components, were the most directly affected. For the union this debate was very important. It took a leading position on the question and its outcome is instructive for what it reveals about the relationship between the registered FCWU and unregistered AFCWU.<sup>84</sup>

Three options were spelt out at the SACTU NEC meeting in June 1956: form separate racial branches, separate uni-racial unions, or deregister. The former was rejected outright. Leon Levy made the case for parallel structures, with African unions working closely with their registered counterparts as indeed was the case in the food, textile, and laundry unions which were the backbone of SACTU. No decision was reached so the NEC called for further discussion leading up to a conference to formulate policy.<sup>85</sup> Over the next few months a pro and anti-registration debate emerged.

New Age ran a series of articles on trade unions and the new Act under the byline of E.R. Braverman<sup>86</sup> which stated that while deregistration had some advantages, the lack of unity among registered unions and their dependence upon industrial councils as well as threats of job reservation were major obstacles to making this a viable strategy for unions to follow. Two courses of action were proposed, deregistration which would depend upon a high level of worker organisation to compel employers to negotiate with unions cut off from the limited benefits of the Conciliation Act; or where this was not possible:

To form registered racial unions operating under the Act, taking part in industrial councils and co-operating

83 Ensor, L. 'TUCSA's Relationship with African Trade Unions: an Attempt at Control 1954-1962' SALB, 3(4) 1977.

84 The issue had been kept alive in the union though articles in the newspaper stressing the need to fight the (then) Bill through workers unity. Morning Star, 3(5) November 1955.

85 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit p.120.

86 This is the pseudonym Ray Alexander used in later articles, but there the opposite position was adopted.

with workers of other racial groups in a federal organisation and in a national inter-racial trade union centre like SACTU.<sup>87</sup>

Deregistration as an option was again put forward by Eli Weinberg of the Commercial Travellers Union. Weinberg noted that deregistration would not be easy for unions immersed in the operation of the Act and with a tradition of using state machinery, a conciliation system hailed as a victory for which the white labour movement had paid in blood in 1922. However, he argued that under the new Act the losses outweighed the gains as working within the Act involved accepting the following limitations: the racial split; arbitrary disposal of funds by government officials; interference in elections and union constitutions; prohibitions on political affiliation; and curtailment of the right to strike. The advantages by way of legally sanctioned agreements, protection from victimisation for trade union work and control over benefit funds, were not advantages if they were secured by splitting the membership into racial groups he stated.

The obvious answer to the Industrial Conciliation Act must be for the Trade Unions... to avoid registration under the Act, a perfectly legal procedure as registration is not compulsory.<sup>88</sup>

Deregistration would have the following advantages: unions could remain non-racial with African workers as full members, the constitution would not be subject to government interference, unions would be freer to conduct political activity to further their aims and would not be subjected to restrictions on strikes under the Act. If implemented, such a step would also be a democratic one.

If a registered trade union refused to operate under the Act this can not only make that piece of legislation look like the proverbial piece of paper, but it can also give the movement a new lease of life; for in order to carry through such a change of policy it is necessary to mobilise active rank and file support, to rouse initiative directly among the workers, to return to times when the strengths of the movement were not the stop order, but the enthusiastic backing of the workers, prepared to fight for their own.<sup>89</sup>

Replying to Weinberg, Ray Alexander (as 'E.R. Braverman') argued he had misread the Act and its most serious threat was contained in the job reservation clauses. "The most serious problem facing non-European

87 New Age, August 16 1956.

88 Truth - 'Nete, Newspaper of the TWIU March 1957.

89 Ibid.

workers today is not whether to register the unions or not to register, but how to defend the right to work."<sup>90</sup> Agreeing with Weinberg that under ideal circumstances the best answer to the Act would be to set up unregistered unions to preserve working class unity, Alexander maintained such a strategy could not succeed in practice without support from the greater part of the trade union movement. As things stood, Alexander concluded, there were insufficient incentives for skilled and semi-skilled coloured and Indian workers to deregister.

SACTU NEC put forward a two part resolution in favor of deregistration to the 1957 conference. Don Mateman (TWIU) argued a pro-registration position, against the deregistration position favored by most African trade unionists. Oscar Mpetha argued forcefully for deregistration: "Must we beg that a piece of paper will negotiate for us? Let us have the confidence in our workers and let us not underestimate our strength."<sup>91</sup> No agreement could be reached so the conference resolved to defer the matter until a special conference to be convened in December 1957 for the purpose of resolving SACTU's position on registration.

Efforts had been made with the union to involve the membership in deciding on a course of action. Lengthy exposure had been given to the issue<sup>92</sup> and in the run up to its annual conference members were urged to hold discussions so that they would arrive with an informed mandate. Branches were given a three page memorandum spelling out the effects of racial clauses in the Act, job reservation, the significance of registration permitting the use of conciliation boards, and political advantages of deregistration.<sup>93</sup>

At the sixteenth conference of the FCWU, twenty nine AFCWU delegates and forty five FCWU delegates with over a hundred alternates and observers passed the following resolution.

We call upon SACTU to issue a pamphlet to the workers, explaining the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation

90 Morning Star, April 1957.

91 Workers Unity, May 1957.

92 Articles explaining the Bill and Act were published in Morning Star, March 1954, November 1955 and Workers Unity, June 1956.

93 FCWU Circular letter No.24/57, 22.08.57. This attention to involving branch executive leadership and in turn rank and file membership contradicts Lambert's assertion that, owing to the sensitivity of the issue of the relation between African and Coloured workers in the Western Cape, the registration debate was not opened up to general membership. Lambert, R. 'SACTU and the Industrial Conciliation Act,' SALB. 8(6) 1983. p.36.

Act, its implications and how the union's groups of workers will be affected.

We condemn the Industrial Conciliation Act but in the meantime will amend our constitution to confine membership to non-Europeans because that, in fact, reflects the membership of the union.<sup>94</sup>

The decision to register and accept the racial provisions of the Act reflected the estimation of the union's leadership of the importance of retaining its status as a registered union and the obvious isolation that any unions who chose to deregister would face in the absence of wider union solidarity. The fact that other SACTU unions followed suit and registered reflected the pragmatic assessment of other unionists that no other course of action was viable. SACTU had been unable to reach a united position in the brief time it had been in existence, and its eventual position was determined by the individual actions of unions registering.<sup>95</sup>

In the FCWU close relations existed between the registered and unregistered unions and a conscious non-racialism was practiced, but the very real obstacles that this formal division caused, must have made the potential that deregistration represented to overcome these formal divisions seem attractive indeed. Opting to register as a union of coloured employees was a pragmatic move in which the desire to retain access to the state's industrial relations machinery, as witnessed in the formation of the AFCWU, seems to have been of overriding concern. Throughout the debate Ray Alexander had exercised a highly influential and public role and this would have influenced union leadership in the eventual decision that was made. By the mid-1950s the union had a decade and a half's experience behind it and leadership were fully aware of the problems it experienced with intermittent levels of organisation as a result of the seasonal nature of the canning industry. Commenting upon the relationship between the income to fund organising activity and registration, Liz Abrahams recalls:

If you haven't got finance it's a problem for the union and then through the registration, if the employer doesn't want to negotiate with you, you can force them to come to a table but when you're not registered they can refuse. The other way, you can de-register but you must have the full support of all the workers. If we haven't got the full support of all the workers then it is going to be a problem. Then the employers can say, "Go to hell, we don't want to negotiate with you," and if we

94 FCWU Minutes of the 16th Annual Conference 14/16.09.57.

95 Lambert, R. (1983) op.cit. pp.34-43.

haven't got the support of the workers, then things are going to be difficult.<sup>96</sup>

Whilst this debate was in progress, relations between the two parts of the union became increasingly acrimonious on matters of finance. Early in the year appeal were made to AFCWU branches to pay head office so that debts to FCWU could be squared. Requests were repeatedly made at Management Committee meetings so that the AFCWU could pay back its debt to FCWU at £25 per month.<sup>97</sup> When this amount was queried, the MC decided to appoint a sub-committee to deal with the matter. Reporting back it confirmed that FCWU bore most of the administration costs, had paid for the Wolseley strike (only receiving a donation from AFCWU) and paid for Morning Star at £15 a month. AFCWU debts to FCWU were confirmed but, on a query by Mpetha, it was agreed to investigate the union's financial position up to the split in 1947.<sup>98</sup>

Underlying these tensions were problems of financial instability the AFCWU experienced, being denied stop-order facilities, and facing deliberate attempts to hinder the union collecting subscriptions. Reflecting on this Liz Abrahams comments.

Ons kon nooit agter die eintlike probleem gekom het nie, maar ons het 'gestruggle' met die 'Africans' self. Hulle was nie altyd baie bereid om 'subs' te betaal nie. Jy moet altyd baie met hulle probeer skel het om 'sups' te kry....Sy (Mafeking) het baie probeer om vir hulle te laat verstaan dat dit is hulle plig om 'subs' te betaal. Een ding wat in die vroeë dae baie gedra het is, baie van die fabriek het nie destyds so baie 'Africans employ' soos hulle nou 'employ' nie. En dit het miskien bygedra tot dit.<sup>99</sup>

### The £1-a-day Campaign

When SACTU launched the £1-a-day campaign in the wake of the mass militancy generated by the Alexandra bus boycott; with the three-fold aim of raising workers wages, sustaining political mobilisation, and embarking on mass recruitment for the trade unions,<sup>100</sup> some time was to elapse before it was taken up by the union. Liz Abrahams attended the workers conference in Johannesburg, and reported back to the MC where

96 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl 10.06.86

97 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 11.08.57.

98 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 10.11.57.

99 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 10.06.86

100 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. pp.158-162.

delegates were urged to hold factory meetings to explain the campaign's aims to membership.<sup>101</sup> This was followed up in circular letters which stressed "it is not enough to pass resolutions that workers need fl-a-day. We are sending you a circular on how to organise your workers and other workers for fl-a-day. Discuss this at all levels so that all are convinced of the need of fl-a-day."<sup>102</sup> Resolutions strongly endorsing the campaign were taken at the 1957 Annual Conference.<sup>103</sup> Implementing this campaign saw the union advancing the slogan of fl-a-day in its wage demands. In two cases agitation for improvements erupted into strikes where the slogan was advanced publicly.

In Cape Town conciliation board negotiations with Spekenham food products ended in deadlock, as employers would not consider increases until other factories were organised. Relations with the firm had always been poor, negotiations in the past had been delayed by the slow moving conciliatory machinery and as a result union organisation at the factory had fluctuated over the years. After Becky Lan's banning the Cape Town branch had nearly collapsed but through consistent work this had been overcome making Spekenham the main factory in the branch. Since negotiation had broken down, workers were free to strike and two hundred came out on a legal strike in September 1957.

Labourers earned around three pounds a week which the union insisted was totally inadequate, demanding instead fl-a-day. The strikers were militant, displaying non-racial unity in their actions but for all their militancy and high morale the bosses would not budge from their hard line position. Four Coloured workers were arrested for picketing and twenty seven Africans fined under the Native Labour Act. All the strikers were fired, management telling a New Age reporter, "We don't know and don't care why they are striking. Why don't you ask them? Our factory is working. I have nothing further to say."<sup>104</sup> With that they set about recruiting scab labour, and although only thirty

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101 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 5.05.57.

102 The letter also stated that branches were affiliated to SACTU and had taken part in the decision which they now had to implement. This possibly refers to the SACTU local committee, for there is no indication of a Western Cape regional workers conference. Circular letter No.23/57 16.08.57.

103 "Our union membership must work for this campaign to arouse the workers of South Africa to struggle for fl-a-day and make this slogan a house hold word in every home..." FCWU Minutes of the 16th Annual Conference 14/16.09.57.

104 New Age, September 5 1957.

strikers accepted their offers and broke ranks with their coloured and African comrades, the firm was able to resume work.<sup>105</sup>

Congress Alliance organisations in Cape Town intervened on behalf of the strikers after three weeks, sending a deputation to management and releasing a statement to New Age.<sup>106</sup> The strikers declared their intention to continue, but the union had to concede defeat and call off the strike. Strikers were given assistance where possible to find jobs in canneries. The defeat broke the Cape Town branch, left it with a debt of seven hundred pounds and no means to pay it back.<sup>107</sup> As a result the branch secretary, Ms. L. Kellerman, was asked to resign as the union could not pay her salary.<sup>108</sup>

The defeat of the Spekenham strike poses questions about the level of the union's organisation in Cape Town. Despite the union's head-office being based in Cape Town it never succeeded in establishing a strong presence in the city's food industry. While it successfully organised unskilled coloured and African workers in fish and fruit canning in the small towns, this never translated into strong organisation among Cape Town's unskilled workers. The Spekenham strike effectively ended what gains had been made up to that point. For those involved in the time, it was a frustrating experience.

It was always very difficult to organise in Cape Town. I always said I would organise ten branches in the country, and then only one in Cape Town. The workers attitude is different. It seems to me they think they are better off, they earn more money. Otherwise, I really can't explain their attitude.<sup>109</sup>

In Johannesburg sixty one workers at the Lecol cordial plant occupied their cloakroom when management would not grant wage increases and firmly ensconced, they refused to speak to Native Labour Officers. The next day they were all arrested in the cloakroom and fined £3. The strike was defeated as the employer would not re-employ the workers,<sup>110</sup> but the union did succeed in recruiting the newly employed workers.<sup>111</sup>

105 New Age, September 12 1957.

106 The statement whole heartedly supported workers who had been left with no alternative but to strike. It was signed by Z. Malindi (ANC), H. Daniels (SACPO), D. Goldberg (SACOD) and L. Kellerman (SACTU). New Age, September 5 1957.

107 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 6.10.57 & 10.11.57.

108 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 1.03.58.

109 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl 10.06.85.

110 FCWU Circular letter No.2/57, 26.09.57.

111 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1958.

In addition to these defeats the union lost its stop-order facilities at all other LKB factories. Notice of this was given at the end of 1957, and when the FCWU claimed legal rights to stop orders as a registered union, the firm replied that it had "other reasons."<sup>112</sup> for withdrawing the facility. A special conference of LKB workers was called to develop a response but when LKB manager Mr. Whitehead refused to reinstate stop-orders or dismissed union leaders, the matter of how to deal with LKB's offensive on the union was referred to the branches and passed from sight.<sup>113</sup>

Although the union regarded itself as committed to supporting SACTU and implementing its campaigns, the relationship between affiliate and federation was not without tensions. Morning Star was moved to Johannesburg in 1956 and Leon Levy made the public officer at the request of SACTU.<sup>114</sup> The MC expressed disquiet at the irregularity of the paper, and became heated when the union was informed that the paper was changing its name to Workers Unity and being re-registered as the official organ of SACTU.<sup>115</sup> Delegates complained that the paper they paid for in advance came out irregularly and gave hardly any coverage to the union, and had not given any coverage to the Spekenham or Lecol strikes.<sup>116</sup> The MC resolved to cease payments to Workers Unity and start a new union journal. This plan was not implemented, with the result that the union's own publishing efforts came to an end.

Far better preparation for SACTU's second National Workers Conference was made. Delegations were elected at Malmesbury, Montagu, Paarl, Tulbagh and Wellington, but poor finances prevented head-office representation at the Johannesburg conference.<sup>117</sup> Meetings were held in Paarl, and branches asked to bring farm workers with them to a regional fl-a-day conference.<sup>118</sup>

John Phendlani was part of the delegation to the National Workers Conference.

We make up an organisation you know. There was another union (SACTU), so we met together in Johannesburg. We

<sup>112</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 30.12.57.

<sup>113</sup> No direct replies are recorded in the minutes. FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.02.58.

<sup>114</sup> General Members Meeting of Morning Star Publishing Co. 30.11.56.

<sup>115</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 6.10.57 & 10.11.57.

<sup>116</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 28.11.57.

<sup>117</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 1.03.58.

<sup>118</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.02.58.

call that place Freedom Square. We came for fl a day....All the peoples were there, Coloureds, Indians.

It was a hard day then. Machine-guns! I've never seen machine-guns like there.(Police surrounded the meeting)

Standing all around! Some of them right on the roofs, standing there with machine-guns."

We were making a meeting there, you know....I thought, 'Hey, I won't see my wife no more! Klaar gelag! It's finished with me!!119

A demonstration was held in Paarl to publicise the campaign. Workers and interested people marched through the streets behind SACTU unionists with Pound symbols pinned to their jackets and holding banners. It ended in a mass meeting.<sup>120</sup> Overall the union had three aims with the campaign: to acquaint membership with the campaigns objectives and advance the slogan in the union's wage demands; to co-operate with other union's to popularise the campaign; and apply to organising aspects of the campaign in relation to farm workers. The latter aim as Mr. Phendlani explains, was no easy task.

Well we think, to get the fl a day, is to organise the workers. That's all, nothing else....Now we come to the point of the farms. The farms must be organised too....

Now we're coming to do all our work....The other comrades will have to organise the factories, because now, we'll have to go and see the bosses. It's hard. The bosses are hard too because they doesn't know what are we going to do with the plenty money. "fl a day? It's too much!...."

Right, now we'll have to organise the farms too, don't forget. It was hard at the farms, I was an organiser, I don't forget. I organise here, what they call Agter Pêrel. It's got about fifteen workers there. Okay, we organise them. They say, yes, it is alright. Its a good idea and they can do it. So we told them, alright, we're going to come again to them. To choose the committees out of them, who's going to go to their bosses....We say, you'll have to 'kies' (vote) now, who's going with us to the bosses, because we can't go alone, the workers that work there, they must go along too....

They've got something that they call a 'dop' (portion of wine)....We tell them, well, the bosses are going to give you perhaps some more money, but they're going to take away the 'dop'. Just then they refuse to be in the unions. They can't stay without the 'dop' they must get that 'dop'!121

119 Interview John Phendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

120 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 10.02.83.

121 Ibid.

### State Intervention Looms

Early in 1958 the state dropped a bombshell. A Wage Board for the preserved food industry had gathered information the previous year and when its recommendations were published, the union was shocked to learn that only employer's views were represented. Wages were lowered, excessive overtime permitted and operations down graded. By cutting wages below prevailing rates it wiped out seventeen years of improvements won through bitter struggle. Full mobilisation was embarked upon to prevent the Minister of Labour publishing the recommendations as a Wage Determination. The union met the Cannery Association on several occasions,<sup>122</sup> and waged a battle against Labour Department officials who visited factories where they told workers that the union had misinformed them of the Wage Board recommendations as these represented an increase over rates last set out in 1942. Strong protests were registered with the Labour Department for slandering the union, yet this was happening ever more frequently as the Labour Department became increasingly hostile to the union. Despite these protests to SACTU, SATUC, unaffiliated unions, M.P.s and reports in the press, the recommendations were published as Wage Determinations (WD) Number 179 and 180.<sup>123</sup> As the existing agreement ran into 1959, the impending battle over the imposition of cuts awaited the expiry of the ruling agreement.

The Port Elizabeth branch suffered extreme employer hostility that preyed upon and exacerbated internal divisions during the late 1950s. These problems were not unusual but were significant as the branch was to become the scene of the union's stand against wage cuts. NEC members were dismissed when they returned to the factory along with a hundred and sixty others.<sup>124</sup> A factory committee, elected under the auspices of the bosses, Labour Department and C.I.D. had been used to dismiss Ms. D. Telling, the existing secretary, in a ploy to start a company union. Head-office officials visited the branch and supervised new elections, placing Isobell Draghoender in the position of FCWU secretary. Discussing these problems on the Management Committee the necessity of

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122 At one meeting the union was challenged over a pamphlet calling on workers to strike if their wages were cut. It disclaimed responsibility for the pamphlet. FCWU Management Committee minutes, 1.03.58.

123 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 30.11.58.

124 New Age, May 1 1958.

educating workers in order that they would not be fooled by employers, was stressed.<sup>125</sup>

Other issues of note in 1957 included the threat of compulsory arbitration contained in an amendment proposed for the Industrial Conciliation Act.<sup>126</sup> Job reservation appeared as a threat to the union when notification was given in the government gazette of an investigation into the food industry. Memoranda were prepared by head-office officials, but the matter fortunately passed by.<sup>127</sup> AFCWU finance continued to be a problem, leading to conflict between the two executives on at least one occasion and indicating problems resulting from the union's parallel structure.<sup>128</sup>

As part of the Congress Alliance the union tried to develop political organisation where ever this was possible. At the request of SACPO, the union encouraged branches to assist in spreading that organisation. "We appeal to you to assist SACPO in becoming the organisation it wishes to become and to develop a conscious non-European leadership that will be capable to take its place in the struggle for freedom and justice"<sup>129</sup> read a circular letter. Labouring under a heavy load of commitments, some members of the Management Committee objected to the election of Liz Abrahams to SACTU's NEC on the grounds that she was fully occupied with union work. In defence Liz Abrahams pointed out that the union had a duty to support SACTU and to assume responsibility for broader political tasks, and asked, "Who else is to do the work if not people like us."<sup>130</sup> Thereafter her SACTU appointment was endorsed.

The year ended with the Johannesburg branch's hands full with a strike when workers at H. Jones refused to work overtime shifts at Christmas. They were arrested en masse and 289 spent the night in police cells singing ANC and union songs. When released on bail two days

125 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 15.06.58.

126 New Age, October 2 1958.

127 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.11.58.

128 Several Management Committee meetings were held separately and meeting times clashed. When the FCWU asked for an explanation Oscar Mpetha replied in a letter "We appreciate co-operation but co-operation does not necessarily mean subjection. You stated that you informed me, (of meetings RG) why inform me and why not say you ordered me? ... Why do you sit and plan without my consent and without consulting me and expect me to carry on your instructions?" FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.11.58.

129 FCWU Circular letter No.28/58, 18.08.58.

130 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 19.04.58.

later, they were taken home in transport provided by the ANC.<sup>131</sup> Charged under the Native Labour Act for striking illegally, the magistrate stated in court, "I can't say the crown has satisfied me whether, 1) the accused created the dispute, or 2) in view of the circumstances the employers are to blame for the strike"<sup>132</sup> and found all the accused not guilty. Despite the firm's assurances when settling the strike that workers would be reinstated, that was not the case in practice. There were long delays before workers were taken back and the workers' victory was marred by very poor financial support from the rest of the union. Numerous appeals for funds were made which grew more strident as time passed. "This is an impossible state of affairs and a terrible blot on the history of our union... Do not let their magnificent victory be spoilt by the fact that their comrades did not support them."<sup>133</sup>

#### Boycotts and Wage Cuts - the Union Holds the Fort

The decade that witnessed the proliferation of mass struggle under the leadership of the Congress Alliance ended for the union with a crucial defensive struggle against wage cuts. Facing a state offensive on both wages and against union leadership; recurrent repression, and the onset of a crisis of over production in the canning industry, organisation was stretched to the limit. Significantly the union was greatly aided by political alliances which demonstrated how effectively broader political campaigns aided union struggles under particular circumstances.

A campaign to boycott products of Nationalist Party supporting firms had been mooted by Congress Alliance organisations in 1957, and was planned to start in June 1959. These included certain newspapers, insurance companies, banks, retail shops, cigarettes, wine, brandy, tea, coffee, jam and dried fruit.<sup>134</sup> Vague in application and the extent of observation over the years, the union's case provides an example of one specific instance where the boycott was highly effective in assisting unions in their work. A spirit of enthusiasm prevailed

131 New Age, January 29 1959.

132 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 1.03.59.

133 FCWU Circular letter No.8/59, 22.02.59.

134 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.342. Compared to the successful potato boycott, this list of National Party supporting companies was vague and would have been difficult to boycott effectively.

within the union in relation to SACTU and its allies, as FCWU vice-president, John Mentoor remarked after returning from a well attended SACTU conference, "we should give SACTU all the support and interest we can. We will only get freedom by working for it."<sup>135</sup> Through SACTU the union had LKB, the firm spearheading attacks on the union, added to list of firms targeted for the proposed boycott of Nationalist Party supporting firms.

LKB's management responded quickly. Mr. G. Whitehead contacted the union and requested an appointment with ANC president, Chief Lutuli, as this was not possible a meeting of local Congress Alliance representatives was convened and heard Mr. Whitehead deny LKB was a Nationalist Party firm or that it was anti-trade union. The union's reply was to simply point to the succession of actions against it, removal of stop-orders and victimisation of leaders. Further meetings were agreed to.<sup>136</sup>

Behind the responsiveness of LKB to the boycott threat, lay deepening problems in the canning industry. As international prices fell LKB was more vulnerable to losses it might suffer in the domestic market and therefore prepared to compromise. Further meetings with LKB produced an agreement to reinstate dismissed branch secretaries in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, to re-employ dismissed strikers and permit the collection of subscriptions on factory premises. The Port Elizabeth factory stated it would not recognise the AFCWU committee for one year, but was prepared to recognise a committee of African workers, a compromise the union accepted. For its part the union informed the ANC of the agreement reached and produced thousands of copies of pamphlets informing people of the victory on paper supplied by the firm.<sup>137</sup> Thanks were given to the ANC for its assistance.

We wish to acknowledge the great measure of co-operation obtained from the ANC in our efforts to reach an agreement with the employers. Without the sympathetic active support of Congress, our task would have been indeed a difficult one.<sup>138</sup>

135 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 19.04.59.

136 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.05.59.

137 So successful was this boycott threat that it was contemplated as a weapon to use on other anti-trade union factories. It was not applied to other firms, possibly due the situation in Cape Town where the state of Congress organisations precluded this from being effective. FCWU Management Committee minutes, 14.06.59.

138 FCWU Circular letter No.18/59, 19.06.59.

Victory that it was, such gains for the union were to be short-lived as pressure relentlessly built up from both bosses and the state. Commencing negotiations in 1959 on the main agreement covering the majority of factories the union was mindful of what had transpired in Tulbagh where employers had imposed wage cuts. A ruling gentlemen's agreement had been cancelled, and the bosses proceeded to rates laid down in Wage Determination (WD) 179 which resulted in a 13s. drop in weekly wages.<sup>139</sup> In the first round of negotiations for the main agreement the bosses proposed WD 179 rates for basic wages with a bonus to raise wages to the level of the old agreement. At that point the state intervened with a vengeance.

The Minister of Labour applied Section 46 of the Industrial Conciliation Act to the fruit, vegetable, meat and fish canning industry, directly attacking the FCWU which he had called in parliament "an unfriendly union."<sup>140</sup> This action defined canning as an essential industry; outlawed strikes and subjected disputes to compulsory arbitration. In protest the union denounced the Minister's action, and denied that canning was any more essential than other sections of the food industry. The union declared that employers and workers were fully capable of settling their affairs without interference and that the Minister's action amounted to a fundamental attack on the right to collective bargaining. Internally the union set about reviewing the position of its shop-stewards to strengthen its organisation for the struggles looming ahead.<sup>141</sup>

Now in a precarious position faced with a wage cuts on the one hand and compulsory arbitration coupled with a refusal by bosses to meet joint AFCWU and FCWU delegations on the other; the union went back to consult its members. From the rank and file it received a resounding reply - workers would not accept wage cuts, increases were what they needed!

In the midst of these negotiations the AFCWU general secretary, Oscar Mpetha, was rebanned for five years, and shortly thereafter the then AFCWU president, Elizabeth Mafeking, was banished. Mpetha's rebanning prohibited him from attending gatherings like the previous

139 New Age, March 26 1959.

140 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1959.

141 FCWU Special Management Committee minutes, 25.07.59. Circular letters referred to shopstewards as needing to become unbreakable links between the workers and the union as well as between workers and management.

ban, but it also confined him to the Cape Peninsula, which far more seriously curbed his organising work.<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth Mafeking, who had been a union official from the early 1950s, and had represented South African workers overseas, was also vice-president of the ANC Women's League. She was a key political figure in the Western Cape who, through her trade union and political work had linked the struggle against oppression and exploitation at every stage. In November 1959 she was banished to Southey a remote town in the Northern Cape. Protest swung into action immediately. In Paarl a mass protest meeting organised by Congress was augmented by a parade by forty members of the the Black Sash.<sup>143</sup>

Masses of people gathered in front of Mrs. Mafeking's house, determined to prevent her removal. On the day the banishment took effect police supported by armoured cars moved in to arrest the popular Paarl leader. They provoked the crowd and a riot ensued, cars were stoned and shops set alight in a violent expression of anger. The union afterwards told a commission of enquiry that this was as much directed against the oppressive conditions people lived under, as against the removal of their leaders. One person was shot dead, scores injured and seventy two people arrested.<sup>144</sup>

Mrs. Mafeking, however, successfully evaded arrest, assisted by comrades she was safely over the border in Lesotho by the time Congress held a protest meeting on the Grand Parade. Numerous speakers described the rising mass anger against the governments attack upon the liberation movement. The meeting ended with a statement read on behalf of Elizabeth Mafeking "The struggle must go on. The people must not be discouraged because I have been taken away... Freedom in our lifetime!"<sup>145</sup>

Canning workers were caught between attacks on their leadership and efforts by the bosses to lower wage costs. By the end of the decade wage reductions were not merely desirable for capital, but became a high priority as the world canning industry experienced a crisis of over-production, producing a glut on the world market. Price controls on exports were ended<sup>146</sup> and a lot of price cutting ensued as canneries

142 FCWU Circular letter No.20/59, 23.07.59.

143 New Age, November 5 1959.

144 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1960.

145 New Age, November 12 1959.

146 'Price control ends' Food Industries Journal, November 1959.

attempted to find buyers for their stock.<sup>147</sup> LKB with its unsound financial structure and heavy loan repayment burden was put under extreme pressure, compounded by the fact that pineapples were particularly affected in the glut and many members in the co-operative farmed pineapples.

In light of the crisis LKB's Port Elizabeth factory notified workers that WD 179 rates would be paid from the start of December 1959. The resultant events were reported in detail in New Age. Men in the carpentry store downed tools and submitted their passes for discharge. Management was prepared to let them go at first, but when they were joined by men from other departments the bosses called a meeting of all workers and tried to separate the women from the men. The women refused and took their bosses to task for sowing dissension by telling the men that women had accepted the wage cuts. Management addressed the assembled workers and explained the company's problems, stating wage cuts were preferable to unemployment. Workers replied saying they would not work for WD 179 rates. To the bosses reply that the factory would close they chanted, "Close it down! Close it down! We are not going to work for such low wages!"<sup>148</sup> Workers sat down in the factory yard until an exasperated manager promised to stay cuts for three weeks to allow further negotiations. Workers discussed reimposing the consumer boycott but went back to work.<sup>149</sup>

LKB's directors, facing bankruptcy, squeezed harder, insisting the cuts be imposed, regardless of whether the boycott was reimposed. Workers were informed that new rates were to be enforced from the first pay week in December - this slashed 11s. off a weekly wage of £3. When management went ahead and imposed the lower rates on the Monday morning, they were confronted by a solid refusal to work for less than the old rates. The manager threatened and then dismissed about a thousand workers, virtually the entire factory, ordering them off the premises.

When they returned after lunch they found themselves locked out and were paid off on wages calculated on the WD 197 rates. Angry and bitter at this treatment they resolved to stay out on strike until the old rates were introduced.<sup>150</sup>

147 Interview Mr. J.P. Delport, Cape Town, 11.04.86.

148 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 29.11.59.

149 New Age, November 26 1959.

150 New Age, December 17 1959.

Head-office authorised SACTU to help settle the dispute on the following terms: that the local branch co-operated; WD 179 was withdrawn; and that the expired Conciliation Board agreement continued.<sup>151</sup> Taking a loan of £1000 Liz Abrahams and E. Williams, Paarl AFCWU branch secretary left for Port Elizabeth. There the bosses refused to meet a deputation from both unions and union leaders were forced to compromise, allowing the FCWU to represent the AFCWU. At a lengthy meeting attended by head office, branch and strike committee representatives with management and the labour department many issues were discussed, covering the failure of the firm to respect terms of its agreement reached earlier in the year and the absolute refusal by the workers to accept WD 179 rates. Talks ended in deadlock.

Strike pay was provided and broader support mobilised for workers by the Congress organisations in the city. A mass meeting jointly organised by Congress and the union turned into a major show of solidarity for the workers struggle. After paying out the remaining funds in strike pay, steps were taken to convene a Conciliation Board.

A month after the lock out started LKB capitulated and agreed to restore wages to their old level. This was made public in a press statement by the Company's chairman, Mr. R. Ferreira, where he stated that:

...(LKB) would not enforce the wage cut announced earlier. Workers would go back to the original level and each worker would be given a bonus to bring his pay packet into alignment with what it used to be.." (the decision was made because) "It is desirable to have a contented labour force. I have had no discussions with any workers or trade unions or anybody and I have no intention of doing so.<sup>152</sup>

As Wage Determination rates still set the basic wages, the union declared it was pleased that the strike was over but that it was still not satisfied. "We shall not rest until employers have renounced the Wage Determination once and for all and accept our union as the sole spokesman of the workers in the industry."<sup>153</sup>

LKB was propelled to make this concession by the strong opposition it faced from the union and Congress organisations. The boycott threat

151 FCWU Circular letter No.5/59, 9.12.59. Port Elizabeth had not paid affiliation fees for two years and failed to liaise with head-office about the strike, straining relations between them.

152 Cape Times, December 29 1959.

153 FCWU Circular to all branches and members 'Stoppage of work at the Port Elizabeth Factory of Langeberg Ko-operasie' n.d.

was certainly a factor, and the strength of the Congress organisation in the city certainly posed problems for recruiting scab labour.<sup>154</sup> The particular struggle displayed how effective alliances between worker and political organisations could be. Where the latter were strong, co-operation produced a powerful synthesis of political and economic struggle, lending mass weight to worker struggles and politicising them in the process. Thanks for solidarity and support were extended to the ANC, SACTU, SACPO, SACOD and SATUC.

This lock-out marked the last of the big strikes the union was to contend with in the canneries and was the last major strike that occurred in the period under examination. Reviewing the union's performance during the strike in her annual report, the General Secretary identified several problems. The struggle waged in Port Elizabeth had been on behalf of all workers in the industry against low wages and for rights to union negotiated agreements. By striking, a stand in the interest of all workers for a living wage had been made. Yet this had not been without problems. Branch mobilisation had been poor, a total of £150 was donated by four branches with head-office paying £1164 out of its reserves and effectively carrying the strike alone.<sup>155</sup>

By succeeding in winning the struggle in Port Elizabeth, the union was able to 'hold the fort' against wage cuts. Its problems, however, were far from over as a heavy toll upon organisation, wrought by the 1960 State of Emergency resulted in the Labour Department declaring it ineligible to convene a conciliation board as it was unrepresentative. Instead the Cannery Association had a Board appointed where they refused to allow African workers to be represented and proceeded to push for a 10% wage reduction.<sup>156</sup> Faced with compulsory arbitration which would certainly have imposed WD 197 rates across the whole industry, the union had to settle for the extension of the previous agreement for another three years plus a small COLA increase.<sup>157</sup> Under the combined assault of the bosses and the state the union suffered, but it was sufficiently strong to prevent money wages being reduced, no small feat in the face of such adversaries.

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154 Workers brought in from Uitenhage agreed to stop work when they learnt of the strike. New Age, December 17 1959.

155 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1960.

156 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 21.07.60.

157 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 16.10.60.

## Conclusion

In relation to other organisations the union maintained strict control over its priorities, not becoming so immersed in the political struggles as to allow its own organisation to suffer. In this respect there is a continuity with the previous period as it did not substantially alter its activities in light of the new climate of national liberation politics. This poses questions concerning the levels of involvement of rank and file in these activities, a matter which is discussed in chapter six. Under certain conditions the union was greatly assisted in its struggles with the bosses by the broad weight of Congress organisations but as the Spekenham strike showed, assistance from its political allies could not overcome problems where its own organisation was weak and Congress lacked the ability to influence scab labour. In the late 1950s the union was confronted by wage cuts in a climate increasingly hostile to the non-racial principles held by the FCWU. Overcoming these attempts to reduce money wages, with the assistance of Congress organisations, the union ended the decade by 'holding the fort' on wages and firmly resisting attacks on worker unity.

## CHAPTER V

### Struggling through the 1960s

Events of the 1960s stand in stark contrast to those of the previous decade. Whilst this period is correctly associated with intense repression and the demise of popular organisations, in themselves these features offer an incomplete explanation of how labour organisation fared. Confronted by a state aggressively pursuing apartheid and a transformation of the canning labour process, involving extensive mechanisation, many of the pressures experienced and successfully countered before, are brought to bear with a greater intensity in this period, creating schisms between the FCWU and the AFCWU. In the hostile climate within which the union worked, hindrances experienced with its negotiating strategy, financial hitches and leadership problems assume greater prominence. In its darkest hour the union retreats to its core branches in the Western Cape, propped up by the support it derives from running the Medical Benefit Fund (MBF). In this chapter, covering the period from 1960 to 1975, we examine how the union contended with the obstacles it faced and struggled on, practising a more restricted social welfare unionism.

#### Paving the way for the boom

Political quiescence and economic expansion are the predominant features of the 1960s, when political opposition was silenced and South African capitalism flourished - indeed as one canning industry executive has remarked "in retrospect they were the golden years."<sup>1</sup> Conditions that made this possible will be briefly sketched out as a backdrop for the union's activities over the period.

Facing an onslaught and the eruption of popular opposition in the wake of the Sharpsville shootings, the state responded by mobilising its repressive forces and following this through with a systematic strengthening of its repressive apparatus. Initial confusion and capital outflows were assuaged by decisive action. In the State of Emergency declared during the Sharpsville crisis, some 20 000 people were detained in a massive crack-down on political activists. Rallying

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1 Interview Mr. D. du Toit, Bellville, 27.01.86.

support from a divided white power bloc, the state banned the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress, and strengthened its ability to deal with its political opponents by judicial means. Security legislation, designed to contain and crush political opposition, permitted: detention for increasing periods of time; amendments to the Defense Act; the formation of a political police force; and the Sabotage Act to deal with a new offensive from popular opposition. As the liberation movement attempted to transform itself from open legal organisation to new conditions of illegality and embarked upon a sabotage campaign, inexperience of these new conditions made hastily formed new structures vulnerable. Thus, through a wave of repression, the state was effectively able to silence political opposition.

Coupled with strategies that effectively dealt with the threat from below, the state implemented strategies to foster an African petty bourgeoisie to bolster the fragmentation of the population into different ethnic units, a process whereby the "Nationalist Party government set about creating junior partners in ethnic control."<sup>2</sup> This division of the populace was coupled with a more rigorous application of influx control which involved an increased use of the control functions of labour bureaux and the enormous removal and relocation of African people from cities and white farming areas to Bantustans. Coloured people, now removed from the white voters roll, were subject to a diluted version of this process of ethnic fragmentation though the provision of separate political institutions and residential segregation under the Group Areas Act.

If the above represents the pertinent political developments of the 1960s, for the economy the period was one of sustained growth in which manufacturing took the lead. Manufacturing increased its volume of output at 8% per annum between 1963 and 1968 and increased its share of the GDP against declining contributions from both mining and agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Key features of this economic development were: increased investment in machinery, fixed capital stock growing at 6% per annum between 1963 and 1972<sup>4</sup>; a finance sector capable of facilitating this investment; and state intervention through parastatals. Significant though this economic development was, it occurred under conditions of

2 Bloch, G. 'Sounds in the Silence: Painting a Picture of the 1960s.' Africa Perspective, No.25, 1984. p.9.

3 Innes, D. Anglo American and the rise of Modern South Africa. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984. p.188.

4 Bloch, G. op.cit. p.13.

imperialist domination where South Africa's subordinate position in the world economy made local industry dependant upon foreign technology.

### Canning Industry in Crisis

The early 1960s were problem years for the fruit canning industry. In these years as discussed in the previous chapter, it suffered the effects of depressed markets. Profit rates were also affected, the early 1960s being regarded as a lean time by canners.<sup>5</sup> The crisis was resolved in two ways, firstly a scheme to control and stabilise export prices was implemented and secondly a process of mechanisation, started before the crisis, was resumed, leading to a reorganisation of production to improve labour efficiency.

Given the seasonal nature of the industry, canners on occasion would dump stock in order to obtain the necessary working capital for the next year. In addition, competition for market shares created a situation of considerable rivalry between canneries. Proposals to reduce this competition by means of controlled marketing were made with increasing frequency through the 1950s. LKB, due to its size and financial weakness experienced the problems in the industry more severely than other canneries and was at the forefront of calls for state control. However, it was not able to reach an agreement with other large canners on state control. Speaking in 1957, the year that the SAF&VCA first officially supported an export scheme although it did not reach unanimity over its content or implementation, George Whitehead, General Manager of LKB, clearly articulated LKB's interests in hastening the imposition of regulated imports when he said, "We may at this stage, not agree with each other as to the form that such control will take, but it would be an important step forward if we could now agree to the principle involved."<sup>6</sup> Two years later, in the midst of a market slump, LKB's calls for state intervention became more strident. Addressing an audience in Worcester which included town councillors, MPs and a Cabinet Minister, Mr Whitehead stated:

5 Interview Mr. G. von Willing, Cape Town, 10.04.86. This is merely an impression and while it does not substitute for data on profitability, the perceptions of other interviewees corroborate this view.

6 Bright Future is Seen for South Africa's Canned Fruit and Vegetable Products. Food Industry Journal of South Africa. July 1957. p.15. An inter canner marketing agreement had been entered into in 1954, but collapsed under pressure.

It should be quite clear that the canning industry is in urgent need of help from the authorities to provide an effective and complete control which will stabilise the industry.<sup>7</sup>

All canneries were affected by the slump, but in the case of LKB problems were made more acute as a result of an unsound financial structure which resulted from rapid acquisitions made in the mid-1950s and increased borrowing from the Land Bank to finance increased operating capital requirements.<sup>8</sup> State support to control export marketing was not immediately forthcoming, but gradually first in the form of an export scheme, and then through a statutory Canned Fruit Export Board,<sup>9</sup> greater regulation was brought to the industry.

Internal reorganisation of LKB rationalised its operations and radically reduced its permanent staff. Between 1962 and 1963 staff at its head office had been reduced from 250 to 80.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the close political relationship between the group and the state earned LKB financial support and on two occasions saved it from bankruptcy by government funding to the tune of £750 000.<sup>11</sup> This financial support coupled with measures taken by the state to lower wage rates through Wage Determination rulings, and the political repression of the 1960s, rescued LKB from bankruptcy.

#### Mechanisation on a Large Scale

Employment dropped by nearly 20% during the slump, yet output fell by only 8%. When employment rose again after the slump, it grew at a

7 'Controlled Export Marketing of Canned Goods Urgently needed.'  
Food Industry Journal of South Africa. April 1959. p.23.

8 General Manager Mr. G. Whitehead ran the group in a dictatorial fashion, with the object of gaining control of the canning industry. The results of rapid expansion without sound rationalisation was to bankrupt LKB and force his resignation.

9 An export board for canned fruit was established in 1967, it has the power to regulate terms and minimum prices. Canners did not cease undercutting immediately thereafter as, under pressure, all canners broke ranks and gave special discounts. However, the board did eventually succeed in bringing a measure of stability to the market.

10 Interview Mr. D. du Toit, Bellville, 27.01.86.

11 Interview Mr. G. van Willing, Cape Town, 10.04.86. LKB's privileged position in relation to the state and access to agricultural credit facilities caused the antagonism of other canners who paid ruling rates for their loans.

rate below the growth of output.<sup>12</sup> Large scale mechanisation accounted for this rise in output per worker and also lowered employment as the introduction of automated production and the installation of higher speed canning lines reduced the amount of hand labour involved in fruit preparation. More labour was allocated to the inspection and quality control functions.<sup>13</sup>

Mechanisation had received an impetus in the late 1940s and early 1950s from what canners regarded as low labour productivity and labour shortages in some areas.<sup>14</sup> In the late 1950s attention was given to increasing through-put to overcome the bottlenecks experienced during the season. The resultant mechanisation involved the installation of high speed canning lines - complex machines to fill, close and cook cans - connected via conveyor belts, eliminating hand transport and greatly increasing speed. The Board of Trade and Industry had investigated the question of increasing production volume in the canning industry in the late 1950s. Its findings pointed to the need to increase the length of the fruit season and the quality of fruit. As yields from fruit peeling and cutting machinery on larger fruit were theoretically three and a half times greater than from smaller fruit<sup>15</sup> research into improving fruit cultivars met the latter recommendation by increasing the size and quality of fruit grown for canning. Further developments in mechanisation facilitated more rapid transport of material through the factory, introducing the bulk handling of fruit and palletisation.<sup>16</sup>

Underlying capital's explanation of the need to mechanise due to what it called low productivity of labour, there existed the resistance of workers struggling to reduce the rate of exploitation. Piece-work, as has been mentioned, generated high rates of surplus extraction but

12 Between 1950 and 1959 employment in the canning industry rose by 200% and output by 65%. Refer to figure 1.1 for output and figure 1.5 for employment. p.38.

13 This is still the case as technology to perform automated grading and quality control tasks is both expensive and risky in the absence of technical support for the small South African industry able to guarantee rapid repairs. Labour costs do not warrant such sophisticated technology. Interview Messrs. Ainsley and du Toit, Paarl, 18.04.85.

14 Knock, C.G. 'Technical Developments in the South African Canning Industry', Food Industry of South Africa Year Book and Buyer's Guide 1953. p.9.

15 B.T.I. Report No.676 Investigation into the South African Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry. 1960. para 87.

16 Interview Mr. G.F. Viljoen, Bellville, 30.04.86.

factory discipline still had to be imposed through supervision to maintain quality. Nor was the system devoid of acts of resistance to this form of exploitation, as the following quotes splendidly capture.

When they were working piece-rates most of the workers try to make work easier for themselves because they wanted to get more tickets to get more money.

Now if you are going to concentrate on one peach because this peach is so dirty that you spend a lot of time on it, maybe the person next to you has thrown out twenty peaches as you are still on that dirty one, so you just cut and throw out.... But you must cut the right way.

Sometimes when the men are coming round with the buckets of green, half green and ripe peaches and you have not yet finished your bucket, then you have two buckets to work. If you are standing next to a drain where the fruit and the water goes, then you maybe quickly lift up the iron and throw the whole bucket down and go on with the next because you got your ticket for that one.

Another thing workers do is to say the fruit is bad when it is really good, they put it with the fruit for making jam and don't work it. With pears they can squeeze it with their hands to make a pulp even if the fruit is not too soft. Then they take it to the supervisor and show them and it must go for jam.<sup>17</sup>

Individualised resistance was supplemented by collective action along similar lines, but as Liz Phike explains, workers were sometimes caught out.

The men who are carrying the boxes of fruit to us if they (work out a deal RG) with the women who is standing there with the tickets, putting the tickets in the box, they will sell you some of the tickets and then you work easier. You get the tickets and then you know you have no need for being in a hurry because you got your sum for the day....

Because the people were stupid, some of them did not want to limit the number they could do per day. If I know I get these tickets without working, they want to have more than they used to do. That's where the bosses find out... when they are counting them... Then they take you and put you in a room to one side and if you can't do it, then they are just clear you have stolen those tickets, because you are not going to say someone gave me the tickets.<sup>18</sup>

Mechanisation affected workers in three principal ways: tighter work discipline; the introduction of shift work; and lower earnings as piece-work was eliminated. Supervision was increased to ensure workers

<sup>17</sup> Interview Liz Phike, Paar1, 4.06.85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

fulfilled their tasks of sorting, grading and maintaining quality control and new work organisation transformed the formerly sociable work, involving large numbers of workers in close proximity working at long tables, into labouring at mechanical sorting belts. Workers had less mobility, they were not permitted to leave their places and were compelled to wear colour coded caps so that workers from different departments could be easily identified. This cut down on inter-department communication as workers could only inform others of events during their breaks. Increased supervision was required to ensure production took place at optimum levels, since piece-rates were eliminated on the whole and, as the labour process was not fully transformed workers retained a limited ability to resist a pace of work imposed by capital. Increased mechanisation involved tighter work discipline, but it did not congeal relations of exploitation within the labour process itself so making redundant the policing role of supervisors. Mechanisation of this nature marks a transition from absolute to relative surplus value extraction, implying a transition from a formal to real subordination to capital. Significant though these developments were, in practice they did not herald 'moments' when real subordination of capital was achieved, for workers had not abandoned their subjective control over the labour process nor their ability to struggle for better terms on which to sell their labour power.

With higher levels of capitalisation from the early 1960s onwards, shift work increasingly became the norm. The union had long striven to gain the best possible conditions for its workers doing overtime, particularly in the provision of meals and transport. Even though employers required permission to increase overtime from the Department of Labour, which was required to consult the union before granting exemptions, the union's objections were over-ruled more frequently as hostility from the Department mounted. Union policy on additional overtime and night shifts was designed to promote employment. Accordingly it opposed exemptions being made to employers to work night shifts and proposed that day shifts be increased to accommodate the employment of more workers.

Most strongly felt by workers was a gradual phasing out of piece-work and the introduction of a standard daily minimum wage with a productivity bonus. These changes represented a convergence of opinion between the union and employers, albeit for different reasons. For

employers the reorganisation of the production process led to elimination of the payment system that conformed to the earlier mode of work organisation. Piece-rates were also targeted by the employers as a result of the increases achieved by the union's seasonal wages level negotiations. From the union's perspective piece-work was regarded as a form of 'sweating' where older workers faced retrenchment if unable to produce at their former pace. For this reason the union started to press for a replacement of piece-work by a minimum wage and bonus system.<sup>19</sup> Piece-work was phased out on the major fruit types in the early to mid-1960s.

Considerable unhappiness was felt over the elimination of piece-rates, as these workers, who had earned wages equivalent to the highest grades, took a drop in income.

When working piece we had to work hard but earned more than we did then. (post piece-work) The grades of the money were less, but we were earning high because we were killing ourselves to get the money... We were very upset really I must say.<sup>20</sup>

#### FCWU organisation in the early 1960s

Again we resume the narrative after a major strike - the Port Elizabeth lock out and the subsequent wage agreement of 1960 discussed in chapter four. One of the more important ramifications of this strike was that head-office provided the bulk of the funds to sustain the workers, with the result that its depleted financial resources hampered its work. Branches made donations in addition to their normal affiliation fees in efforts to rectify this.<sup>21</sup>

The year started on a good note. Efforts to improve the position of the fish branches resulted in the formation of a new branch at Elandsbaai, workers were re-instated at Somerset West after the intervention of the general secretary and at Lambert's Bay a solid front by workers secured a victory. At Lamberts Bay a struggle over conditions had led to eviction orders being issued and one worker was dismissed. The general secretary managed to have the worker reinstated

19 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 18.04.85.

20 Interview Liz Phike, Paarl, 4.06.85.

21 Head office was not represented at the 1960 SACTU conference due to pressure of work and a lack of money. All branches resolved to donate £15 to head office to rectify this. FCWU Minutes of the 20th Annual Conference 24/25.09.60.

but management insisted she be suspended for fourteen days as punishment, whereupon the entire factory resolved to take a fourteen day holiday. The boss backed down, agreed to take back all and withdrew the eviction notices.<sup>22</sup>

A well attended SACTU regional conference in Cape Town, with union delegates from as far away as Lamberts Bay, Ashton and Wolseley further contributed to an optimistic spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Then the State of Emergency was declared, rudely interrupting this scene - union meetings were disrupted and office bearers detained. Oscar Mpetha, general Secretary; John Phendlani AFCWU vice president; Leon Levy, Mabel Balfour, S. Jonas from Johannesburg; and Isobell Draghoender and Francis Baard from Port Elizabeth were detained.<sup>24</sup> In addition other members of the union were subjected to various punitive measures, such as Christina Matthews, FCWU's Benoni organiser who was banned, and imprisoned for two months as a result of the 1958 fl-a-day stay at home.<sup>25</sup> In the wave of repression that followed, these office bearers were among those to suffer banning orders and banishment, severely hampering the union in coping with the mounting hostility it faced. Indicative of the problem was the situation in Port Elizabeth, where Ms. Draghoender was restricted from attending gatherings and prohibited from associating with AFCWU secretary Francis Baard.<sup>26</sup>

Recurrent problems in the fishing branches stemming from intermittent work prevented the union achieving sufficient representivity, forcing it to withdraw its application for a conciliation board.<sup>27</sup> Piece-rate negotiations were also hampered as bosses at first refused to see union deputations on the grounds that, increases had already been granted in the new agreement and that they could not afford higher wages given the poor state of the market. After a series of meetings and deputations to the bosses where the union argued its case forcibly, factories in the Western Cape achieved increases.<sup>28</sup>

22 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 13.03.60.

23 Ibid.

24 Liz Abrahams was detained and released through threats of strike action claim Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.413. This is not corroborated by other sources.

25 FCWU Circular letter No.8/60, 25.01.60.

26 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 24.07.60. The MC recommended that Ms. Draghoender go and work in the cannery until things settled down.

27 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 22.05.60.

28 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1960.

In view of the massive lay offs in the fruit canning industry, coupled with a reduction in the size of the seasonal workforce as a result of mechanisation,<sup>29</sup> unemployment benefits became a matter of increasing concern. When unemployment insurance benefits were reintroduced in areas that had been excluded from the workings of the Unemployment Insurance Act, the union was angered to learn that its members were excluded. Just how deliberate and blatant state action against the union was came through in a reply from the Minister of Labour to protests against his bias. "Members of your union, as such, have not been excluded from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The exclusion is of persons employed in the fruit and vegetable canning industry and the fruit drying and packing industries."<sup>30</sup> The union's action for the extension of unemployment benefits to its members was to stretch over several years. In this activity the union had the support of Mr. Charles Barnett M.P., the coloured representative for the Boland.<sup>31</sup>

The banning of the ANC and PAC did not lead to an immediate cessation of political activity. When SACTU was reaching the apogee of its organisation and mobilisation in Natal, the union's support for SACTU also ran strong. Ten delegates were elected from the Western Cape branches, two from Port Elizabeth and one from Johannesburg to attend the 1961 SACTU conference. When SACTU meetings were banned the conference was moved forward in a hectic 'beat the ban' session before the order came into effect.<sup>32</sup> Reporting back to the management committee, delegates told of the defiant action and remarked how much they had learnt from discussions with, "the peoples leaders."<sup>33</sup> The union continued to make donations to the local committee and complied with requests for financial assistance from SACTU unions involved in

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29 Automation was one of the reasons cited why workers urgently needed unemployment benefits. Branches were requested to discuss automation in their departments and inform head office of what new machines were introduced and how much labour was displaced as a result. FCWU Circular letters Nos. 9/61 & 10/61

30 Letter from the Minister of Labour to the FCWU 27.09.60., quoted in FCWU Management Committee minutes, 16.10.60.

31 Barnett, who served between 1958 and 1968, gave considerable assistance to the union through the 1960s on matters such as these.

32 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.415.

33 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 23.04.61.

strikes.<sup>34</sup> When approached by a number of Cape Town unions to participate in a conference on job reservation the union queried why SACTU had not been included, to be told that the organisers believed a better response would be forthcoming if it were not organised by SACTU. The union agreed to participate, and branches were urged to send representatives but the management committee resolved that the secretary should press for the inclusion of SACTU in the conference.<sup>35</sup>

General union work, as always, continued to take up the bulk of the organisation's attention. Constant checking of pay packets did not allow underpayment to go unnoticed, with the result that each year the general secretary could name a sum ranging from several hundred to thousands of pounds that workers received in back pay through the efforts of the union. Improving conditions, longer rest periods, better protective clothing and holding on to improvements won when the bosses attempted to pass on the cost of such items by making deductions from wages, required constant attention. In addition maternity benefits were monitored to ensure that workers received what they were entitled to, and numerous small grievances were dealt with. Members were also kept informed of political developments, encouraged to celebrate May day and join the union to celebrate its founding anniversary each year.

Within the factory the terms in which labour was subordinated to capital were expressed in the conflict between workers and foremen. The latter had the powers of dismissal, were often racist and would verbally and physically abuse workers, thus drawing fire on issues of factory discipline and control. The success with which threats from foremen were countered depended upon the level of organisation within the factory and strength of the committee.

If the foreman sees the union in the factory is weak...Ah, he is playing baboon with the workers. But if he knows (it is strong RG) the manager himself will tell the foreman. "Look people you must be careful. I am always getting into trouble because you people are playing and hitting the workers."<sup>36</sup>

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34 Donations were made to the Western Province Motor Assembly Union (R4.20) and Durban branch (£35). FCWU Management Committee minutes, 2.07.61 & 13.08.61.

35 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 11.02.62.

36 Interview John Pendlani, Paarl, 1.04.85.

### Difficulties with Expansion

Since the early 1950s the union had ceased to expand into new sectors of the food industry, and in general had concentrated upon maintaining its organisation in the core canning industries. The union's expansion was checked by the repressive climate and obstructionism from state officials. The story of Victory Mills serves to illustrate the problems the union faced in attempting to draw unorganised workers into its ranks.

Victory Mills, a small food packing plant in Worcester, was organised by the union early in 1961 and a demand for a R2 increase on all rates was submitted. Wages were appallingly low, women earning £2.12s. and men £2.19s. (including COLA) per week.<sup>37</sup> Workers signed power of attorney forms to facilitate the process of establishing a conciliation board in March and waited impatiently for progress. In June the union was informed by the Labour Department that some of the workers in the dispute were involved in the distributive trade, therefore the union was not registered to represent them.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly a new application was made for those workers to be covered by the union's scope of registration. In November very dissatisfied workers were informed by the Department of Labour that the conciliation board had been refused. Now free to strike, workers discussed what action to take and feeling they could wait no longer, decided to strike in December. Support for their action was assured by the management committee.

Twenty five workers duly went on strike, demanding a £2 a week increase. Their places were taken almost immediately by scab labour supplied by a boss keen to see the union defeated. After two weeks, when some of the scab labour left the factory the employer asked workers to return, but he refused to re-employ more than ten workers. The union paid out £137 in strike funds and assisted the victimised workers find new jobs,<sup>39</sup> but the strike had been broken and the factory not successfully unionised.

37 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 21.01.62. Mixed sterling and South African currency was recorded in the minutes.

38 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 4.06.61. Approaches were made to the Distributive Workers Union but it stated it did not have the resources to cover Worcester.

39 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 21.01.62.

The strike at Victory Mills illustrates obstacles the union faced. It had opted to use conciliation boards as a means of gaining wage increases but the delay in their appointment and the bureaucratic steps that had to be complied with made the use of these boards a strategy incapable of producing quick results. Under the circumstances of limited organising resources, head-office officials would have been hard pressed to visit the factory regularly and keep workers' interest alive in the union and the benefits it could only bring in the long term. Thus it could only give its support to such local action that it had a limited ability to control.

A negotiation strategy dependant upon conciliation boards was also exposed to the obstructive role the Department of Labour could play. As pointed out in chapter two, a negotiating strategy so closely linked to the state's industrial relations machinery subjected it to terms laid down by the state. Earlier problems experienced with the administration of the system became more severe during the 1960s and these problems are particularly well illustrated by events in the fishing industry.

Fish workers had not received increases since 1956, and for much of the late 1950s the FCWU's branches in the industry were weak. Beset by problems of intermittent work and poor seasons, repeated attempts to secure new agreements were frustrated, and only in 1961 was a conciliation board application successful. After some effort a new agreement was negotiated providing for increases of 12/6d. per week and other improvements.<sup>40</sup> The Labour Department then refused to accept this new agreement unless it excluded certain operations (such as fish smoking) not covered by the union's scope of registration. This the union agreed to, submitting separate demands for these categories.<sup>41</sup> Further delays occurred in the next round of action to improve fish workers wages as the union was not registered to cover frozen fish.<sup>42</sup>

### Leadership problems

Restriction orders were intended to prevent leaders doing their work effectively, and while these obstacles could be circumvented, they could not be obviated entirely. Oscar Mpetha experienced this problem in relation to his position as AFCWU general secretary. His second banning

40 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 13.08.61.

41 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.12.61.

42 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 29.02.64.

order had restricted him to the Cape Peninsula, thus interfering with his duties far more than his previous ban. Matters came to a head at the start of 1962.

Poor finances and a weakened state of organisation in the AFCWU branches had forced the closure of AFCWU head office for six months in 1961. Oscar Mpetha was owed £400 in back pay and large amounts were due to the FCWU, a situation that led Mpetha to propose that he reduce his work for the union and that he be paid a retainer only for the duration of his banning order.<sup>43</sup>

When the situation did not improve, a special conference was called at SACTU's behest. Don Mateman and Mark Shope visited Cape Town and addressed the conference, expressing their disappointment over the decline of a union that had built SACTU and now did not reply to correspondence, had neglected administration and shown divisions between its executive and full-time officials. At the special conference, attended by officials of both unions, several allegations of neglect of duties and failure to account for expenditure were made against Mpetha and it was thereupon resolved to appoint Lydia Kasi to the position of AFCWU general secretary.<sup>44</sup>

At issue here were problems that all organisations faced with repression, and for the union additional structural problems associated with the division into registered and unregistered parts. The lack of financial stability has been shown to be a recurrent problem. The internal dispute possibly also resulted due to differing perceptions on the question of the use of resources for union and political work, as divisions arose over how the money was spent, not that it had been misappropriated for personal gain.

#### Police Harassment Intensifies

From 1962 to 1964 the state launched a major offensive against the popular movements, following through the banning of organisations with an intensive series of bans and political trials against the leadership

43 AFCWU 14th Annual National Conference minutes, 9/10.09.61. Comprehensive minutes of the AFCWU management committee and conferences exist for the 1960s thus allowing detailed comments to be made, the absence of earlier records prevents this for the 1950s.

44 AFCWU Special Conference minutes, 28.01.62.

of popular organisations.<sup>45</sup> Although no stranger to police harassment, action against the union intensified and some of the incidents are chronicled here.

In March 1962 Leon Levy's banning order was renewed. Soon after that police attended factory meetings in Paarl, Ashton, Montagu and Mossel Bay.<sup>46</sup> Union meetings were prevented by police and employers at Stompneus Bay and when head-office officials visited East London they were questioned for three hours by police who demanded to be provided with meeting agendas. When union officials refused the Special Branch agent threatened to "break down every thing they had built up in East London."<sup>47</sup> Six Special Branch policemen followed the unionists wherever they went and attended every meeting. In response protests were made to the Minister of Labour, press and overseas trade unions.

Taking their lead from the police, employers stepped up their offensive against the union. In Port Elizabeth Francis Beard was denied access to the factory by LKB, which thereafter refused to meet a committee which included African worker representatives, but still permitted meetings with the FCWU.<sup>48</sup> In January 1963 Francis Beard was banned, bringing to eleven the number of union office bearers and officials banned or exiled in its twenty two year history.<sup>49</sup>

During 1963 the police raided the union head office on three occasions, the first raid occurring in May when Special Branch police recorded the names of all branch officials, read union correspondence and took copies of the Johannesburg correspondence. Several local officials were also later questioned by Special Branch police.<sup>50</sup>

For union officials in the small towns the police were a constant presence, harassing and intimidating them at every move.

Jy is nou hout gerus by jou huis dan kom die polisie aan jou deur, daai tyd. "Jy't gisteraand vir die mense dit en dit gesê. Is jy nie bang nie. Weet jy dat jy kan tronk toe gaan daaroor." Dan was dit nie eers jou bedoeling gewees nie.<sup>51</sup>

45 Bloch, G. op.cit. pp.6-7. and Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. pp.420-434.

46 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 20.05.62. Members were told to inform head office of similar events and remain calm.

47 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 29.07.62.

48 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 30.06.62.

49 FCWU Circular Letters No.5/63 & 6/63, 31.01.63 & 11.02.63.

50 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 9.06.63.

51 Interview Mrs Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay, 2.08.86.

Protests to the Minister of Labour that the union's right to organise was being infringed upon were given a curt reply to the effect that the matter should be taken up with the Minister of Justice and that the police were investigating subversion. In response the union issued a press statement that was published in the Cape Times stating it was a legitimate union with twenty five branches and 9 174 members.

Our complaint is that the police in the country areas particularly, where the union is isolated and in any event exposed to much hostile pressure by some employers, and where there is no other organisation to defend and advance the people, intimidate members and persistently obstruct our work in these rural areas.<sup>52</sup>

Denying that the union was subversive as it was in fact a legitimate registered trade union, the statement ended as follows.

Further we make no attempt to conceal our aim of taking part in the struggle for democratic rights for all South Africans, including the right for free trade union organisation for all. Our members are voteless and we express their legitimate aspirations and needs when we protest against racial discrimination, and demand equality of treatment and civil liberties for our people.<sup>53</sup>

AFCWU general secretary, Lydia Kasi was detained for a month under the infamous '90 day' General Law Amendment Act in mid-1963, and Leon Levy, having been released from detention, left the country.<sup>54</sup>

Three union officials were banned in 1964 and thereafter, their job being done, the level of police harassment was to decline in intensity to a more intermittent interference. Early in 1964 Johannesburg AFCWU secretary Mabel Balfour was banned, and shortly thereafter FCWU Johannesburg secretary, Mary Moodley.<sup>55</sup> The most bitter blow of all was the banning of FCWU general secretary Liz Abrahams in August 1964. She was prohibited from doing any trade union work and confined to the Paarl district.<sup>56</sup> Abrahams had been general secretary for nine years, and as the first worker to be elected to the position had brought to the post a militancy and determination in the best union tradition. Her post was filled by Ms. Freda Peterson for an interim period and then John Mentoor was elected FCWU vice-president, a position which he held until 1975.

52 The Cape Times.....

53 FCWU press statement in Cape Times, June 7 1963.

54 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 13.10.63.

55 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 24.02.64.

56 FCWU Circular letter No.17/64, 3.09.64.

SACTU was especially hard hit during the state offensive. Many of its members, pulled into the sabotage campaign, landed up in jail, leaving the organisation without activists to direct it. In the Western Cape trade unionists were not recruited into the sabotage campaign. Over this period SACTU activities slowed down as the FCWU's position became increasingly desperate. Returning from SACTU's 8th Annual Conference in 1963 the general secretary reported that activists were to organise workers wherever they were concentrated and speak to them on busses, trains and in their homes.<sup>57</sup>

By the following year the union's finances had deteriorated to the point where Cape delegates were unable to attend SACTU's Annual Conference. The Johannesburg branch was left to represent the union.<sup>58</sup> No further SACTU conferences were held after 1964. With forty five SACTU officials banned at that point<sup>59</sup> trade union activity gradually ground to a halt and what remained of SACTU leadership went into exile.

Hostility and expediency characterised the attitude of the Trade Union Council of South African (TUCSA, the renamed SATUC) towards SACTU. In the early 1960s TUCSA opened its doors to African trade unions and attempted to wean them away from SACTU. It also tried to block registered Coloured and Indian unions' support for SACTU.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the FCWU was invited to attend TUCSA's Annual National Conference in 1965, prompting union officials to enquire whether SACTU was still active.<sup>61</sup> Replies were received from letters written to SACTU head office urging it to stand firm and branches were asked to increase their efforts to collect affiliation fees. Thus the union continued to make financial contributions to SACTU through 1965 but this came to an end early in 1966. After receiving a plaintive letter from the secretary of the AFCWU branch in Johannesburg, describing how the office had been rented out by SACTU without the union being informed, that subscription income had dried up and that the secretary did not know if she could continue to work; the FCWU head-office

57 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 5.05.63. As an informal activity it is not possible for me to judge how extensive this activity was. There are no further references to such activities in the minutes.

58 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 19.04.64.

59 Luckhardt, K. & Wall, B. op.cit. p.429.

60 Emdon, E. 'Co-Optation and Control: TUCSA and the African Unions in the Sixties.' Africa Perspective, No.25, 1984. pp.49-52. Ensor, L. op.cit. p.28.

61 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 34.01.65.

attempted to contact SACTU head-office.<sup>62</sup> When no reply was forthcoming the management committee resolved to inform the branches not to collect affiliation fees for SACTU any longer.<sup>63</sup> Eleven years after SACTU was formed the union officially put an end to its financial support for the now defunct federation. Principles of non-racialism and political emancipation that the union had stood for from its inception had been championed by SACTU and the union was proud of its contribution to advancing these principles through SACTU. Unlike the TWIU which disaffiliated from SACTU, the union did not disavow what its own older tradition and that of SACTU had stood for. Now isolated from the support of a broader labour movement, the attainment of the aims it and SACTU stood for became an even remoter possibility.

Under these circumstances, political activity ceased and what little SACTU involvement there had been in the branches stopped altogether. The union was left to pursue its struggle for improvements in the social conditions of its members under its approach to social welfare unionism over a more restricted terrain. In the branches activity centred on basic issues of wages and conditions where there was little time to spare for political education. As an interviewee has commented:

Nee, hulle het meesal net gekom vir die unie werk. Want daar's nooit tyd om sulke ander sake te praat nie. Hulle het van 'n ander plek gepraat, maar dit is nou net wat by daai fabriek gebeur. Nou net van die unie werk, nie van ander dinge nie....En as daar miskien van ons unieleiers in die tronke is dan sal hulle miskien verduidelik...."

"Ek dink hier's nou meer politieke praat as toe, destyds het ons nie eintlik politiek gepraat nie.<sup>64</sup>

### Struggling for a pittance

Lengthy negotiations between the union and the Fish Canners Association over the establishment of a provident fund resulted in an agreement to start a reserve fund to supplement workers income during the off-season. Administration of the fund was in the hands of management, who refused to accede to the union's request for joint management or for alterations to its administration.<sup>65</sup>

62 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 6.02.66.

63 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 6.03.66.

64 Interview Maggie Fransman, Wolseley, 21.06.86.

65 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 27.01.63.

As efforts to have a conciliation board appointed in the fish canning industry were not successful, thus bosses could not be seriously challenged. Moreover, a Wage Board was appointed to investigate the fish industry and despite a detailed case being made for higher wages, backed up by evidence of workers needs, the eventual recommendations were passed into Wage Determination number 249 which increased wages for a few grades but left most untouched or even reduced. In the light of profits being made in the fishing industry, this angered the union. Coming into effect in 1964, the wage determination had prevented applications for conciliation boards being made until a year had elapsed.<sup>66</sup> Union leadership directed its attention to improving fish branches' state of organisation and streamlined the process by adopting a strategy of regional meetings for the West coast branches as the distances involved made contact extremely costly.

A new two year agreement providing for increases on COLA, was negotiated for the fruit and vegetable canning industry when the previous one expired.<sup>67</sup>

#### Attacks on Unity from Without and Splits from Within

Undermining non-racialism within the union had been an employer and Department of Labour objective for as long as the union had existed in a form which embodied non-racial unity. Efforts to undermine its non-racialism had confronted the union in the past, they were stepped up in the mid-1960s. Workers committees at Somerset West, Tulbagh, Ashton, Montagu and Worcester were informed by employers that joint AFCWU/FCWU meetings would no longer be permitted as the Department of Labour had given instructions to that effect. Department of Labour officials were reported as asking African members, "why did they have to pay 5c and 2,5c every week when the Bantu Affairs is doing every thing in their power to assist the African workers."<sup>68</sup> Such efforts to undermine unity did not always succeed, as in one incident in Paarl where workers refused to be racially separated or to speak to Department of Labour officials when a dispute broke out. In this case they were rewarded for their unity by winning the reinstatement of dismissed workers.<sup>69</sup>

66 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1964.

67 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 13.10.63.

68 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 15.06.63.

69 FCWU Circular letter No.11/63, 27.04.63.

In an interview with the Secretary of Labour concerning the Wage Determination in the fish industry; employers' victimisation of committee members; and interference from Labour Department officials, the union was assured that matters would be rectified.<sup>70</sup> Quite the opposite occurred, with the campaign against the union continuing unabated. Cannery Association meetings were addressed repeatedly over several years by officials from the Department of Labour who explained the workings of the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act and urged employers to take the initiative and form works or liaison committees.<sup>71</sup>

Divisions, however, were not all state or employer induced as a serious split late in 1964 at the Paarl branch, which consisted of two main factories: LKB Daljosophat and H. Jones, shows. Division erupted at the Annual General Meeting where dissatisfaction with the branch secretary was expressed. At the management committee it was reported:

H. Jones workers are dissatisfied at stories going around and the lack of unity amongst workers. Meetings are always disorderly. They did not want two branches, only to be separated for they could not stand the misbehavior of LKB Dal workers.<sup>72</sup>

What was meant by 'misbehavior' is not clear from the minutes, however, workers at the LKB Dal factory contributed less in subscriptions to the branch and this suggests that they were less organised and that this caused resentment over the use of branch funds to which they had contributed a smaller proportion than H. Jones members. Other factors cited concerned the Union's President, Mr. C. Kilowan and Paarl branch officials who were accused of partisan behavior.<sup>73</sup> Coming as this did when Liz Abrahams had just been banned, the new secretary Ms. Peterson was ill equipped to cope. Head office officials urged the factory committees to unite and deep concern was expressed by other union branches at the disunity in the 'mother' branch. However, H. Jones workers were adamant, refusing to join LKB Dal. They instructed their secretary Ms. D. Hartogh to divide the Paarl Branch assets on the basis of income over the previous five years. When the head office took legal advice against the split, as it was

70 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 24.05.64.

71 Annual Report of the Secretary of the South African Fruit and Vegetable Cannery Association 1964.

72 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.10.64.

73 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 23.8.64; 25.10.64; 15.11.64; 6.12.64; 6.3.66.

unconstitutional and would also weaken the union, compromises suggested, in which both factory committees' interests would be secured, did not meet approval. As a result the Paarl branch split into two - Paarl and Daljosophat - and following a series of bitter exchanges, the issue was finally settled in October 1966 when the Daljosophat branch accepted a division of assets based on income from each factory.<sup>74</sup>

Underlying this split was the more general phenomenon of trade union officials having a following in particular factories, as a result of having themselves worked there, or built a series of loyalties among such workers by attending to their interests, that these loyalties are expressed firstly towards the particular organiser and only secondly to the union. To these features internal to organisation could be added employer's efforts to exploit racial divisions in the workforce, a problem the union had faced in the past and was to face more often in the future. In the case of the Paarl split, however, there was no evidence of direct employer intervention. Whatever lay at the root of the division, the results were painfully apparent in the weakness of this branch that had been the union's hub.

#### Struggling to Maintain Organisation

In an effort to increase its legal protection and make the medical benefit fund easier to administer, the union approached the Canners Association with a request to form an industrial council. Some measure of the vulnerability the union felt at the time is reflected in this attempt to make fullest possible use of the Industrial Conciliation Act in order to increase the union's bargaining power. The decision to apply for an industrial council would also have been influenced by the obstructive role played by Native Labour Officers who attended conciliation board meetings to 'represent' the views of African workers, and invariably stated that African workers were satisfied with wages or desired increases far below the union's proposal.

The formation of an industrial council had been proposed in the early 1950s, in the mid-1960s and again in the early 1970s. When approached, the Canners Association agreed to consider and investigate the proposal, but turned down the request on grounds that it would be

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74 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 23.10.66.

unsuitable for the industry.<sup>75</sup> Further union requests were unsuccessful. Explaining the Cannery Association's decision a representative has commented:

Firstly, industrial councils cost more. Secondly, they were felt to be not really necessary as there is only only a small permanent labour force. Conciliation boards are no cost really. The association is paid subs by canners and includes conciliation boards in its work. During the winter months an industrial council inspector would only find permanent staff at the factories, who are paid more and probably satisfied anyway.<sup>76</sup>

The management committee's examination of the branches in the mid-1960s found general levels of organisation poor with many workers unorganised. Collection of subscriptions varied but many branches had had long periods when little or no money had been collected.<sup>77</sup> Low 'subs' income left the head-office with little money to finance trips to strengthen branches resulting in a vicious cycle and these issues were to remain a problem over the remainder of the period examined here.

Conditions varied in different parts of the union. In the fish branches the union was able to obtain a 75c. across the board increase starting in 1965. A conciliation board agreement confirmed this increase but the Minister of Labour refused to gazette it on grounds that the union was not registered for all items in the areas concerned.<sup>78</sup>

A new fruit canning agreement was reached in 1965 after the Cannery Association declared a dispute and convened a conciliation board. Thus the union was informed by the Department of Labour when it wished to make its wage demands the basis of the negotiations.

The demands served by the employers constitute the subject matter of the present dispute. The dispute was not precipitated by any demands of your union but came into being upon the rejection by your union of the demands made by the employers. The counter demands subsequently made by your union do not therefore form part of the dispute.<sup>79</sup>

75 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 27.06.65.

76 Interview Mr. G.S. Glendening, Cape Town, 15.04.85. As Mr. Glendening has been secretary of the SAF&VCA since the mid-1950s, this view would cover the period under examination.

77 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 14.03.65.

78 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1966.

79 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.07.65.

Settlement was reached, extending the previous agreement in addition to increasing COLA over the space of three years from 27,5c. to 45c.<sup>80</sup> Basically unchanged from the agreement which was reached in 1961, when the union had been under severe pressure to stave off wage cuts, and the only increases granted since having been to the COLA, this agreement gives an indication of the union's level of organisation and the unfavorable conditions it faced.

In 1965 unemployment insurance benefits were extended to cover canning workers, who had previously been excluded. However, these benefits only covered those who worked for at least eight months in a year, thus only permanent workers were covered. In addition the canners association applied for, and were granted classification as a seasonal industry in terms of the Act<sup>81</sup> making it more difficult for the union to have benefits extended.

The strengthening of organisation at branch level in light of the serious weakness in the union prompted the leadership to convene three training schools during 1966. These were conducted for the benefit of branch officials in the nearby branches, and excluded distant branches on the West Coast and in the Eastern Province. Training in the union had seldom been given in formal sessions devoted to the subject as the expenses were prohibitive which explains the pragmatic exclusion of distant branches from this round of training schools. General practice had been to make use of conference meetings and similar gatherings for brief sessions to educate members in trade unionism, and specialist training schools had not been held since the early 1950s. Matters covered included industrial legislation, health issues, book keeping and note taking, city council affairs and the necessity of trade unions.<sup>82</sup> The schools were regarded as being highly successful with training provided by sympathetic trade unionists and the attendance at each school being about two dozen. However, lack of funds led to their discontinuation.<sup>83</sup>

### Things Fall Apart

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the formal separation of the union into a registered and unregistered branch became more serious as

80 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 29.08.65.

81 Annual Report Secretary of the SAF&VCA, 1965.

82 FCWU Circular letters Nos.14/66, 15/66.

83 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 20.11.66.

racial separation weakened the organisation . The level of organisation in the AFCWU branches declined more severely and that part of the union suffered the most through this period for reasons suggested below. The African branches did not collapse entirely during the late sixties, indeed their low point was in the early 1970s but the union's adherence to non-racialism was seriously challenged.

Three major factors created structural problems for the union: increased pressure for racial separation from employers and the state; changes in the composition of the workforce increasing the proportion of African workers overall; and tighter implementation of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP).

Influx control was tightened up during the 1960s and in the Western Cape the CLPP clearly had more to do with control over African labour than allocating jobs to coloured workers. From 1966 the African population in the Western Cape was 'frozen' and was to be reduced by 5% per annum.<sup>84</sup> Far from a reduction in the number of African workers in the canning industry taking place over the mid to late 1960s, their numbers in fact increased. As figures 1.5 through to 1.6.2 in Chapter One show, total African employment in the industry had exceeded total Coloured employment by 1954 and while figures for both groups were similar until 1960, during the 1960s African employment rose steadily to double total coloured employment by 1970. Noting that these trends are based on national figures for the canning industry, and that Coloured employment figures in the Western Cape would not have been so dramatically overtaken, the implications of these employment trends were as follows. A higher proportion of workers in the industry would have been eligible for membership of the AFCWU, but the weakness of the AFCWU prevented it expanding its membership on a significant scale to match the higher number of African workers employed, therefore decreasing overall representivity in the factory. Compounding this problem was a reliance upon conciliation boards to reach agreements and the fact that these could not be instituted for African workers who were legally excluded from the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

<sup>84</sup> Van der Horst, S. 'Statutory and Administrative Measures and Policy Directly Affecting the Employment of Coloured Persons,' in Van der Merwe, H. V. & Groenewald, J. Occupational and Social Change among the Coloured People in South African. Cape Town: Center for Intergroup Studies, 1976. pp.157-158.

Having been refused permits for short term contract labour in the past, canners had expressed concern over the threat to their labour supply, implied by the CLPP. These fears were soon allayed as meetings with the Department of Bantu Affairs informed canners that the labour reduction formula would be relaxed in their case, but they were asked to voluntarily reduce the numbers of Africans employed.<sup>85</sup> Tacit permission for using, and in fact increasing the amount of African labour in canneries continued.<sup>86</sup>

Exploiting racial divisions were nothing new in themselves, however, under the greater intensity of such attacks and weakened by other factors, the union's ability to combat schisms declined. We have seen how the state and employers applied pressure to fragment the union by refusing recognition of the AFCWU and how, even though fiercely resisted, this succeeded.

A relationship of FCWU representing the AFCWU at conciliation boards had existed ever since the formation of the AFCWU, creating the situation where the FCWU acted by proxy for the AFCWU. In the late 1950s AFCWU members attending conciliation board meetings as observers were prohibited and this continued to be the case in the future. This proxy relationship, initially confined to conciliation board negotiations only, began to extend to other spheres of the union's operation. Some of the problems of this period are briefly mentioned below.

Dissatisfaction was expressed on the management committee when the general secretary and Grabouw branch secretary went ahead with a meeting after the bosses had refused to see the AFCWU secretary ordering her to leave. The opinion that "we must tell the bosses that we are united and if the African cannot enter then we do not discuss anything"<sup>87</sup> was expressed and it was decided that general members meetings should be called if the problem reoccurred. Problems did continue and were expressed by African workers' accusations that the union did nothing for them.<sup>88</sup>

85 Annual Report Secretary of the SAF&VCA, 1966 & 1967.

86 Humphries, R. 'Coloured Labour Preference.' Center for African Studies UCT Conference Western Cape Roots and Realities 1986. pp.21-22. The writer argues how needs to supply labour were given high priority over maintaining influx control.

87 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 6.03.66.

88 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 29.10.67.

Due to the refusal of the Department of Labour to allow the AFCWU to hold meetings or collect subscriptions on the factory premises, a practice of FCWU officials collecting subscriptions was instituted. They would be accompanied on factory visits by the AFCWU secretary Mrs N. Johnson, but the effect of this was to reduce to visible presence of AFCWU officials in contact with members. As other problems mounted, the refusal to pay subs reinforced divisions between the two unions. Factories employing a large African labour complement, such as Worcester, consequently became serious weaknesses in the union's overall representivity.

One major source of antagonism revolved around the employment of seasonal workers. Supervisors had the responsibility of recruiting seasonal labour and were used by the factory to notify workers when they would be needed and to mobilise the necessary numbers required. When only coloured workers were promoted to supervisor posts, the question of who got work took on a racial dimension. Complaints started to be voiced that African workers were being discriminated against in employment.<sup>89</sup> Action against victimisation of one section of the workforce was taken on occasion by organising deputations to management,<sup>90</sup> but the overall effect of this was to widen the gulf between the AFCWU and FCWU.

There were also political and ideological dimensions to this schism in relation to the union's retreat from political activity in the barren years of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Political activity declined to agitation for coloureds' civil rights, reflecting implicitly the states' policy to further entrench ethnic divisions through the policy of establishing separate political institutions for Coloureds and Indians in the late 1960s. At the lowest point in the union's history organisation was restricted to the major branches in the Western Cape, internal divisions leaving African workers disillusioned with the union, and the registered union struggling onwards on a path of isolation.

In the late 1970s a section of the leadership which had links to the Freedom Party and 'a go it alone' approach centred on the coloured workers split from the union to form a separate union for coloured workers the 'Boland Vakbond'. The 'Vakbond' received assistance from the Department of Manpower and TUCSA officials as well as the employers who

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89 AFCWU Management Committee minutes, 14.01.68, & 28.04.68.

gave it offices at the factory. This break-away union was beaten by renewed organisation in the 1980s.<sup>90</sup> One final matter in this saga of problems that beset the union deserves mention, that of dishonesty by officials. Money had been misappropriated in the past and when culprits were identified retribution was swift. In this period however, the problem inadvertently assumed greater significance. By the end of 1968, nine people owed the union money, yet in the majority of cases they had no ability to repay their debts, and legal action against them proved to be unrewarding. Official corruption undermined workers confidence in the union, reducing subs income in a vicious cycle. These problems were only to be overcome when renewed organisation revived the union from the mid-1970s onwards.

At its low point the union was divided and weak, organisation withering until only the core branches in the Western Cape were active with moribund organisation limping on in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg. From the bosses perspective their adversary of old was no longer a threat.

We quite frankly thought we could kill the union with little effort. We thought we could kill it off. It was not a serious threat. We did not do it though.<sup>91</sup>

### But the Centre Holds

Why did the union not collapse entirely and fade like all other unions which had engaged in similar political action during the previous two decades? The answer lies in: the support the union derived from the Medical Benefit Fund (MBF); that as a registered union the FCWU's access to factories was never decisively blocked; the industrial relations machinery and the soundness of the union practices ingrained in union officials by Ray Alexander.

Although jointly controlled by employee and employer contributors, the MBF as discussed in chapter two, in practice was used by the union to further its own organisation. MBF employees were in many instances also branch secretaries, thus their salary was paid for by the MBF. Contributors were not confined to union membership, and at the union's lowest point it is possible that MBF membership exceeded its own.

<sup>90</sup> Articles where Paarl officials gave support to the Coloured Labour Preference Policy reported in Rapport, 15.10.78 and 22.10.78. Also interviews with Paarl branch officials 10.06.86.

<sup>91</sup> Interview Dr. J.A. Mouton, Paarl, 9.04.86.

Administering the fund required meetings with the contributors and this permitted secretaries to hold factory meetings with workers where the union itself was unable to hold factory meetings. Such meetings were officially confined to matters relating to the fund only, but they were used as forums to discuss broader issues, a practice which, on occasion, caused confrontations with employers. In addition the fund was administered by Ms V. Yon, a loyal member of the head office staff since the late 1940s and who had been trained by Ray Alexander. Although not an elected union official Ms. Yon provided guidance and was consulted by other officials. Her presence as MBF secretary provided a continuity with the past and influenced the direction the union took during the period when leadership was removed by banning.

When much of the benefits that collective action had been so restricted as to evoke scepticism in the value of paying subscriptions, the union was able to hold up the MBF as concrete evidence of its achievements. In conditions of poor organisation, showing results in settling the small grievances of workers amounted to principle gains the union could display to encourage support. An increasing reliance upon the MBF flowed from this predicament.

Considerable attention was given to extend the scope of the MBF and for the inclusion of MBF for non-member factories. After much effort, including petitions to management and numerous meetings, the fund was extended to cover LKB Ashton and Mossel Bay.

The fund was not free of criticisms directed at its administration due to misunderstanding concerning the benefits offered and accusations of partiality on the part of administrators to certain workers. Nor was it free from criticism from employers, as at least one factory refused to join on grounds that sick pay under the fund was less favorable than the minimum laid down in the Factories Act.<sup>92</sup>

What was important was that the MBF conferred real benefits upon its contributors and gave them access to medical care they would otherwise not have been able to afford. In the process the union was able to show what it had achieved for workers. Speaking about the fund a unionist has commented:

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92 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 25.10.64. This opinion was confirmed in a later study commissioned by the union. Industrial Health Research Group Sick Pay and the Factories Act. South African Labour Bulletin 6(8) 1981.

Workers were very grateful to have it as then they could get medical attention. They could not afford to go to the doctor on their own as it is very expensive. If you got sick you had to wait until you had enough money and by then you were more ill.<sup>93</sup>

The second reason why the union did not collapse entirely concerns the benefits of remaining a registered union. Throughout this dissertation implications of the decision to remain a registered union have been commented upon, and the problems inherent in an increasing reliance upon the states' industrial relations machinery treated at some length. Their counterpoint, the status the FCWU had as a registered union has not been so emphasized, yet it is due to this feature that the organisation was never fully suppressed. Weakened and depoliticised, the union was nevertheless able to maintain a relationship with the employers that, had it not been registered, it could not have achieved without real organisational backing to force through employers' objections to dealing with the union. Employers were never able to block the union's access to the factories entirely even though they imposed conditions upon the union regarding meetings on factory premises, and demanded to see the agendas of such meeting. Essentially registration had contradictory effects, for while it deepened the structural division between coloured and African workers, it at the same time provided the legal protection that was an important element in allowing the union to survive these years.

Another aspect of the union's survival concerns the enduring principles of trade unionism embedded in generations of unionists by the union's founder. Attention to administration and financial soundness was drummed into successive generations of officials.

Ray Alexander continued to play an important advisory role to the union after her banning and did a tremendous amount of work, from preparing memoranda on important issues to drawing up wage negotiation proposals, at considerable risk to herself due to the restriction placed on her. After going into exile in 1967 she continued to play an advisory role.

And finally there was also the aspect of an organisation built up over many years and this featured strongly in the discourse of the union's leadership. Workers were enjoined to pay their subscriptions and build the union to fight for a better future a 'new life' free of privation in a free and democratic country. At the same time workers

<sup>93</sup> Interview, Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 10.06.86.

were warned of the consequences of neglecting the union and allowing conditions to revert to those in the pre-union days. Leadership constantly stressed the responsibility workers had to maintain the organisation that others before them had built up through struggle and sacrifice. Young workers were enjoined not to betray the union that had been built by the past sacrifices of their parents. Thus the union had both a forward looking vision of a future that was to be obtained, as well as a seeking to preserve what had been won ever mindful of conditions which had existed before the union's inception.

This tradition featured strongly in the way official addressed themselves to workers when they urged them to carry on the struggle. Repression caused set-backs, but the organisation went forward:

Dit is natuurlik 'n verlies vir die unie, maar die unie, hy word al hoe sterker, hulle bou net verder. Sê nou maar waar Ray opgehou het kom daar mense en hulle bou net verder daarop. Ons gaan nou nie anderste bou nie. Ons bou net soos Ray opgebou het.

Ek dink dat omdat Ray nou die unie gestig het. Dit wat sy geleer het vir die werkers, dit baie goed was en die werkers het dit aangeneem en gesien, "Maar, dit is 'n regte rigting wat ons moet hou. Ons moet nie afdwaal van hierdie rigting nie want dit wat Ray vir ons geleer het is 'n regte rigting."<sup>94</sup>

### The Last Act

We end this overview of the period with a summary of wage negotiations, union matters and social activities that takes the narrative up to 1975 where this study of the union ends.

Informal negotiations between the union and the Fish Cannery Association in 1967 gave an increase of 75c. on all grades<sup>95</sup> which became formalised when a Wage Board investigation simply repeated the increases already granted.<sup>96</sup> In both the fishing and canning industry rationalisation of production led to plant closures, with enormous effects upon the workers in small towns dependant upon canning work. Factories in Port Nolloth closed down in 1970, as a prelude to the major collapse of the West Coast fishing industry that was to follow. The union organised work elsewhere for those who wished to move to other canning factories.<sup>97</sup> Rising inflation prompted the union to

<sup>94</sup> Interview Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 21.01.86.

<sup>95</sup> FCWU Circular letter No.10/76, 20.04.67.

<sup>96</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.08.68.

<sup>97</sup> FCWU Management Committee minutes, 24.05.70.

approach employers for increases, with the result that the Fish Cannery Association agreed to raise wages by R1.30 across the board in 1972.<sup>98</sup> Although this period marked a low point in the organisation of fish workers, it was not without conflict. Saldanha Bay workers protested in 1971 when they were forced to work long overtime periods without meal breaks. When leaders were put off for a week, their comrades struck in solidarity, forced their reinstatement and renewed an agreement to provide meals for overtime workers.<sup>99</sup>

In the fruit canning industry three conciliation board agreements were negotiated, each one covering a three year period. At the first the bosses led with an offer of Wage Determination 179 plus COLA to give a wage equal to the current wage. Efforts were made to consolidate COLA with basic wages but the union's weakness prevented progress being made in that direction. Still saddled with Wage Determination 179 that employers used as a point of departure in their offers, the union was only able to win a 50c increase across the board on basic wages and part consolidation of basic wages and COLA.<sup>100</sup> These increases were soon swallowed up by inflation and the introduction of sales tax, the union then making approaches to individual canners. (See Chapter Seven for an analysis of wages.)

The bosses replied to these requests with the argument that workers' productivity would have to be increased before they would consider granting any wage increases. Employers told deputations requesting increases that unless workers stopped "absenting themselves, being irresponsible, smoking dagga and coming to work drunk"<sup>101</sup> they would not contemplate increases. Gants in Somerset West told a deputation that absenteeism was rife and that in order to have the necessary seasonal labour complement of one thousand, they had to have two thousand workers on their books, and often had to get production with as few as seven hundred workers.<sup>102</sup>

98 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 22.10.72.

99 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 5.12.71.

100 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.08.68. One third of the COLA and additional COLA was consolidated with basic wages.

101 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.12.69. Earlier in 1966 similar requests for across the board increases had been refused on grounds of absenteeism.

102 In employers terms the 'quality' of labour had deteriorated. What this probably means is that the low wages and harsh conditions was a less favored option. The physical strain of canning work promoted a high sick or absenteeism rate amongst workers.

In response the union agreed to co-operate and campaigned against alcoholism and absenteeism. Circulars warning of the ill effects of drug abuse were despatched to the branches and appeals made to cut down absenteeism. Discussion on the management committee concluded that no increases could be gained if members did not co-operate with the union and workers did not carry out their side of the bargain.<sup>103</sup> By sending deputations to management the union was able to secure a 15% across the board increase in 1970.<sup>104</sup>

This pattern was repeated over the next few years. Main agreements were negotiated in 1971 and 1974 with the Cannery Association lasting for three years. This agreement provided for a 7% increase the first year and 2% each year after. Through direct approaches to individual employers in 1973 the union was able to gain across the board increases of some 15% to meet inflation.

As far as the branches were concerned support declined in the outlying areas that the union's full-time officials were not able to visit regularly. The larger fish branches were intermittently active through the early 1970s. Plant closure had serious effects on the union leading to the collapse of several branches as the single factory they were based in closed such as in Wolseley. In 1968 LKB closed its Port Elizabeth factory, closed its Wolseley plant in 1970 and shut down its factory in Worcester in 1976. H. Jones closed their Port Elizabeth factory in 1973, thus leading to the collapse of the branch there. The demise of the union's branches outside of the Western Cape was a slow process. Officials claiming to represent the union and workers simply carried on with an ever decreasing sphere of influence, eking out an existence on a small income from subscriptions. The Johannesburg branch amalgamated with the African General Worker Union in 1968 and although the management committee expressed its censure it was powerless to take action.<sup>105</sup> The general secretary visited Johannesburg in 1971 and was unable to find the branch secretary. Although interest was expressed by one worker who was willing to collect subscriptions, nothing further was heard of the branch.<sup>106</sup>

In 1971 a long term project to build a union centre came to fruition. An old ambition, land had finally been purchased in Paarl and

103 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 8.12.69.

104 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1970.

105 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 16.06.68.

106 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 5.12.71.

the Ray Alexander Union Centre built. Group areas removals had forced the sale of this land and required the union to acquire land in a coloured group area. Savings for a building were collected over several years through a building fund to which workers contributed. Although the union's organisation was weakened in this period its ability to have the union centre constructed is a measure of its fortitude. The building was named the Ray Alexander Union Centre and was seen as a place where members could gather for educational and social activities and was formally opened with a ceremony to mark the union's 30th anniversary.<sup>107</sup>

Through these lean years attention to civil matters affecting members, I have designated as the social welfare unionism that characterised the union from its inception, occupied a central place in the union's extra-factory activity. Stripped of its former more political role, this activity in improving roads and bus shelter represented much of what the union was able to offer its members in terms of the gains it could win for them. Yet even this restricted form of political activity, however, drew fire from the state.

From the union's inception, annual conference resolutions had been sent to the appropriate state body or local authority, where they had received attention and in many instances been complied with. In 1969 the Paarl municipality challenged the union's right to submit resolutions to it demanding improvements in the provision of its services and requested the Department of Labour to intervene. In protest the union pointed to clauses in its constitution providing for precisely such a role and appealed to the Inspector of Labour to reconsider. The reply the union received indicates how confined the legitimate terrain over which trade unions were allowed to operate had become. The union was instructed to cease these activities and:

...must concern itself with industrial interests. Acting on behalf of the entire coloured population in certain districts of Paarl in respect of housing and the provision of services falls outside the scope of a trade union. Such matters are the business of local and provincial administration.<sup>108</sup>

The union did not abandon its concern for these issues and continued to campaign for improvements for its members. Most significantly in this period, when the space for political work

107 FCWU Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1971.

108 FCWU Management Committee minutes, 18.01.70.

activity was so restricted, the union was left dealing with civil matters affecting FCWU members and did not touch upon the political interests of its AFCWU members.<sup>109</sup>

### Conclusion

Looking back over this period which represents the nadir of the union's history, it is apparent that many of the problems the union faced then were present in its earlier history, but the shift in the balance of forces in favour of the state and the bosses reduced its capacity to overcome these problems.

Divisions that had been successfully combated in earlier periods deepened and by the end of this period principles of non-racialism that guided the union over the years were bereft of practical content. This chapter has shown the structural features underlying these problems and the severity of the factors which faced the union and promoted these divisions. These schisms have been examined from the perspective of how they undermined the unity of the union. This challenges the overall understanding of the union as one entity, with a formal division into a registered and unregistered part. These divisions have been shown to be more than merely formal. They were related to crucial issues of negotiating strategy and dependence upon the state's industrial relations machinery. But, for all of these difficulties within the union, in the final analysis, the bosses were never able to so weaken unity in the factories as to enable the lowering of African workers' wages for similar tasks and so give material content to their efforts to separate coloured from African workers.

A more conservative attitude prevailed in the leadership of the union, engendered by the severe repression the union had experienced. The leadership was all too conscious of the fact that more of its office bearers were to be banned than any other union which had joined SACTU. Under these circumstances in the absence of other organisations to form alliances with, and in particular a trade union centre that would act for the interests of its members, political activity was

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<sup>109</sup> Approaches were made to the Labour Party for assistance on various civil matters, and various notables in coloured political circles such as Dr. van der Ross were invited to open annual conferences, indicating something of the outlook which prevailed in the FCWU leadership.

severely restricted. Even a much restricted focus on civil matters was challenged by the state.

The union survived this period due to its status as a registered union, and while that certainly was a major structural feature underlying the division within it, the contradictory effect was to allow the union to weather the onslaught. Emphasis has been given to the many problems that faced the union during this period, but this view needs to be balanced by an assessment of what the union was able to achieve. Through its efforts wage cuts the employers attempted to impose were resisted for a decade. Although the wage increases the union was able to gain were small, the results slowed down the decline in real wages during the 1960s and started to improve real wages in the early 1970s. Finally the union still represented their members grievances over basic working conditions. Had it not been for the union's presence, the bosses' will would have held full sway.

## CHAPTER VI

### **FCWU and Politics**

The relationship between the economic and the political is a key issue for trade unions. As organisations, they act to advance the sectional interests of their members, but also have a potentially broader role to play in advancing the interests of the working class. The political dimension of the FCWU is therefore here subject to a separate scrutiny.

This chapter sets out to establish the nature of the union's 'political character' and to assess its political involvement. By the union's 'political character' I mean identifying the specific ideological, political and practical expression of the union's approach to the question of the relationship between economics and politics. The union's history covered in this dissertation spans developments from World War II to the mid 1970s and witnesses the rise and repression of national liberation movements. Thus situating the politics of the FCWU in this context throws some light upon the nature of opposition politics.

One crucial factor which influences the union's political character is its organisational structure. This is examined in depth as it shown to be one of the union's distinguishing features. Strong continuities of political activity are evident over different periods of oppositional activity and this is due to the way a finite political character is established in the workings of the union. Three aspects of a political character can be found in the union: struggles involving the state - political unionism; activity around improving living conditions for members - social welfare unionism; and struggles over forms of control on the shop-floor. The latter aspect is only briefly dealt with here in relation to the particular position occupied by shop-stewards.

Part one examines the union's structure and policies to establish the main features of the union's political character. Part two discusses the union's relation to the Communist Party and to SACTU.

## Part I Union Structure

There are two factors in the union's structure which are particularly distinct and crucially affect the political direction it took.

### Local Autonomy of the Branches

When the union was established it was modelled upon the lines of an industrial union. Following a conception of unionism, where power and influence depends upon the size of a union's base and not upon a monopoly of skills among a section of the workforce, the FCWU expanded into the canning industry with the objective of organising the entire industry. Influencing this approach was the union's industry wide negotiating strategy and its experience of canners colluding with one another in the face of worker action.<sup>1</sup>

As the union expanded and became geographically dispersed into small canning towns the union's structure correspondingly altered to make provision for the large distances between branches. While the union started out as a conventional industrial union, the nature of the industry it developed within soon gave it an atypical industrial union structure. Due to the large distances between branches and the cost in union resources for visits to these branches, contact was limited to visits at intervals through the year and when specific problems arose such that branches requested visits in order to resolve these problems. As a result, a decentralised union structure developed where it was not possible to hold regular meetings between the general secretary and factory representatives. Branches, as it has been stated, had the responsibility for running the affairs of the union with little supervision from head office. Opportunities for regular meetings between the secretary and factory representatives did not exist and thus, for the union to survive, local autonomy was not only desirable, it was a real necessity. Local initiative was encouraged but branches were by no means self sufficient, as has been pointed out in the case

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander and the Party followed an industrial union model which explicitly criticised the dispersed and general nature of the ICU. Examples of canners co-operating against worker action have been shown in the Wolseley strike discussed in chapter three.

of Wolseley and branch operations in general.<sup>2</sup> When the leadership was removed from office through banning orders, local autonomy helped sustain the union, for it was not as dependent upon the secretary to administer its affairs and give leadership as perhaps an industrial union concentrated in a city would tend to be.<sup>3</sup>

Local autonomy of the branches was crucial if the union was to succeed in negotiating piece-work rates quickly in a number of factories simultaneously. At the start of the fruit canning season new piece-rates were negotiated on an individual factory level and had to be done quickly while the fruit awaited processing. The increases gained in this way were a direct reflection of the state of each particular branch. The short season required from the union an ability to act quickly and, just as capital experienced this time when they were confronted by workers at the apogee of their power, union organisation was also stretched thin by having to deal with all the canning factories at the same time.

Two major features of the union's political character were determined by this structure. Firstly, the branches had considerable local autonomy and, in the small towns, in the absence of other organisations, the union 'was the community'. General issues affecting the workers in a small town featured as concerns for the branch there. Also from the outset the union leadership, with the exception of the secretary and a few officials from Cape Town, were all to be drawn from smaller towns. Thus, their outlook would have been influenced by this fusion of factory and local issues. Secondly, there existed a disparity between the political activity of the leadership and the mobilisation of the branches. Union leaders represented the union in national political campaigns, but this involvement at the head-office level has to be contrasted to the isolation and inertia of the branches. Thus the political unionism the union engaged in was unevenly experienced by the

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2 Branches still required assistance from head office to solve more serious problems. As an interviewee puts it "Ons moet nou net altyd wag tot waneer Miss. Ray nou weer daar kom. Sodat sy vir ons in breë detail kan uitle....." Interview Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay, 2.08.86.

3 The Textile Workers Industrial Union was the union most similar to the FCWU. It was a parallel union, established in secondary industry under left wing leadership and organised in some small towns. Unlike the FCWU the militancy of its leaders did not survive the repression of the 1960s and FCWU records report a refusal to work with the TWIU on the grounds of its exclusive economic focus.

different parts of the union. Mobilisation spanned the high level of activity and consciousness at the head-office, through to the low level of involvement from isolated branches.

### Shop-stewards

Shop stewards are important in developing a leadership cadre within the factory and representing workers in decision making. Examining their role in the FCWU helps to throw light upon the question of rank and file involvement in union activity and politics. References will be made to recent debates over the role of the Communist Party and in relation to Indian trade unions in Durban during the 1940s as this serves to highlight certain issues. Parallels here are instructive as these unions grew under similar circumstances in secondary industry to those faced by the FCWU and were formed by unionists who were members of the Communist Party.

The FCWU developed as an industrial union, registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act and making use of the provisions of the Act. The constitution, drawn up by the secretary and first executive did not accommodate worker representation in the decision making bodies through shop floor structures. Where the union organised, branch executives were elected from members in that particular town and charged with the responsibility for running the union; being accountable to members through three monthly general members meetings. For the monthly Management Committee meetings or quarterly National Executive Meetings, representatives would be elected, mostly from the branch executive and it seems, in most cases, through factory meetings.

No consideration was given to shop stewards in the original 1941 constitution. Much later, in a version of the constitution approved in 1953, they were provided for.<sup>4</sup> However, their role as stipulated in the constitution was confined, even after 1953, to collecting subscriptions, checking membership details and informing the secretary of any disputes.<sup>5</sup> This does not bear out the role ascribed to shop stewards in the pamphlet Unions and You written by Ray Alexander and issued by the Communist Party which stated shop stewards should be seen

<sup>4</sup> The constitution may have been amended earlier but this is the date that a new printed constitution was issued.

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of the FCWU approved 27 August 1953 p.30-40.

as "the backbone of any union."<sup>6</sup> In that pamphlet, guidance for leadership was described thus.

One of his main duties is to see that his department is fully organised and that all members are in good standing, that is, their subscriptions are paid up to date. He has to convince non-union workers that it is in their interests, as well as the interests of all workers, that they should become members. As a fully conscious trade unionist he must also explain union policy to all members and workers and develop their understanding both of the economic and political aims of the union. He is therefore, an educator, as well as a collector of dues.<sup>7</sup>

The pamphlet also enumerated a number of guides to follow and stipulated what the shop stewards needed to know.

Criticizing this view of shop stewards three authors of a recent paper contend that unions can only function democratically if shop stewards are "constitutionally empowered and act practically as elected representatives of a specific constituency on the factory floor, and are fully integrated into the structure of the union."<sup>8</sup> In Natal in the 1930s and 1940s, they argue that unions failed to structurally incorporate shop stewards, link factory floor to union committees or develop a strong shop floor leadership.

What is at stake here is the developing a leadership from among the rank and file to strengthen democratic participation internally, as well as extending worker leadership in political struggle. The experience of the FCWU was unlike that of the other industrial unions created by CP organisation, due to its branch structure. As pointed out in chapter two, the union promoted the establishment of factory committees comprising representatives of workers in all departments. On it served leading workers who would represent the workers in deputations to management and negotiate over grievances. These committees received mandates and reported back at factory meetings. In addition, a certain amount of local wage bargaining involving the committees took place over piece-rate payments for each season. Thus in the FCWU, by contrast with, for example, Indian unions in Durban in the 1940s, factory committee members representing workers directly were involved in negotiations. Ray Alexander has stressed the importance of

6 Alexander, R. Trade Unions and You 1944 p.10.

7 Ibid.

8 Vawda, S.; Tichman, P.; Padayachee, V. 'The Communist Party and Indian Trade Unions in Durban in the 1940's Preliminary Notes' ASSA 1986 p.7.

this in relation to 'Gentleman's agreements' which, although having no legal force, were significant for they involved employers meeting union representatives and recognising shop-stewards. "(T)hat was our main thing, our shop-stewards should be recognised and they should be able to negotiate with us."<sup>9</sup>

While it true that factory committees were not constitutionally provided for, and no formal links between the union officials and the factory committees were stipulated, leaving the assessment at this constitutional level misses the distinction between structures on paper and actual practice.<sup>10</sup> When the union responded to the state's action declaring the canning industry an essential industry and prohibiting strikes in 1957, attention was focused on the importance of the rank and file unity and action. On the Management Committee a resolution was taken which stated that, in the light of the problems facing the union "the position of shopstewards, which should be regarded as the backbone of every trade union must be reviewed."<sup>11</sup> Their role was outlined as being a link between workers and the union, to keep members informed of union matters, hold regular meetings and also be the link between workers and management acting for workers to settle small disputes. What this indicates is that the role of shop-stewards was not conceived statically and fixed only by their constitutional definition. Placing more significance upon shop-stewards marks a departure from the way they had been discussed in the past but it does not necessarily imply a shift in the overall practice of the union on shop-stewards. A more significant influence on the role of shop-steward derived from the necessary improvisation and adaptations branches were required to make and called forth a creative interpretation of the constitution. A worker interviewed explains that shop-stewards were also used for organising purposes.

Ons het meer van die 'shop stewards' gebruik gemaak as wat die konstitusie gesê het, verstaan. Want ons was

9 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

10 Aware that their methodology may be criticised for being ahistorical and pre-occupied with 'constitutionalism' the authors Padayachee, V; Vawda, S; Tichman, P. in their paper 'The Control of Class Consciousness: Indian Workers and Trade Unions 1930 - 1950'. ASSA, 1985. pp.12-13. They are concerned to explore the consequences of such constitutional structures upon independent working class development. As the Durban unions they examine did not act unconstitutionally their practices were informed by these structures.

11 FCWU Management Committee minutes 25.07.59.

maar nou 'n klein bietjie wat nou kan lees en skrywe,  
wat ons kan gebruik vir daardie doel.<sup>12</sup>

How extensive and effective the factory committees were in practice varied. In the large factories the committees are likely to have been strong and well entrenched, but this was not true of all the branches. At Wolseley for example, the branch did not succeed in gaining management recognition of their factory committee. In addition, different views to the above quoted role of shop-stewards were prevalent. Some interviewees have referred to these as "sub stewards"<sup>13</sup> with the perception that their role was confined to collecting subscriptions and complaints from members to pass onto the branch committee and, in turn, to the head-office officials.

### Policies of the Union

There are two major features of the union's policies which together make up its political character - an attention to improving members living conditions and an engagement in national political issues.

### Social Welfare Unionism

From its inception, as illustrated in chapter two, extra factory issues such as those of housing, health, education, recreation and transport were tackled by the union. Agitation on these issues was conducted on behalf of the members and oppressed people more broadly. Social issues, beyond the struggle over the wage relation, were defined, by the left-wing leadership of the union, as part of its legitimate concern from the very beginning. As FCWU president Frank Marquard remarked.

Our union is the first union to go out to the countryside and is therefore looked upon by the people as a new hope and it is our duty not to disappoint them, but to show them how, through organisation and unity, they can bring about a change in their conditions.<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis was placed upon the branches taking up these issues is well explained in the following quote:

Let us not forget that our union branches have a great deal of work to carry out, not only in their main task

12 Interview Margriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay, 2.08.86.

13 Interviews Rachel Zeeman, Wolseley, 21.01.86.

14 FCWU Central Committee minutes 7.11.42.

of protecting the interests of the workers in the factories, but also in improving the general standard of life and culture. Our aim must be to make every branch a leader of the community and a centre of social activities. ...Our union must become a means to a new outlook; a way of fighting poverty, disease and drunkenness, of spreading knowledge and enlightenment and so strengthening the class in its struggle for justice and decency.<sup>15</sup>

Benefits accruing to workers in small country towns through the union's efforts to bring about an improvement in their social conditions were major reasons for its widespread support.

Our union has established itself because of the stand it has made on the broad issues of civil rights affecting the working people of this country.<sup>16</sup>

Taking up social issues featured so prominently in the union's activities partially as a consequence of its structural position within the small towns where it was based. Economic class struggle pitted the union against the bosses over improvements in wages. Those same bosses were the principal opponents in struggles to improve housing, community facilities or transport. If the factory was not itself responsible for a particular issue, then it was likely to be controlled by the village management board, upon which the factory bosses frequently sat.<sup>17</sup> Thus, separating struggles for wage increases from struggles over local improvements was artificial. Since the union, as has been stated, was the first organisation to collectively represent the interests of workers in canning towns, it took on a wider function in struggling for non-wage improvements. This I have called social welfare unionism. This denotes that the union sought to gain material concession from the capitalists and state but did not necessarily pose the question of state power centrally. This social welfare unionism was one facet of the union's political character that was enduring and was largely derived from its structural make up. Social welfare unionism was joined by national political activity that increased and receded between the 1940s and 1970s. Social welfare unionism itself remained constant and the most enduring feature of the union's political character.

15 Annual Report of the Secretary 1965. Written as a reminder of what should be happening, not what necessarily was happening.

16 Annual Report of the General Secretary 1950

17 This generalisation is an impression gained from records of the unions dealing with village management boards on the West coast. The manager of the Wolseley cannery was mayor of Wolseley for some time.

### Political Unionism

Different interpretations of the way unions relate to politics in South Africa has led to the suggestion a distinct form of unionism has evolved in this country. The terms that have been given to this is political unionism or social movement unionism. Webster (1986) used the latter term to explain that the dual nature of unions leads to a two sided view of them.

One, the economic dimension, is that of a union trying to win wage increases and improvements in living conditions; the other is that of a 'voice institution' i.e. a social and political institution.<sup>18</sup>

In this study the term political unionism is used rather than social movement unionism. A distinction is drawn between agitation for improvements in living conditions, which I refer to as social welfare unionism, and political activities involving the state where I have used the term political unionism.

Lambert (1984) suggests that it was SACTU which initiated a new form of unionism linking trade unions to politics. This form of political unionism, Lambert suggests, transcended the economic-politics divide by proposing factory struggles against economic exploitation and wider political oppression should be developed simultaneously. As a result SACTU come to play a leading role in the political struggle. For Lambert political unionism comprises three interrelated aspects.

First, a leadership strategy of interlacing economic and political struggle in such a way that a movement develops whereby workers act against exploitation at the factory, community and state power levels, not in terms of stages but simultaneously; second, the development of forms of organisation that facilitate this integrated politics, and finally, active engagement in an alliance that has the potential to extend working class influence beyond its own boundaries.<sup>19</sup>

At the core of this form of unionism was an organising strategy centred upon the establishment of factory committees which had two functions. Firstly, to create a membership base in the factories to

18 Webster, E. 'The rise of Social-Movement Unionism - the Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa'. ASSA, 1986. p.2.

19 Lambert, R. "Political Unionism and Working Class Hegemony in South Africa 1955-65 : Perspectives on the South African Congress of Trade Unions" Institute for International Development and Cooperation, University of Ottawa Conference 1984 p.4.

wage collective struggles on immediate factory issues; secondly, to involve factory workers in "township and state power issues through involvement in the alliance resistance campaigns."<sup>20</sup> The positive potential of this, Lambert argues thus:

my own research indicates that in areas where there existed a strong working relationship between organisations in the Alliance, an upsurge in the unionisation of workers was generated. SACTU (was) strengthened immeasurably at factory level.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted Lambert's views are based on the assertion that organisational strategy centred on factory committees. The number of committees, extent in areas covered, representivity of the workforce, links to SACTU organisers and duration of existence are not specified. Indeed, the key point that "a trade union base ...developed rapidly precisely because of the (Congress) alliance, as did the rapid increase in membership in those regions where the alliance was strong"<sup>22</sup> has as supporting evidence only one footnote referring to documentary and oral sources (unspecified) collected over an extensive time period that welded together confirm this position.

The implications of this conception of political unionism and its validity applied to the FCWU will be considered when reviewing the SACTU period in the next section.

#### The Communist Party and the Union

Once again the debate over Indian trade unions in Durban in the 1940s is instructive.

Edwards (1986) has written of the significant role the CP had in establishing unions and its subsequent influence upon these unions, many of which were run by secretaries who were CP members. Trade union organisation was facilitated by the close proximity of union offices which permitted inter union cooperation, particularly in the case of strikes. Edwards further maintains leadership of the unions from CP membership enabled factory cells to be set up and permitted the Party to meet workers directly, and resolve differences between the Party and unionists. Edwards argues that the influence of the Party over the communist led unions was extensive, as each Party member who

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20 Ibid p.4.

21 Ibid p.27.

22 Ibid p.25.

was a trade unionist was involved in the Party's trade union committee. In Party structure they would decide on a course of action and apply it to their respective unions.<sup>23</sup>

These views are contested by other interpretations which challenge both the validity of the claims that Party's influence was extensive and the assumption that it was beneficial. It is suggested by Padayachee et.al. in a direct response that if Party cells were extensively established, the absence of systematic links between the Party and the unions prevented CP cells from strengthening the unions on the factory floor. They suggest that the view of a Party caucus in the unions is manipulative of these organisations and that the assertion that the Party had considerable influence upon these unions is questionable. These authors argue that CP influence was limited, due to the circumscription of Party's strength in Durban, and policies which concentrated on anti-segregation struggles and not on unions. Following a 'broad front', multi-class approach, neglected worker issues and by supporting the war effort, the Party was set against strikes, even though workers were resisting threats to their organisation.<sup>24</sup> Giving credit for the immense contribution of CP organisers, these authors express reservations concerning the Party's ability to have an impact on the development of working class organisation due to its limited resources.<sup>25</sup>

What insights can be gained from this debate over the Durban experience and applied to the FCWU? A major distinction between the two situations was that, unlike in Natal, the FCWU was not promoted by the Party as a means to strengthen the left within the nationalist movements. Similar political conditions did not exist in the Cape to those of Natal and the Transvaal where attention was given to

23 Edwards, I. 'Recollections: the Communist Party and Workers Militancy in Durban, early 1940's' SALB. 11(4) 1986.

24 Padayachee, V; Vawda, S; Tichman, P. op.cit.

25 Padayachee, V; Vawda, S; Tichman, P. 'Trade Unions and the Communist Party in Durban in the 1940's: A Reply to Iain Edwards', SALB 11(7) 1986. p.62.

recruiting among trade unions for the nationalist movements.<sup>26</sup> At least one consequence of this was that the FCWU did not experience the problem of a leadership becoming increasingly involved in political struggles against segregation, which restricted their activity in the unions, as was the case in Durban.<sup>27</sup>

It is not possible to say definitively whether recruiting for the Party was done through the union. Union leaders were banned in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, as was the case for other leaders of the national liberation movement, but the terms in which the union political role was outlined, as being subordinate to its economic functions suggest that recruiting for the Party did not occur. Workers were not enjoined to throw their weight behind the national liberation movement, a rhetorical call given the isolation of the branches. Nor was the discourse of leadership, when touring the branches, overtly political. They seem to have concentrated upon civic matters, the substance of social welfare unionism, when addressing the workers in the branches.

On the question of theoretical influences and training activities in the union in the 1940s, Alexander makes the following comment.

About teaching, what we had was study classes. We particularly worked on Lenin's book "What Is To Be Done?" that became a must in helping to train people for organising the workers and other such books from America that we had got on the organisation and the work of the Committee for Industrial Organisation and books that we had obtained from Britain as well as from the Soviet Union about workers organisation under the old Tsarist Russia, how they organised. The famous book by Sogebroskay "Twenty Years Underground Russia" (sic) and by Illich Bapushkin who had given his memoirs on how he had organised the Baku workers. These pamphlets or books were used for reading with a group of workers - tin

26 In Natal, Party trade unionists sought to recruit Indian workers into the nationalist movement where they could engage in politics. "You see, when it came to a political issue, we as trade unionists also thought that the Indian business man also was part of the oppressed group. We were not able to fight him openly. Take for eg congress itself. It was not a working class organisation.

But we had to get the working class to participate in Congress activities up to a point. When it came to class struggle and economics, we came out openly against the Indian employers. We had a number of strikes in those industries." Interview No.5. recorded in Durban May 1983. A copy of the tape is held under restricted access in the African Studies Institute Wits. University of the Witwatersrand.

27 Vawda, S et.al op.cit. pp.16-19.

workers, sweet workers, food workers, textiles. We all, you know, met together and learned together.<sup>28</sup>

Certain qualifications need to be made concerning how extensive this educational activity was in practice. It is not possible to say how regular these reading groups met, but it has been shown in chapter two that official training within the union did not occur regularly. Thus, these reading groups would probably have, similarly, met on an irregular basis. Of more significance for building a picture of the union's political character are the implications of the Leninist view of trade unions that would have featured in this material. This poses questions as to what the Communist Party's view of the trade unions was and what role it ascribed to them. Lenin locked in a polemical debate with the Economists in What Is To Be Done? asserted workers were only capable of spontaneously achieving trade union consciousness; that of the need to combine against exploitation. Political consciousness, that of the understanding of the relationship of all classes in society "can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers."<sup>29</sup> Again, what were the implications for unions of the Party's Leninist line with its "pessimistic"<sup>30</sup> view of trade unions' political role and conceiving them in economic terms. It is worth noting that educational material from the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) was used. CIO unions in America developed as fairly economic unions with a CP leadership who maintained a separation between their own political position and the profile of politics in the unions they organised.<sup>31</sup>

In general terms, further questions are posed by the role proposed by the Party for unions in the 'Popular Front' and anti-fascist struggles preceding and during the war. Similarly, how was the view of unions affected by the later shift to working alongside and through the

28 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

29 Lenin, V. I. What Is To Be Done. Moscow: Progress, 1978. pp.78-79.

30 Hyman's characterisation of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky's conception of trade unions. Hyman, R Marxism and Sociology of Trade Unions 1971. p.18.

31 Ruiz, V.L. op.cit. discusses the political separation between CP membership of union leaders and the absence of developing a class consciousness among the rank and file in UCAPAWA, the California food processing union. This is attributed to the lack of time available under when organisers were occupied with dealing with grievances. p.137. The writer makes no attempt to theorise the implications of CIO theory and practice.

nationalist movement<sup>32</sup> which found theoretical expression in elaboration of the 'Colonialism of a Special Type' thesis.<sup>33</sup>

A significant feature influencing the union's political character was the role played by Ray Alexander, who maintained her union work as a priority and did not follow the pattern elsewhere in the country, which saw a shift of CP activists attention away from unions and into the national liberation movement. In fact the FCWU appeared during the 1940s to limit itself to social welfare unionism and participation in the national campaigns of the time by links at a leadership level. In addition encouragement was given to members to join political organisations and to act politically through these organisations. What is significant about these political activities is that while, on the one hand, some of the campaigns the union becomes involved in have state power as a central part of their focus, on the other hand, these activities do not constitute a fully fledged political unionism.

## Part II Selected Issues in the 1940s

The preceding discussion will now be related to an examination of firstly, how the union related to the Communist Party in the 1940s, and secondly, its relation to SACTU. These two aspects are crucial to an understanding of the union's political character. All issues referred to in this section have been covered in more detail in preceding chapters.

### The Party and the War

Strikes which occurred during the war pose questions about the role the Party played in relation to workers struggles. The Party's support for unions and its policy in favor of uninterrupted production for the war effort were not always in harmony. What is the experience of the FCWU in this regard?

The major strike in Paarl in September 1941 that launched the union occurred too early to indicate a stance on the matter. It occurred prior to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the shift in the

32 Lodge, T. op.cit. quotes the 1950 CP Annual Report where in it proposed building the national organisations and transforming them into a revolutionary party co-operating closely with the CP. pp.29-30.

33 Wolpe, H. 'The Theory of Internal Colonialism' in Oxaal, I. et. al. (eds) Beyond the Sociology of Development. London: RKP, 1975.

Party's stance on the war. More instructive was the response to the prohibition on strikes by African workers promulgated early in 1942. The FC&AWU in Johannesburg sent the following resolution to the forthcoming TLC conference.

The Government's institution of the new anti-strike decree, which is in principal totally unacceptable to us, we have in this instance accepted, so that the workers cannot be accused of fermenting trouble and hampering the common war effort. It is clear, however, that the employers are taking advantage of our workers patriotism in an attempt to further their own selfish ends.<sup>34</sup>

The FCWU, by contrast, was quoted in The Guardian as slating the restriction. "(We) ...reject the ban on strikes in war time, as strikers act against low wages and it is their only means to do so."<sup>35</sup>

During the war there were two FCWU strikes. A short strike took place at Rhodes Fruit Farm when wage cuts permitted by a Wage Determination were introduced in January 1944. Workers took the initiative, and head-office supported their members when they struck. It was settled rapidly, the cuts restored and was regarded by the union as a victory for all its members. In May 1945, a major strike in the dried fruit industry broke out in Worcester. Branches were balloted on striking as negotiations had broke down. Workers were called out in the off season and the union experienced great difficulty in securing a settlement, as it did not receive support from other unions and the bosses were in a powerful position to ignore the union.

The first of the two strikes cited above would indicate that local initiative took precedence, and this was supported by the union leadership. In the much longer strike in the dried fruit industry strike action was explicitly debated and decided upon. The subsequent strike was criticized for its timing, yet strike action was not deliberately suppressed in the interests of war effort production. Could these strikes have contradicted the Party's no-strike policy during the war? As a policy this was unlikely to have been made explicit and embodied in a formal decree or declaration, but was conveyed much more through slogans and a general ethos of support for the war against fascism. The strikes do suggests that the Party's policy was not necessarily carried out to the letter by unions with CP members in leading positions.

<sup>34</sup> The Guardian February 26 1942.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, what did transpire was strongly influenced by the branch structure.

### The FCWU and Wider Involvement

Concerning general political tasks, the following points apply. As soon as the FCWU could it affiliated to the Cape Federation of Labour Unions and the Trade and Labour Council local committee. The reason were both to broaden the influence of the union and the Party upon the labour movement and apply pressure from the left in these bodies, as well as to use them for support in struggles the union engaged in. During strikes the union appealed for and received financial support from other unions, These sources dried up after the dissolution of the TLC. Similarly, when other workers struck, the FCWU extended financial and moral support. Use was also made of deputations to authorities on the many issues that confronted the union. The FCWU would declare such threats to the union as 'an attack on the whole trade union movement' and attempt to mobilise maximum support from other unions. Action to stop the Department of Labour interfering in conciliation board agreements illustrates this 'Broad Front' approach.<sup>36</sup>

During the war political rhetoric followed the Party's 'Broad Front' approach. The union's journal carried the slogan "We Will Feed the Men who Fight Fascism"<sup>37</sup> and the leadership repeated this theme at conferences, at the same time calling for full mobilisation and the extension of training to blacks. The union affiliated to the Friends of the Soviet Union and supported Medical Aid for Russia financially.

Considerable attention was given to the campaign against the removal of coloured voting rights and support was given to the Franchise Action Committee.<sup>38</sup> On this issue the union mobilised members directly, keeping members aware of events through reports. Paarl and Worcester branches were represented on the FRAC committee, but for the rest of the union the level of mobilisation is unclear. Union involvement in broad front politics, meant that in the main, the executive represented the union on political platforms and encouragement was given to members to join other organisations and

<sup>36</sup> See page 82.

<sup>37</sup> Circular on the Workmen's Compensation Act 1941. FCWU collection, Wits, AD 1175, file AIV.

<sup>38</sup> Frank Marquard served on the FRAC executive. See page 92.

participate in their political campaigns. Membership was kept informed of activities through reports and discussions at meetings. How extensive such discussions of politics were is difficult to assess, but oral evidence suggests that this was limited.

Daai tyd het ons nie so danig belang gestel in politiek nie, verstaan. Ons mense het maar later, baie later het ons beginne die gedagte kry, 'die mense het ons nie reg behandel nie', verstaan. In daai tyd het sy nooit politieke dinge met ons gepraat nie. Kyk, sy noem dit maar sy noem dit op so 'n mooi manier....Sy noem dit baie sag. Later, toe ons loop meer opstandig word, loop sterker word, toe het ons vir mekaar gesê, Miss Ray het mos daarvan gepraat....Sy't ons nooit opgestook daar teen nie, verstaan....Soos ons nou later geontwikkel het en hoe meer van die jongspan nou ook by die unie aangesluit het, so het ons nou later mekaar se verstande self ooggemaak.En hoe slegter die base ons behandel het later van tyd. Want kyk, hoe meer ons eis van die unie, hoe meer onbeskofter raak die base.<sup>39</sup>

In brief during the 1940s the union's political activities consisted of a tenacious pursuit of social welfare unionism that involved branches in local affairs and union participation in broad front activities through links at a leadership level. The effects of the latter percolated through the union via written reports and discussion at meetings. Political struggle took place in activities outside of the union in which the membership were encouraged to participate.

#### FCWU and SACTU

An expanded political terrain confronted the union in the 1950s. In a context where the national liberatory movement grew as a force of popular mobilisation, the Apartheid state concurrently initiated structural changes, reorganising labour control, intensifying political repression and consolidating political power in the hands of whites.

Interpretations of the implications of involvement in SACTU have given rise to considerable debate: either making a case for debilitating and detrimental consequences; or advantages for unions through a greater politicisation and contribution to engendering working class content in the national liberation struggle. In light of the importance of SACTU the remainder of this discussion is devoted to how the union related to it.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay 2.08.86.

What was crucial here was that the rise of the national liberation movement did not initiate a new form of politics. They did not fundamentally alter the union's approach to political mobilisation: Nor did they usher in a phase of new political unionism. The union retained its characteristic form of social welfare activity and affiliated to SACTU as a formal parallel industrial union. It was primarily through SACTU that the union related to the other components of the Congress Alliance and its campaigns.

For this reason, the following discussion is concentrated on SACTU. But, two important qualifications need to be made. A heavy reliance on documentary evidence blinds this study to political activity that is not reported in official documents. In addition, this perspective discounts the informal political activity of leadership and rank and file within other organisations, primarily the ANC, SACPO and FSAW. While informal political activity is discounted by the approach I use, a clear impression of the union's political character does emerge as minutes fairly accurately record the unions activities and these impressions are contrasted with opinions from interviews.<sup>40</sup>

The FCWU made extensive use of affiliation to federations. This was for practical as well as for political reasons. The FCWU opposed the dissolution of the TLC which succumbed to racial divisions and expediency on the part of the white labour movement. Thus, the union welcomed the formation of SACTU as the non-racial successor to the TLC. However, in SACTU the AFCWU and FCWU assumed a different status. No longer were they small left-wing unions urging support from a larger federation for their struggles. In SACTU they became key unions - two of its major affiliates in numerical and financial terms. In addition, from amongst the union's leadership came many of the trade unionists that served on the SACTU local committees. Within SACTU, the union was pushed centre stage and now had to provide assistance to other unions and struggles.

Political unionism could have transformed the union's politics. Political unionism had the potential, it has been argued by Lambert, to transcend the bourgeois distinction between politics and economics,

<sup>40</sup> The minutes faithfully record activities, but do not always record speeches made at meetings in full. Thus what events are reported in the minutes are regarded as the major part of what the union was involved in. What is most left out of this approach is a means to assess what influences were brought to bear in deciding upon courses of action.

reassert political mobilisation of workers on the factory floor and develop the capacity for asserting working class hegemony in alliances thrown up in the unfolding national liberation struggle. Applied to the FCWU with its existing factory committees this view implied that the FCWU could have advanced beyond its social welfare unionism and developed a rank and file political leadership. In short the problem was not the deleterious affects of affiliation to SACTU, but a failure to internalize the new political movement which SACTU represented.

Posing the question in this way directly contradicts the formulations of other commentaries on SACTU, notably those of Feit and Ensor. Feit argues that SACTU's failure could be attributed to its inability to achieve economic gains which were an essential prerequisite for the achievement of its political objectives. The reasons why SACTU's trade union base was weak, according to Feit was due to its involvement in Congress Alliance campaigns which detracted from unionists' ability to build a trade union base.<sup>41</sup>

In a related analysis of SACTU, Ensor argues that for a political role to be possible, African union required independence from the registered unions. Yet, without the support of the registered unions, and in the context of a obstacles from employers and the state to building a solid membership base, the SACTU unions were unable to build the organisation they needed to engage in politics. As a consequence, SACTU made repeated calls to TUCSA for assistance.<sup>42</sup>

Summarising previous discussion on relationship between the union and SACTU, covered in chapters four and five, some brief comments will be made about the effects of this relationship.

Little consultation took place between the union and the framers of SACTU's constitution who visited a Management Committee meeting where they presented the draft constitution and it was duly endorsed. At SACTU's inaugural launch in Johannesburg, the union's executive sent one representative only, due to lack of finances. After the launch the union helped form the Cape Town SACTU local committee and officials in other centers took leading positions in SACTU bodies.

Branches were urged to affiliate in strength to SACTU, their reticence indicates low levels of awareness of SACTU and its activities. The key question is what tangible benefits branches derived from SACTU and how SACTU was perceived by members in the branches.

41 Feit, E. op.cit. pp.102-108.

42 Ensor, L. op.cit.

Amongst the union's leadership at the head-office the understanding of SACTU and appreciation of its importance was well developed. The situation in the branches was different. For much of the time, in the small branches, SACTU was manifest only through its correspondence, circular letters and educational material that the union's head-office distributed. How these were used and what follow through, if any, is not readily apparent. Levels of understanding and ability to use SACTU material varied, but for outlying branches it is likely that this was limited.

Ek glo nie, as hulle kennis gedra het, het hulle baie min gedra. Soos ek gesê het, daai dae was dit baie moeilik om mense deur te bring, jy verstaan. As jy nie weet wat SACTU beteken nie en jy kry 'n 'circular letter', hoe gaan jy dit opvolg. Op 'managements' was SACTU baie gebespreek, en verduidelik wat beteken SACTU ens. Maar op die buite 'areas' was dit baie gewees mense wat, ek sou nie sê hulle het nie notisie geneem nie, maar hulle het swaar 'n begrip gehad van 'n ding.<sup>43</sup>

FCWU's relationship with SACTU was not always harmonious as the conflict over the moving to Johannesburg of the union's newspaper the Morning Star and its subsumption into Workers Unity, SACTU's official mouth piece, has shown.<sup>44</sup>

After the 1958 SACTU conference, renewed stress was laid upon the fl-a-day campaign and organising the unorganised. On the SACTU local committees one day a week was given over to organising unorganised workers into SACTU structures. In the FCWU union officials would devote Thursday to visiting factories and addressing workers in their lunch hours. It is not possible to say with certainty how sustained these activities were but the impression gained is that this did not continue for very long and what organisation was engendered soon fell away.<sup>45</sup> For the union, this poses the question of whether resources channeled for SACTU work reduced the capacity for union officials to do their work. The FCWU ceased to grow in the early 1950s and did not expand into new parts of the food industry. Structural reasons like problems

43 Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 10.06.86.

44 See page 165.

45 This assessment is made on the basis of the situation the union was in at the time, facing problems with its own organisation and unlikely to sanction the drain on resources that local organisation, if it was to be successful, required. Also, there are no references in minutes to reports from the SACTU local committee (the body responsible for co-ordinating organising activity) on how organising drives were progressing.

in expanding the scope of registration to cover new areas, and a negotiating approach centred on state channels, as the previous chapter has shown, are important, nonetheless, involvement in SACTU work did contribute. At least one reason for the lack of expansion was the shortage of personnel and the demands upon organisers' time.

If we are branch secretaries we work for SACTU, we work for Coloured People's Council, we work for Federation. We did not only have the union to work for. We had other political organisations that we also had to attend to....and that just keep you busy with all the things that you belong to. And of course, the most important thing is to organise workers. You can't make a success with a campaign if you haven't got the support of the workers.<sup>46</sup>

Port Elizabeth represents the area where a productive relationship existed between the union and the Congress Alliance. In that city, the imposition of a boycott of Nationalist Party supporting firms, when applied to LKB, secured major concessions. The situation in Port Elizabeth was unrepresentative of the rest of the union where the majority of branches existed in places without other popular organisations.

Several factors militated against a shift taking place in the union's political activities. Amongst these factors, the following were most significant: a lack of training in the branches, low levels of participation which deferred politics to 'leadership links'; the established character of the union and its experience of relations to trade union federations; and the rural Cape base of the union which meant issues pursued by the National Consultative Committee in Johannesburg were removed from the concerns of the union locally. Other crucial factors concern SACTU's own failings that prevented a full elaboration of political unionism. To paraphrase Lambert: the subordination of SACTU in alliances, a blurring of leaderships' involvement in different structures and repression.<sup>47</sup>

Levels of involvement in SACTU varied. But for much of the union's base, this amounted to little beyond circulars from SACTU where there were structural limitations in the ability to assimilate these, it has already been suggested. Only a greater emphasis on political education could have overcome these disabilities. More important, opportunities for viable mass action varied between regions. There were very few

<sup>46</sup> Interview Liz Abrahams, Paarl, 10.06.86

<sup>47</sup> Lambert, R. (1984) op.cit. pp.29-31. and Lambert (1980) op.cit.

towns where the union organised and which had Congress Alliance organisations that engendered the conditions for successful political unionism. Impressions gained from interviews suggests rank and file appreciation of SACTU did not develop beyond what they learnt from speeches made by union leaders, and this was not concretised by mass action. Isolated in small branches, facing a police force that actively harassed union leaders and fully occupied with union work, there was little that was done to inform the rank and file about SACTU.

Eintlik het ons nie die gewone werkers baie ingelig daaroor nie. Omdat 'n mens so versigtig moet wees en 'n mens weet nie wie jy kan vertrou nie. As ons partykeer daarvan gesê het is dit nou net ons kommittee wat daarvan praat. As daar dan 'n nuwe kommittee lid by kom dan het ons ook nie sommer daaroor gepraat nie. Want ons weet mos voor onse siel dit is mos nou politiek. Jy moet eers daai mens vertrou, sy hele vertrouwe wen, laat jy weet hy staan heeltemal agter jou en dan kan jy ook nog nie. Want jy moet nog te bang wees, daai destyds. Want kyk, daai tyd het die baas op alles ja en amen gesê. Die polisie was ook op alles ja en amen. So ons het nie kan sommer alle mense in die breë 'detail' kan ingelig nie. Ons het maar net by onse 'Food and Canning' gekom en ons het geprobeer om hom sterk genoeg te kry, verstaan....As daar enige tyd oor is dan het ons oor ander dinge gepraat maar ons het altyd maar net eers op 'Food and Canning' gewees. Hy was heel eerste van alles.<sup>48</sup>

The SACTU experience did not produce a qualitative shift in the levels of participation in political events or deepening of political consciousness that it may potentially have done. In instances where the conditions Lambert specifies for a productive relationship developing between trade unions and political organisations existed, this indeed was the case and the union was strengthened as a result. In an overall assessment however, it is my contention that the experience of SACTU upon the union did little to transform its political character.

### Conclusion

The FCWU's political character has in this analysis been derived from the union's structure as well as the political influences acting upon it. It has been asserted that the organisational structure is crucial in explaining some key features in the evolution of the union's political form: the problems in mobilising the branches, the inertia to

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<sup>48</sup> Interview Magriet Wynand, Saldanha Bay 2.08.86.

political mobilisation, and the resilience of the union through the requirements of developing leadership at a branch level.

Social welfare unionism exhibits a continuity throughout the union's history and defines a 'bottom line' of campaigning for improvements that is never discarded, even when other political options have been closed. Having failed to develop a fully fledged form of political unionism of its own, when the Congress Alliance and SACTU were repressed, the union retreated to agitating for civic improvements. When other formally political active unions retreated into a narrow economism the FCWU did not. Its political activities were conducted from the basis of priority being given to its economic trade union functions, and overtly political action was not permitted to displace this priority. The relationship between the unions economic activity and broader political role in the interests of the working class has been illustrated through quotations from union documents. It is here reiterated by Alexander in this quote concerning the political role of the union in the service of the working class.

Because that was our main concern. That the unions should not just be an organisation for improving the wages and conditions of work. That is primarily their role. But, at the same time, to organise them to organise the workers and to participate in political struggles to win democratic rights for our people.<sup>49</sup>

In the union's activities, the emphasis of work did not shift from concentrating upon trade union matters. Since social welfare unionism was integral to the union's approach, this was not an external activity to be selectively engaged in and therefore was ingrained in the union's practices. Thus it endured when other aspects of the broader role of trade unions fell away.

In examining the union's relations to SACTU there appeared to be a potential to develop a political form that could assert shop floor leadership but this did not occur. While the union was certainly a major SACTU affiliate, the extent of its involvement in SACTU was limited and the presence of SACTU itself and the union's involvement in it, did not effect a major change in the union's political orientation.

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49 Interview Ray Alexander, Lusaka, December 1985.

## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion and Assessment

This dissertation set out to provide a critical history of the first three and a half decades of the Food and Canning Workers Union's existence. The form that it has taken is that of an institutional history which has combined extensive use of the unions's own records with other sources, particularly oral interviews. The result is an account which is rich in detail of what took place, as well as conveying the voice of participants who forged that history. A heavy reliance on primary material requires of the researcher a means to verify the official version. Records cannot be assimilated uncritically and, in the approach adopted here, interviews have played a major role in corroborating and contrasting experiences of union practice with details in records. The value of combining archival research with interviews is in the fidelity the former provides of details of events which may then be contextualised in with the help of recollections of participants. Trade union records have not, hitherto, been as extensively used to produce a history of a Cape Union, thus a major aspect of the contribution this dissertation makes to South African labour history is by the compilation of information contained in the FCWU archive.

Omissions invariably result from a narrow focus and in the case of this study, these are apparent in themes that remain underdeveloped. Notable amongst these is a neglect for the regional differences within the union and the insights to be gained of regional variations by contrasting the experience of trade unionism between the major industrial centers. This study has focused upon the Western Cape for two reasons: the historical importance of the region where the union was geographically concentrated, and access to union members for research purposes. As a result, with the exception of Port Elizabeth, branches outside of the Western Cape receive little mention.

### Key Features of Union Activity

The principal features of the union's development will be summarised prior to a brief assessment of its negotiating strategy, non-racialism and wage performance.

When the union was formed in 1941, it followed the pattern of the upsurge in industrial unionism in secondary industry - organising unskilled and semi-skilled workers into a non-racial and militant union. What was crucial for the growth of the union was the expansion of the canning industry, principally the section canning fruit, which increased employment enormously during the war and grew steadily thereafter as an export industry. The canning industry presented conditions conducive for industrial unionism with large, labour intensive factories. FCWU organisation grew within the canning industry and it became the union's principal industrial base. Other sections of the food processing industry organised by the union were fish canning, dried fruit packing and food packing. Two features of nature of the canning industry, its regional dispersion and seasonality, critically affected the union's structure and policies. As a result its organisational structure encompassed branches in small towns in the canning districts of the Western Cape, West Coast and Eastern Cape. Based in a seasonal industry, the union experienced fluctuations of its organisation and power, and combined with its organisational structure, lent the union a unique character which stimulated the development of local autonomy in the branches.

During the 1940s the union underwent its major growth phase. In this period a set of practices covering the methods its used to improve wages and conditions; factory level bargaining on piece-rates; an involvement in wider social issues; and activities to improve the living standard of its members became firmly established. Organising where there had been no previous trade union organisation, the union made a tremendous impact on the lives of its members by bringing about substantial improvements in wages, working and living conditions.

Branches were geographically isolated and frequent visits by head-office officials were not possible, with the result that local autonomy was promoted. Local officials were required to run the affairs of the branch with only intermittent assistance from head-office officials, as a consequence the development of local leadership was stimulated. One important feature of this local autonomy was to give the union a

political character which laid stress upon gaining improvements in living conditions for workers in the canning districts, and whose interests were articulated through the branches.

In 1947 the FCWU was compelled to form a separate un-registered union for its African members, the AFCWU. The two unions functioned effectively as one, their formal separation kept as far as possible, to a division on paper to comply with the law.

A large proportion of the labour force in the canning industry consisted of women, and this feature was of some significance for the union. Women workers showed a militancy and commitment to the union which placed them at the fore front of strikes and struggles canning workers engaged in. As women were the most affected by seasonal work, their interrupted working period contributed to the unions seasonal fluctuations in strength. Many women workers took leading positions in the union.

During the 1950s growth the union had experienced in the previous decade slowed down and the union ceased expanding. Involvement in national political campaigns occupied a more important place in the unions activities, but did not displace its primary function as a trade union. The political involvement of the union and the character of its activities has been analysed in chapter six. A decade that witnessed the union participating in a broad spectrum of political activity ended with a crucial defensive struggle to prevent the imposition of wage cuts in which the union was successful.

Conditions of increased repression, and a hardening of employers' attitudes in the 1960s, intensified problems the union had faced in previous periods. By the mid 1960s three consecutive general secretaries had been banned, bringing to a total of eleven the union officials who were banned. During the 1960s the union was subjected to a greater level of state repression in the form of harassment of activists by police. Co-operation by the Department of Labour declined. More hostile conditions for organisation placed a strain upon the union's non-racialism and made the achievement of wage improvement more difficult to obtain. Organisation in the isolated branches fell away and at the union's lowest point, only the core branches in the Western Cape remained active. In the bleak period of the late 1960s and early 1970s the union relied for much of its support on the protection the Medical Benefit Fund gave to workers. Operating in context without the support of political allies, as a result of the repression of the

Congress Alliance, the union's political activity was curtailed. Most of the gains the union was able to bring its members were through ensuring they received benefits they were legally entitled to, and by agitating for, and receiving, wage increases to cushion the effects of inflation. Despite the more restricted scope of its activities in this period, the union continued to act on behalf of its members and the working class more broadly to press for improvements in living conditions.

### Negotiating Strategy

Assessing the methods the union employed to gain improvements in wages and conditions, poses questions of the historical experience of the union under the state's industrial relations machinery. Wage improvements were secured through two main actions, the achievement of an agreement with employers by using a conciliation board and also by negotiating piece-rates with individual employers on a seasonal basis. Some comments will be made about the former activity, as these were the main agreements which set rates for all grades of workers and ruling conditions.

Steps taken to secure a conciliation board required making visits to branches to revive and strengthen organisation, gather demands, and serve these demands on the employers. A dispute could be declared upon the rejection of union demands and an application made to the Minister of Labour for the appointment of a conciliation board.<sup>1</sup> Conciliation boards were favored as the best means to arrive at a settlement, as they permitted the union to negotiate directly with employer representatives to produce a legally binding agreement. In these negotiations stronger branches were able to increase the bargaining power of the weaker branches so that resultant agreements reflected a balance between the union's stronger and weakest sections. As branches were only responsible for policing the agreements, and were able to call upon the Department of Labour to investigate contraventions by the employers, weaker branches were protected under this strategy.

When the union was established and started to evolve a distinctive negotiating strategy, the union combined negotiations with collective actions such as rousing factory meetings to display workers unity and militancy. The practice of engaging in strikes to pressurise employers

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<sup>1</sup> See pages 79-81.

during negotiations was not explicit policy, as circumstances as to the advisability of such action varied, but demonstration type stoppages did occur as happened on occasion. These forms of collective action were a means of involving the rank and file in the process of collective bargaining, and contributed to strengthening the union's hand in negotiations.

From the mid 1950s onwards the context in which these negotiations occurred underwent a change and the returns from the use of these structures was reduced. Two important features affecting the union in this regard were: a decline in co-operation from the Department of Labour; and a curtailment of means to back up negotiations with displays of collective action. Requests made to Department of Labour to approve amendments to the union's constitution to enable it to be registered to cover new sections of the workforce or registered for new areas were subject to lengthy delays. The union became committed to using conciliation boards to secure agreements. Private 'gentlemen's' agreements were rejected on the grounds that they did not have legal backing, and the union was unable to secure an industrial council for the canning industry.

In applying this approach, centered on the use of conciliation boards, to new areas or operations that were not covered under the union's constitution, entailed lengthy delays while the Department of Labour dealt with the necessary red-tape. In the time before all the bureaucratic details had been attended to, the union could only ask its members to be patient. Even applications for conciliation boards in areas covered by the union's scope of registration were subject to delays. In addition to the prohibition on strikes that African workers faced, first under war measure 42 of 1942, and then under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, canning workers faced legal action if they struck after the industry was declared an essential industry in 1957. The possibility of prosecution, however, did not prevent canning workers from engaging in strike action, but it did raise the cost of such action and led to a diminished use of the strike weapon. State repression directed at leaders weakened the unions organisation, and coupled with the offensive directed at the union, of which the ban on strikes was but a part, negotiations on conciliation boards under these circumstances were deprived of the threat of strike action to strengthen the union's hand. In addition, with the phasing out of peice-rate work, local level bargaining which had been able to produce

significant increases fell away, yet no substitute was found to incorporate this local level bargaining in the season and the union's negotiating strategy remained unaltered.

Over time the union became less and less able to overcome the problems associated with using the state's industrial relations system. The union's negotiating strategy did not adapt to altered conditions which turned it from a strategy that had produced good results to start with, into becoming an approach applied inflexibly with diminished returns. Evidence to back this assertion can be seen in the union's wage negotiations (to be discussed below).

### Non-racialism

How successful trade unions are at maintaining unity in the working class and overcoming racial divisions is a crucial aspect test of a union's democracy and representivity. In the FCWU a tradition of non-racialism became one of its central tenets and despite a considerable range of forces to the contrary, the history of the union shows practical content was given to its official non-racial policy over the years. The matter cannot be left to rest, however, on the comfortable assertion that maintaining racial unity was without problems, and guaranteed by the progressive orientation of its leadership. As chapter five has shown, there were instances where this unity was weakened.<sup>2</sup>

As an industrial union organising in an industry where the workforce was not significantly divided along lines of race, the position of its members in the workforce confirmed the non-racial unity the union stressed in its organisation. These structural features helped underpin the union's practice of non-racialism when, in formal terms, it was required to form a unregistered parallel union for African men in 1947. African women were only compelled to have their membership transferred from the FCWU to the AFCWU after they were issued with passes in the mid 1950s. In the day-to-day functioning of the union the separation remained formal, however, problems that were manifest early on concerning discrepancies in subscription income between the two unions illustrated that the separation was not entirely formal and there were points of disagreement between the two unions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See pages 199-203.

<sup>3</sup> See page 77.

Employers fostered racial divisions to undermine worker unity in matters such as which workers were promoted and which were to be employed in the off-season. These divisions became more serious when employers started refusing to see delegations comprised of both unions, actions they carried out under the advise of the Department of Labour. Employers actions to undermine workers unity on several occasions were challenged and defeated by workers acting to defend their unity and refusing to be separated on racial lines. The effects of these actions by the employers and the Department of Labour, however, were felt in time as organisation weakened.

At conciliation board meetings the registered FCWU represented the unregistered AFCWU whose delegates were able attend meetings as observers untill the Department of Labour refused them permission to do so in the late 1950s. When the AFCWU was refused permission to meet on factory premises, and denied access to collect subscriptions, the representative role that the FCWU played on behalf of the AFCWU at conciliation boards, was extended to collecting subscriptions on behalf of the AFCWU. As the composition of the workforce changed, and a higher number of African workers were employed in the canning industry, problems in disparity of levels of organisation between the registered and unregistered unions became more serious. A larger proportion of the potential union membership became eligible for membership of the AFCWU, yet African workers faced the greatest number of obstacles from the Department of Labour and the employers to effective organisation. As AFCWU's level of organisation declined more severely than that of the FCWU in the harsh conditions of the late 1960s, this weakened the union's organisation as well as straining its non-racialism. At the end of the period examined by this dissertation, when the union was severely weakened and reduced to its core branches in the Western Cape, relations between the two unions deteriorated. Tendencies emerged of African workers becoming increasinly dubious of the benefits of union membership and coloured workers, viewing the weakness of the AFCWU as a liability, advocated pursuing their separate interests. Non-racialism was not assured by official policies, nor by the political convictions of leadership, it depended upon the strength of worker organisation in the factories. When organisation declined, non-racialism also came under pressure. The revival of the union's non-racialisms in practice required the reorganisation of its base, and only when that was achieved in the later part of the 1970s were divisions overcome and the

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

BASIC, COLA & ADDITIONAL COLA GRADE I

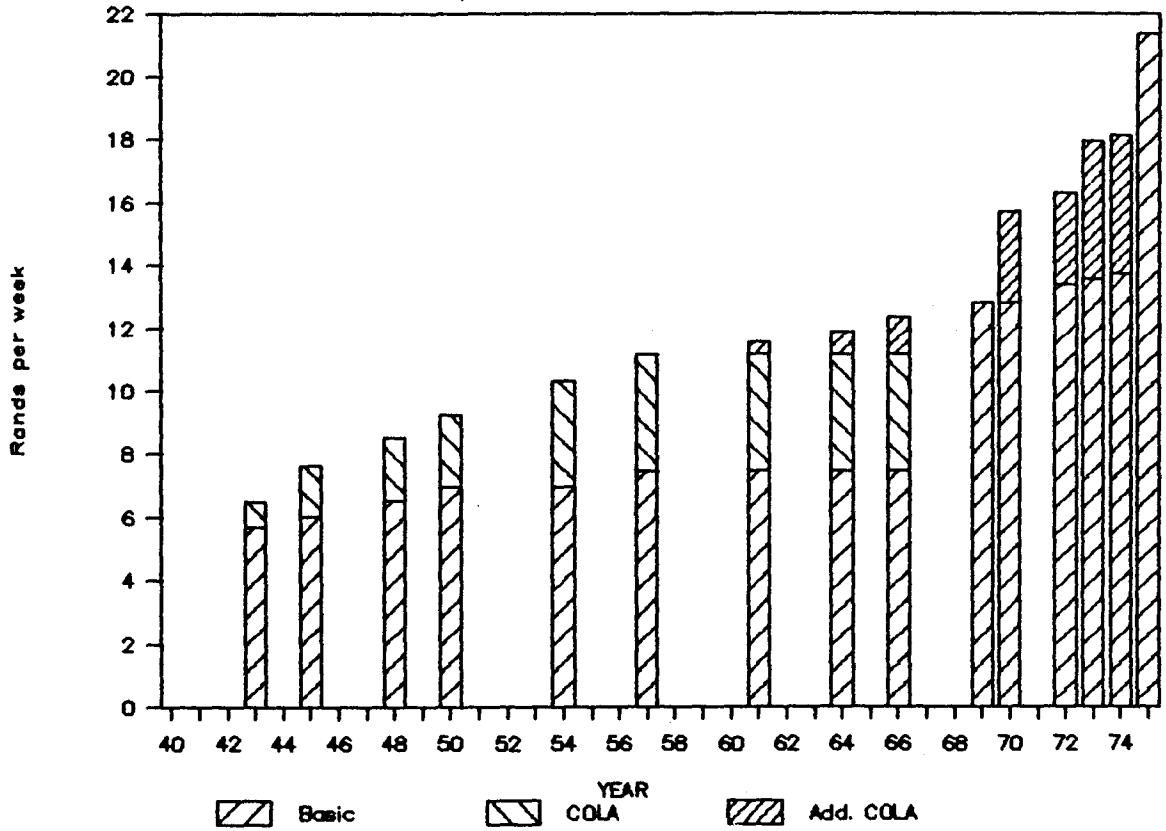


Figure 7.1

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

BASIC, COLA & ADD. COLA: FEMALE LABOURERS

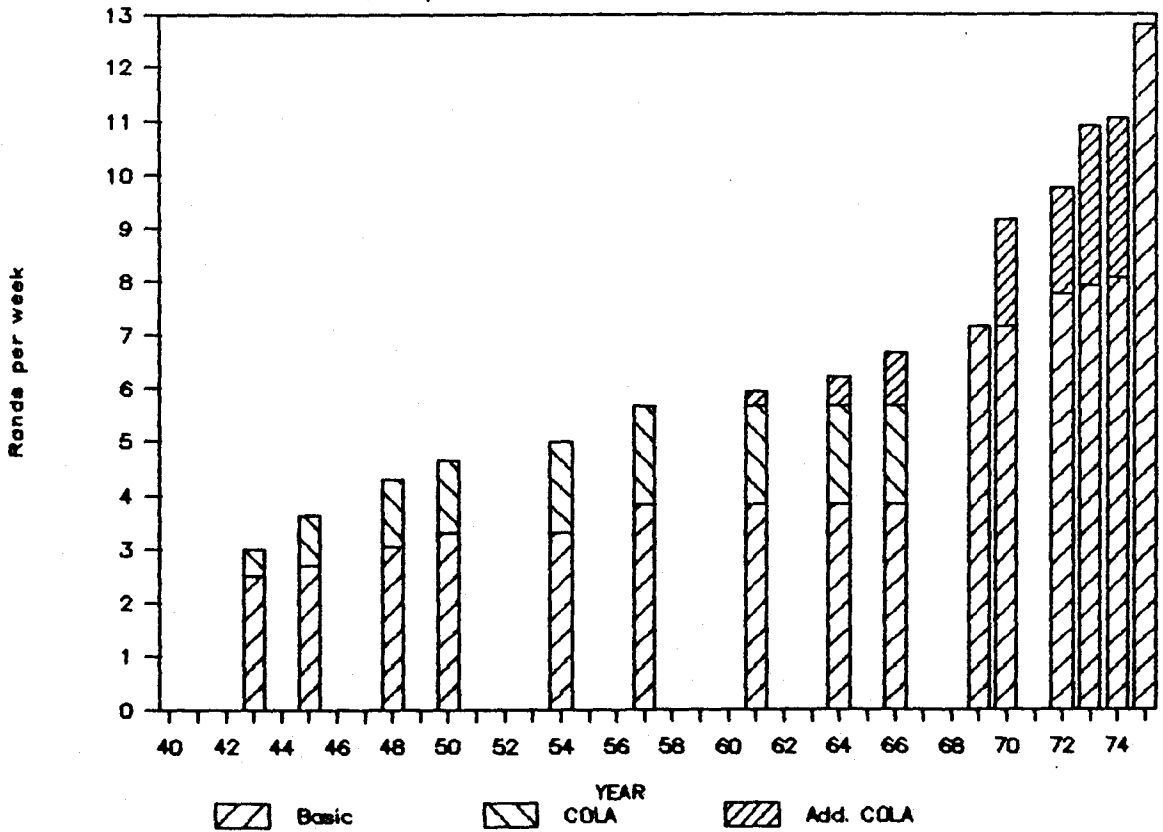


Figure 7.2

union's proud tradition of a policy and genuine practice of non-racialism resurrected.

### Wage Performance

This brief conclusion and summary of the union's activities will end with an examination of the union's performance as an institution representing the economic interests of its members. Below are figures showing the trends of wage categories. These figures do not reflect the non-monetary improvements gained by the union such as shorter working hours, and better working conditions, nor are other aspects of the wage such as leave pay and higher over time rates reflected.

The wage rates shown in the figures below are based on the gazetted conciliation board agreements, which give the basic wage, with the ruling Cost of Living Allowance and Additional Cost of Living Allowance added to this. Since records do not reflect the exact money wage I have had to collate information from annual reports, minutes and Canners Association records to work out the COLA (government and additional) component of the wage i.e. that part not gazetted. The readers attention is drawn to the fact that figures of additional COLA for 1970 and 1973 are estimates of an across the board increase that ranged from R1 to R1.75 in the former and R1 to R1.50 in the latter case, and that the resultant wage reflected in my figures can only be regarded as indicative of trends. Wage tables are shown in appendix I.<sup>4</sup> Wages are shown for the seven adult grades as these grades were the most important employment categories in the industry.<sup>5</sup> Rates are for the Paarl district and the base year is 1975.

4 I am grateful to Dr. M. Nicol for the use of material he gathered on government COLA.

5 The distribution into employment grades in January 1957 were as follows:

Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV Male
1,27%	1,14%	1,52%	1,27%
Grade IV Female	Grade V Male	Grade V Female	
1,37%	26,67%	40,01%	

Source: Wage Board Report on the Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry 1958.

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

REAL WAGES IN 1975 RANDS

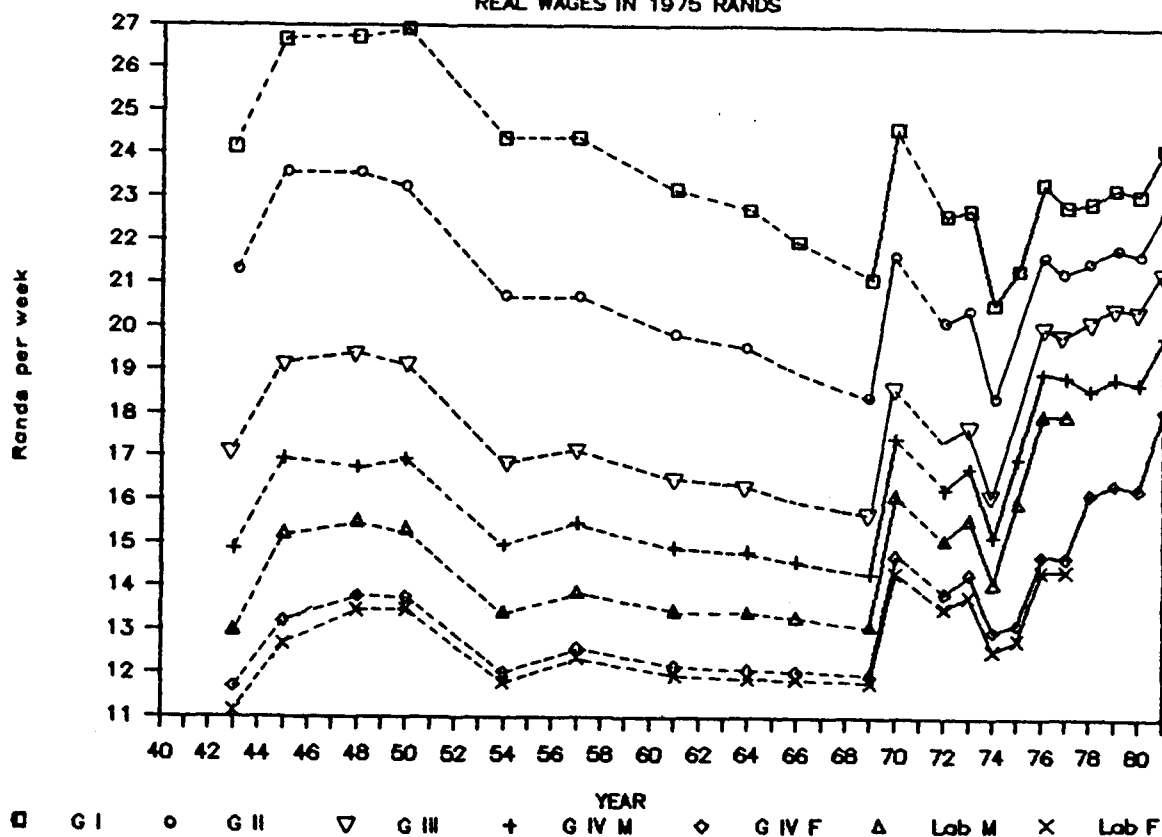


Figure 7.3

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

REAL LOWER GRADE WAGES IN 1975 RANDS

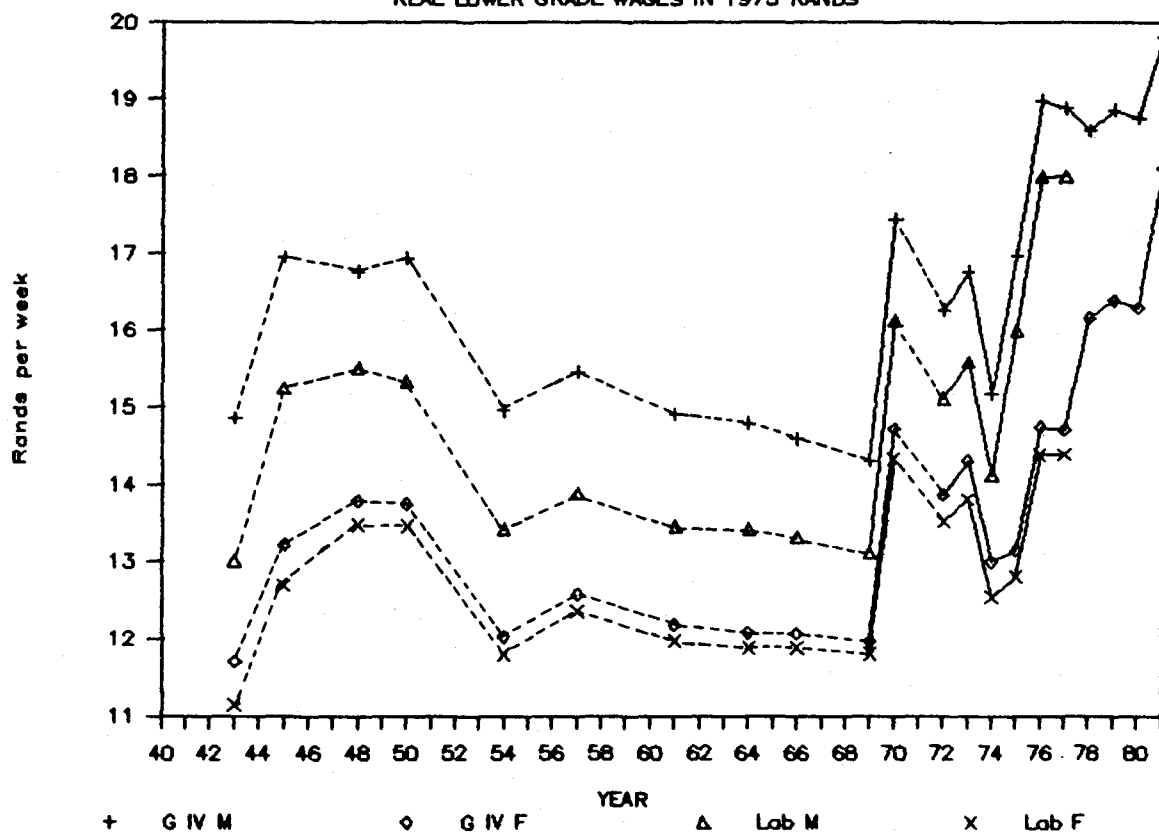


Figure 7.4

### Nominal Wages

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 show nominal wage rates between 1940 and 1975 for grade I and grade V female workers respectively. Both show the following trends: a rate of increase in rates paid which slows down in early 1950s and rises again in the early 1970s, and basic wages remain unchanged from 1954 to 1968. Over those years the increases that are gained are on additional COLA, indicating that the union was unable to push up basic wages which would then have made higher basic wages eligible for increases in COLA. By paying an additional COLA, employers were providing only a small amount they could more easily withdraw. These amounts were stipulated in the conciliation board agreements and therefore legally binding, but in the early 1970s they were granted voluntarily and were not legally binding. Raising wages through increased additional COLA when only marginal increases were gained in basic rates is clearly evident in the three year agreement negotiated in 1972. The increases gained in the agreement represent approximately a 7% increase with a 2% escalation over the following two years. This is in contrast to the success of direct negotiations and agitation in Paarl for higher wages in 1970 and 1973 when increases of approximately 15% were gained.

### Real Wages

Figure 7.3 shows real wage trends for all grades between 1940 and 1981, with 1975 as the base year. These trends show that significant increases were gained through the war, and since the first date for which there is data is 1943, the increases over previous non union rates were considerable. (Pre union rates for labourers were reported as a flat rate of 17s. 6d. per week and the union's first agreement succeeded in raising these to £1 2s.6d.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the basic rate for labourers in 1943, this represents a nominal increase of 171%) The overall trend shows a convergence between the higher and lower grades, aided by the elimination of the labouring grades in 1976. Grade I rates in these figures reached their highest level in the early 1950s and had not been equaled, whereas grade III which peaked in the late 1940s was bettered from the mid 1970s onward. The lower grades, more clearly seen in Figure 7.4, were the major employment categories and this is where

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 32, page 21.

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

REAL BASIC, COLA & ADDITIONAL COLA GRADE I

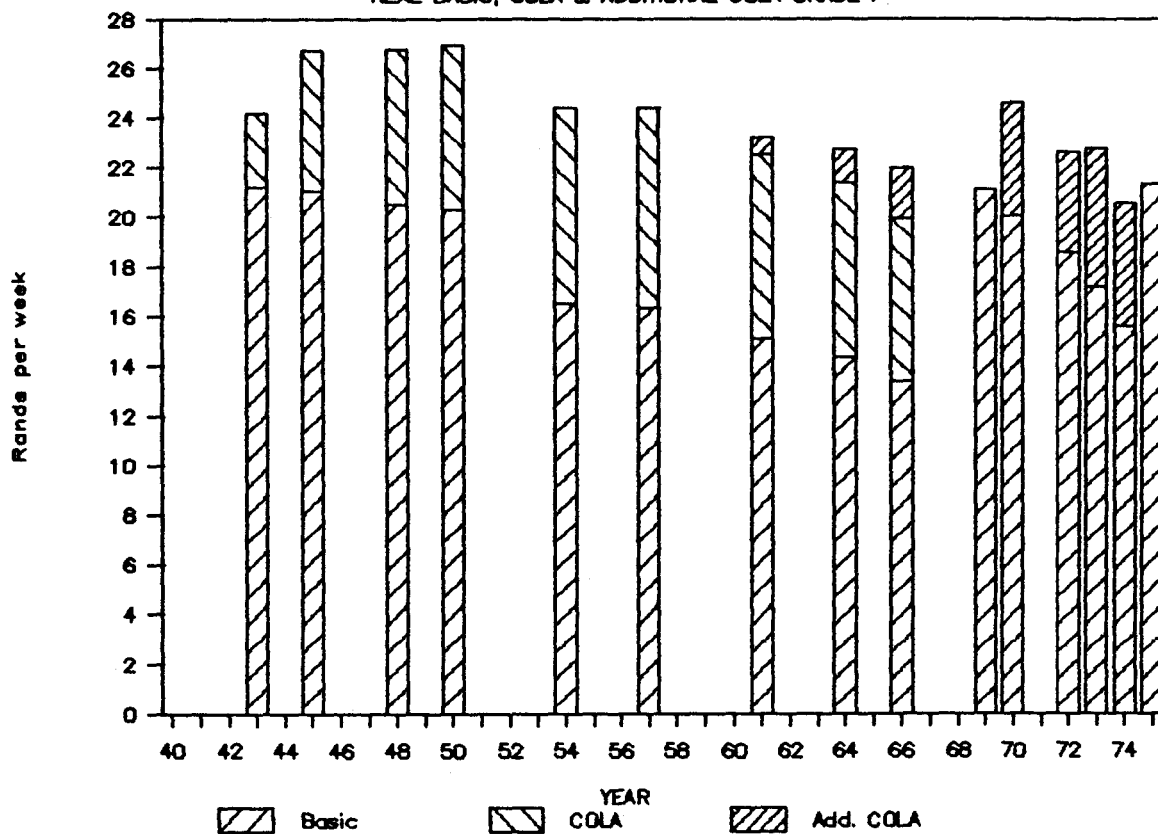


Figure 7.5

### CANNING INDUSTRY WAGES

REAL BASIC, COLA & ADD. COLA: FEMALE LABOURERS

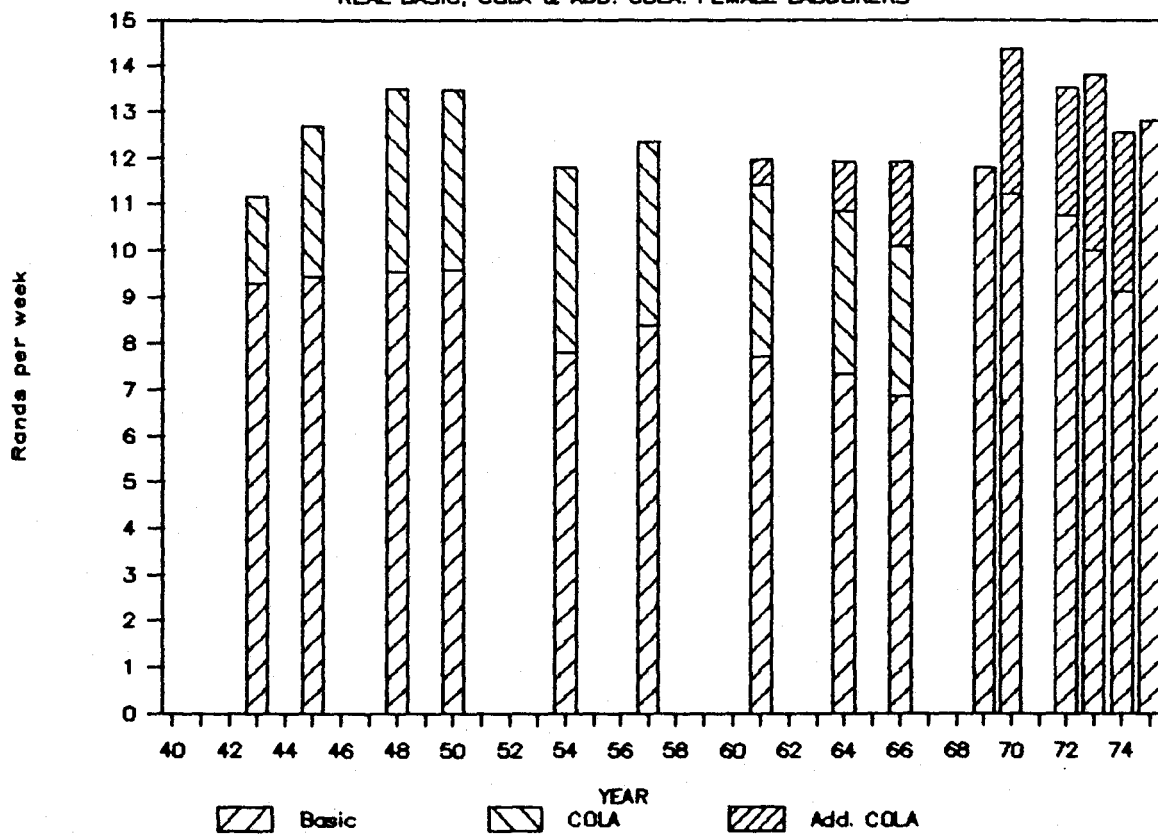


Figure 7.6

the union's performance is best judged. After declines from peak levels in the late 1940s, through the crucial years of the 1950s and 1960s and when real wages for the higher grades were declining steadily, real wages for the lower grades remained more or less constant. This was achieved by a greater contribution of the COLA component to the total wage, as is illustrated in Figure 7.6 showing the components of female labourers. Wages rise in the late 1960s, a time the canning industry was making high profits. Basic wages are raised by the consolidation of COLA components and the government's COLA is phased out. In the early 1970s real wages fluctuate, the inflation rate rises and the wage increases gained by amounts in additional COLA do not keep up with rising prices. This is a time when the union is weak, but was still able to assist in gaining amounts far in excess of the increases set out in the wage agreements.

## POSTSCRIPT

### Reorganisation and Merger

The end point of this study has been reached, but it was certainly not the end of the The Food and Canning Workers Union, for the union was revived and expanded to become one of the key union in the emerging independent labour movement.

A process of reviving the union started in 1975 with the appointment of Jan Theron as FCWU general secretary. Branches that had fallen dormant were revived and the union commenced on a path of growth, first in sections of the food industry that had previously been organised under the union, and then into new sectors. Past leadership, who had been removed from the union by repression re-joined, and contributed to the process of rebuilding the organisation.

As a union that had always stood for the principles of industrial unionism, the FCWU took a leading role in calling for unity within the independent trade union movement. In terms of this commitment and as a pre-requisite for unity with other food unions, separation of the union into the FCWU and AFCWU was brought to an end and a re-united FCWU formed.

The union took a leading role in the working for the establishment of a new trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). In line with COSATU policy of 'one union one industry' the FCWU brought its 32 000 members into a single union for the food industry.

On 31 May and June 1 about 400 food workers from many different unions met in Cape Town to form one national food union. It is the biggest and most powerful food union in the whole of Africa. It is called the FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION (FAWU).<sup>1</sup>

Forty years after the FCWU was founded, it ceased to exist as a separate union. The struggles and traditions of the Food and Canning Workers Union are now being joined by those of food workers from elsewhere, and united and more powerful, food workers are once again in the vanguard of the labour movement.

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<sup>1</sup> COSATU 1(1) August 1986. p.4.

## APPENDIX I

## JAM, FRUIT AND VEGETABLE AND DRIED FRUIT PRINCIPAL STATISTICS

Year	Employment				Total	1000 Rands at Constant Prices					EMPLOYMENT									
	White	Africn	Coloured	Indian		No of Firms	Total Wage	Fixed Invest	Gross Out-put	Value Added	Race and Gender divisions									
										Wht M	Wht F	Af M	Af F	Col M	Col F	Ind M	Ind F	Blk M	Blk F	
1934-35	414	299	885	60	1658	18	215	476	1477	569	223	191							540	704
1935-36	428	873	1144	78	2523	18	266	567	1880	752	241	187							850	1245
1936-37	379	434	1164	67	2044	19	270	632	1710	689	259	120							807	858
1937-38	396	441	1032	78	1947	19	295	922	2007	741	270	120							770	781
1938-39	422	409	955	81	1867	20	296	876	2016	916	281	141							756	689
1939-40	468	552	1718	117	2855	22	407	1094	3003	1082	292	176							1138	1249
1940-41	629	1120	2743	155	4647	24	612	1291	5359	1716	387	242							2070	1948
1941-42	705	1473	2477	114	4769	24	855	1459	6696	2403	466	239							2077	1987
1942-43	733	1910	2868	100	5611	24	1086	1436	7106	2540	561	172							2570	2308
1943-44	829	2709	3299	91	6928	28	1558	1716	10045	3636	644	185							2316	2883
1944-45	874	3413	3673	58	8018	26	1961	2135	11677	4091	702	172							3999	3145
1945-46	935	3023	3923	38	7919	29	2110	2345	12227	4185	759	176							3596	3388
1946-47	880	2451	4068	45	7444	30	2049	2712	12800	4963	689	191							3206	3358
1947-48	998	2684	4273	46	8001	34	2393	3627	16161	5146	772	226							3566	3437
1948-49	1159	2973	3890	46	8068	38	2555	5163	14852	5527	847	321							3572	3337
1949-50	1402	3636	4289	272	9599	44	3227	6317	21228	8285	980	422							4244	3953
1950-51	1807	4623	5687	225	12342	77	4525	7990	33102	11376	1170	637	3453	1170	1853	3834	192	33		
1951-52	1883	5988	6277	234	14382	79	5145	9435	39187	13153	1205	678	4434	1554	2048	4229	199	35		
1952-53	1968	6307	6572	289	15136	84	5913	10283	40358	13007	1334	634	4480	1827	2080	4492	223	66		
1953-54	2082	6369	6729	258	15438	84	6159	11217	41515	15894	1374	708	4152	2217	2097	4632	201	57		
1954-55	2255	6778	6871	274	16178	83	6599	13292	40905	15065										
1955-56	1962	8487	7526	271	18246	81	7363	15508	45367	18570										
1956-57	2125	9614	7849	303	19891	78	8112	19204	49008	19830	1454	671	5556	4058	2475	5374	216	87		
1957-58	2196	10307	8446	342	21291	84	8802	20423	53412	21628	1519	677	5777	4530	2687	5759	243	99		
1958-59	2171	9586	8234	320	20311	89	9145	21883	58137	21826	1577	594	5491	4095	2342	5892	228	92		
1959-60	2064	6348	4418	356	13186	90	8592	22756	52890	19252	1497	567	4195	2153	1672	2746	260	96		
1960-61	2014	6760	4286	396	13456	91	8857	21764	62158	26684	1444	570	4568	2192	1823	2463	278	118		
1961-62	1817	7060	4375	150	13402	70	8674	21520	57001	20933										
1962-63	1736	8146	5519	144	15545	68	8921		61882	22480	1326	410	4326	3820	1848	3671	128	16		
1963-64	1715	8071	5063	127	14976	78	9155	22285	70034	26754	1336	379	4561	3510	1945	3118	122	5		
1965-66	1935	10878	5307	136	18256		11143				1483	452	5265	5613	2054	3253	126	10		
1967-68	1903	10825	5109	90	17927						1452	451	5466	5359	1930	3179	79	11		
1970	1994	11936	6282	156	20368	78	14140		98604	33837	1543	451	5554	6382	1957	4325	148	8		
1972	2046	11964	6697	142	20849	87	17691		125610	42181	1584	462	5968	5996	2016	4681	135	7		
1976	2113	12654	5372	80	20219	91	27256	58902	217220	84003	1614	499	6398	6256	1727	3645	80	0		

Sources

Industrial census for manufacturing establishments 1935 - 1950.

Industrial census report no. 3 for jam, canned and preserved fruit and vegetables; fruit and vegetable juices and cordials; pickles, sauces and condiments; dried fruit packing. 1950 - 1962

Manufacturing census reports 1962 - 1976 (irregular)

Table 1



## APPENDIX II ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Slightly abridged translations of Afrikaans quotations are given below in the order that they appear in the paper.

Page: 48

"The union's strength lay in the women."

Page: 50

In my opinion the women in the union achieve more with the bosses than the men. It's like that here as well, the women will insist upon something which would be dropped by a man, women carry on. The women does not give up, she carries on.

Men are more easily moved by the arguments of the bosses. This we've discovered. Men will agree more readily than women. A woman sticks to her point. Our boss has even said, "Why are you all women. I also want some men here." But the men don't want to serve on the committee. The boss has seen that the women persist with an issue until he has to give in. He has to give them what they want, whereas a man will just give in....

I think the women are the best, they stand more united than the men!

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You know, she was so strict, you couldn't joke about and make light of it. She always said that the leaders should set an example. How would we discipline the workers if we did exactly the same things. She was very strict about that kind of education.

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Frank Marquard and Becky Lan, mostly the leaders. In those days the workers didn't speak as much as they do now, now they talk a lot. Then the people used to listen to what the leaders had to say.....Their explanations of things that had happened or of shortcomings, or whatever. Then the workers didn't speak much, now it's very different.

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Then they always got head-office to come. Let head office come and sort out the matter....It took a long time for the people to realise that, if those people could do it, then so could they. And later on, when the bosses realised that the people supported the union,

that they supported their leaders, when the leaders went in, you could say that the problem was solved.

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She told us what we had the right to ask for. What we may ask for and what we may do. That we could ask for better schools for our children. We could ask for proper churches, etc."

"She told us, "Look, these are things that you can ask for, you may ask for and they must give it to you because you are part of this town's economy."....You don't see a white woman or a white girl in a factory. Not one that would work amongst that load of fish all day. Only coloured and black women and girls and we have the right to ask for what we want.

We applied for a new dance hall, and when it was almost finished we, the leaders of Food and Canning, went to have a look and reported to the workers. Well, they told us they didn't want that hall, that it was too small. So they had to demolish it. We could have taken it like that, but we wanted to show the boss. He had had things his way for all those years and now it was our chance. We had the power to make him dance to our tune. That was our trick.

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School children would go to the factory to help in the afternoons and I used to join my sister who worked there. Later, when I did not want to attend school any longer I also started working.

I was about fifteen when I began to work full-time at the factory. I started on piece-work and later on I was moved to the sorting-belts.

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The union may have been weakened by the fact that not only people from Wolseley worked here. There were people from Saron, Ceres, Touws River, Porterville, Picketberg, Wittewater and many other places. They would fetch truckloads of workers who would then sleep here. Those people were not keen to join the union because it was a godsend for them to work here.

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I did not wish to be chairman as I was afraid. The chairman is always the first one to go to prison when there is trouble.

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I had worked here quite a while before I heard about the union. I can't quite remember whether it was the 1940's or 1950's when they came here to organise.

That was the first that we heard about the union. The head office always came to us to convene meetings and inform us about the union. Later we joined the union.

It wasn't easy to establish the union here because people were unaware of its existence and what it meant. However, they did eventually manage to organise most of the people here at the factory. The management didn't like the union and didn't accept it and when they learnt we belonged to the union they attempted to drive the leaders out of the factory.

I joined the union because we were paid very badly. We worked hard; bosses were very indecent towards us in the factory and the head office explained to us how they could help us and that we would also be able to get more money in addition to other things. Once we had all the facts we could see it was a good thing to belong to. So we joined up.

(What did the bosses do?) They swore at us. Just gave you the sack. You might just have done some small thing and they'd chase you away. You get sworn at from dawn till dusk. You must just keep your nose to the grindstone, you're not even allowed to look up. You're hurried, nothing is ever good enough.

Then the boss told me. "If you are here to stir up the people, I'll run you out. If that's the truth."

So I said, "No" (It was Christmas; I had children.) So I said "No. I'm not a leader." But I was a leader and we were going to fight this thing through to the end.

Later on he called me again. So I told him not to give me nonsense. I came to work, not listen to tales.

We just held our meetings outside Rachel Sass's (Zeeman) house. We just organised the whole time. While I was at work I'd ask the people "Haven't you joined the union yet? The union gives us an advantage. Don't you want to join?" And then they'd say, "Yes, sign me up!"

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They were scared to talk. We could never speak about the union at the factory because the workers were scared. When we came together for a meeting we had an opportunities to speak about the union.

Then it wasn't as it is now, that we take our grievances to the bosses and do something about them. Danie... was always too scared. ...So it never happened that the workers went to the bosses to complain, because the bosses did not recognise the union and wanted nothing to do with it.

It just passed by, it wasn't taken up with the bosses. Complaints were mostly given to head office when they came out here. We didn't ever go to the bosses personally. There wasn't a chance for that since he didn't even want to hear about the union. We just gave our complaints to head office but I believe head office didn't have much chance because the boss would not accept them.

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"It is high time the non-whites have an organisation of their own, such as the Indians have in their South African Indian Congress and the Africans in their African National Congress."

We would still be busy eating when the boss would come. Before you could say it's over he'd just say "Yes! Yes!" There wasn't a hooter, there wasn't a watch against the wall so that you could see when it was break or work time. Sometimes you'd be working, the people would walk across the road, and you wouldn't know if it was lunch-time or what the time was.

If that boss wanted to hit, he'd hit you. If you'd done something wrong you had to run. Just have to run like that.

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One day I said. This isn't right, we are not dogs and this is not slavery, for things to be carrying on like this. So I spoke to the coloured foreman, Jack Benjamin and asked him "Why are you not within the law. Why isn't there a hooter, and why is this and that as it is?" So he told me to go and ask the boss. That boss swore a lot, we were all scared of him.

Then I said "No, this can't go on. We are not slaves, we will not do this." That morning when van Schalkwyk said, "Yes! Yes!" I had not finished breakfast. But we had already decided, myself, Mackenzie and Pop (Bastiaan). We will not go in because we need to know when break-times, meal-times were and when work resumes. And why there is no hooter here...

So the people went back and we stayed put, a group of us sat and would not go back inside.

Then he asked "Will you work, yes or no?" That was van Schalkwyk, "Will you work, yes or no?" Then Annie replied, "We are still eating!"

"Then you can just guzzle!" he said.

Then the others went in and those outside stayed there.

'Baas' Koos Delpoort closed the windows. 'Baas' van Schalkwyk closed the door. Those inside resumed work. He stood at the door. If you come you had to ask and if you

want to go out to the toilet you had to ask and hurry if you want to get back in.

And then we who were outside saw that it was ten minutes that we had been having breakfast, and wanted to go back, Koos, the boss asked me, "Where are you going?" So I said, "I am going to work, we want to resume, allow me to enter!"

Then Delpport said to me, "You can't come in, your time is up."

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Annie said "Oh God! There's trouble this morning. Rachel what's going on here?" So I said we're going to see this thing through...

When the people, those who were outside, saw the police arrive, they ran pell-mell to get back inside.

So the people began to work. The majority of them ran back to start their work.

I sat there. Mackenzie said "We are not going in, we are staying put..."

Then a policeman came up to us and kicked the box out from under us. He asked us "Aren't you two working?"

Then I said, "I still have time. How long do we get to eat?"

So he said, "Ten minutes after seven fifteen."

Then I said, "We have just arrived here. First we must feed our babies, have a little to eat and then we will go back.

"Why won't you go back. The boss at the door said you refuse to go in." he asked.

So I said, "We will go back when our time is up. When we have finished eating then we will go back inside again. Before we had finished eating the doors were closed and we can't climb in through the windows."

Then he said "Now you are being clever." And he shoved me with his baton here on the back of my head.

I put my child down and said, "You won't shove me like that again. You could kill my child with that baton."

He was rude that policeman. He was white....He did not want me just to say yes or no, I had to call him 'baas'. Then I told him, "You are not my 'baas', God is my 'baas'."

Then he said, "What is your plan, are you going to work."

So I said, "Yes I am going to work." We approached the door for the third time, Mackenzie and I, and the boss said, "I have told you two, you can't come in, the others may come in, but you are not allowed to."

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Where have you ever heard of a boss establishing a union. Mr. Delpport thinks the workers are a bunch of monkeyes. We don't want Delpport's union. We want a union that will fight for our children's" sake.

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He said he would destroy the union. Then I said, "You can try and destroy the union, but I will not allow it to die!" That's what I told him. "I will fight until the union lives."

He said "Yes, the union has confronted me seven times. And it collapsed seven times . It will collapse again."

Then I said, "That is okay boss."

I was there with my children, with my cases packed with food and clothing and my babies and we came up to the lorry. At the lorry, Jack Benjamin said to me that I may not climb aboard... there was no work for myself and Pop Haas.

So I asked him why not, and he said I must obey the the foreman and do as master Danie said. Then I said, (I was so hurt and ashamed) "Your boss has not given me notice. The factory has not given me notice and I have not given notice.

One day the bosses decided they were going to sack her (Annie McKenzie) and they justified this by saying.... at the time she was working at a pitting machine and they said she had cross-cut a box of peaches. Now you can just imagine that! Cross-cutting a box would break the machine. And so they decided to sack her for incompetence. We had a general union meeting (I was the chairman at that time) and we decided to choose a delegation to go and speak to the bosses about Annie's dismissal. There would be a strike if he did not reinstate her. Ben Plaatjies and I went to speak to the bosses. Well we went and they explained about the peaches and not being able to keep her because of that. So we told them that the workers had decided to strike if they did not reinstate her. They wanted us to speak nicely to the workers and tell them not to strike etc.

And I told him, "We can't decide anything here in the office, we have to go back because the workers sent us. We can't now say, yes, the workers aren't going to strike or whatever. We have to give them the message because they sent us."

We left and just a short distance away the head-foreman caught up with us behind some crates and said to me,

"Sass" (my surname was Sass) "You must tell the people not to strike. Don't be like a bunch of Springbuck - when the one jumps over the cliff edge then all the rest follow behind."

I can clearly remember saying to him. "Sir, we are going to give a report to the workers of what you have said, because they sent us."

So we reported that they would not reinstate Annie, and the workers decided they were going to strike which they did.

So we went to stand on the lot. Some people stayed inside and some went on strike. There we waited and sang union songs. Then later, when the Africans saw we were

holding out, most of them joined us and the strike continued.

We were prepared for the strike because we were well informed. We had spoken before the strike. They (head office) had explained to us when a strike is lawful and when it is not. That is why we had first gone to speak to the bosses and told them that we would strike if Annie was not reinstated.

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On the day that it happened I was coming out of the washroom, I'd finished my meal. When I got to the washroom door my friend said "Where are you going? People are going to strike today. I asked, "What's a strike?" I didn't know what a strike was. "No, come come!" they said. So I joined the rest.

We went home at night and in the mornings we all joined up again to stand on that lot. We sang songs like 'come and join us' and 'Senzenina'.

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You have struck illegally. You have dismissed yourselves and now I am dismissing you again. I will not dismiss you again, go and fetch your pay. I give you five minutes to move. That is all.

When I saw there were such large lorries and vans I said, "I'm very sorry but, (I was crying) I'm not getting into the van, I'd rather climb onto the lorry." Now, I am small, and the people had to help me onto the lorry.

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One policeman came up to me and asked: "Didn't I see you in Wellington my girl, aren't you from Wellington?"

I said, "No sir, I just went to school there."

He said, "Don't worry, the prison isn't made for a dog and a cat. You can take courage from the fact that you haven't committed a murder or done something else. You are standing up for your rights and standing together with your people.

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My mother lived in Waverley. Other people brought me my lunch. Then there were those who stood by us. Many people did... they made food and brought it to us even though they did not know the people on strike.

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The strike taught us a lot. They (head office) were with us each day. There wasn't a day that they left us alone. They taught us what it means to strike.

That you can't just strike, that you have to go and speak to the boss and ask - and tell him the people are going to strike. It was a legal strike because of that.

They taught us a lot. They taught us about lawyers, I think his name as Friedman. He gave us lessons,... how one has to answer in court, how the questions will be put. I was very well informed about that.

Two told me that they were on our side. That they stood for the union. That they worked for the union. And I must say they will help us poor people.

Many people, from our union, gave them the basic details of the issue; gave it to detectives who worked for the bosses against the union.

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Annie is a man, she had men's clothes on. I was carrying that heavy child on my back. I had on a scarf as the African women wear it, with the scarf around the head. Annie was wearing trousers. Then if we walked about or, if we wanted to come out from under the bridge we are husband and wife.

Mpetha, Mafeking and Frank and brought us food, coffee or tea or something or a flask with babies milk.

Phew! things were tight and I just asked God for help. Yes, they just hunted for us, just hunted for the two of us. If they had got us... Then the police van went past and then the van went past again.

Sometimes we went to a farm. That farm where the horse stood... That old fellow always gave us food. "Old chap", he said to us. Annie Mackenize was the 'Outa' (old man).

"'Outa', 'Outa', you must do this and that and then I will give you this and that."

Oh yes, then in a little while Annie had five shillings or half a crown. Then she could buy something good for her children. "Thank you boss, thank you."

Oh yes, I helped in the vineyard during the day and at night we went back under the bridge.

They drove past us. They did not know us. Oh yes, they had a photo of me, but I was smeared black....I had some of that grease on my face. It did not shift. And my scarf was tied behind as the Africans wear their scarf.

Annie Mackenzie had a moustache. We were always disguised like this.

I had a hard time... we had to hide away because they were looking for us.

(Why?) "They gave the police trouble" (Rachel Zeeman) They looked for leaders, they wanted to kill the leader. If they had the leaders and locked them in jail, then the union would collapse. That's what they did to Wolseley people who struggled to support the union.

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"We gathered on the lot because we regarded ourselves as workers. Our intention was to return to work."

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I made the statement which has just been read out to me because the C.I.D. forced me to.

The sergeant took down the statement. The C.I.D. said that I had to tell them who had told me to strike. I said that I didn't know and the C.I.D. then told me that I did know and that I was not to tell lies. The C.I.D. said that it was Mackenzie who told us to strike. That is why I said that Annie Mackenzie said it. I said it because I didn't know what to say.

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Master Danie... The boss will give them five pounds per day for as long as that factory stood. But they may not; they have to promise they would not join the union, because the union was bad. Also, they would wind up in jail if they joined the union. They must not join the union.

Oh yes, they would not get work. Like ourselves, they would not get work. They would be employed nowhere, like ourselves because we belonged to the union. This was done to destroy the union.

And to Lilly he said he would give her a job as a forewoman and to Sally van der Venter he would give a forewomans job, for the rest of their lives they would be forewomen. Although they were not working he would pay them for the whole year. That is what he said to them.

He tried as hard as possible - to prize people away to drive people away from the union so he would be in the majority and us in the minority.

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I don't think there was much chance with them at the time. The union may have spoken to them but they didn't bother themselves with such things.

They were quite scared of us. They were told so many lies. It was said that we would knife them and all kinds of nasty things that we hadn't done."

(Who said that?)

"Lots of people, they were scared and a bunch might say "don't go there - they'll knife you." They were always scared of the strikers. And during the strike: there wasn't any fighting or stone throwing at the people who carried on working."

(Was it difficult to talk to them?)

"No, it wasn't difficult because we would always bump into each other outside."

(Did you explain to the scabs that they were taking your jobs?)

"No, we didn't do that."

(Did any of the scabs leave when they learnt they they were taking your jobs?)

"No... I don't know. We didn't actually talk to them. We just carried on the strike in our own manner."

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We went to Ashton. Just after the strike Ashton asked some of us to go and work there and some of us took up the offer. We only worked there for a day because he wouldn't take the men that came from here. So we said that if the men couldn't work, then we would have to go home as well. So they paid us and brought us home.

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The men were not as strong as the women. It was mainly women who went on strike. There were a couple of men but... the majority of strikers were women.

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We never really pinpointed the problem, but we struggled with the Africans. They weren't always prepared to pay their 'sups'. She, (Mafeking) always tried to explain to them that it was their duty to pay. One of the things that carried a lot of weight in the early days was the fact that the factories didn't employ as many Africans as they do now. That may have contributed to it.

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You might be comfortably at home then the police come knocking at your door. "You said this and this to the people last night. Aren't you afraid. You know you can go to prison for that." Then you hadn't even meant that.

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No, they mostly came for the union work only. There was never time to talk about other issues. They did speak about other places, but only in terms of what had happened at a factory. Just about union work, not other things....or if some of our union leaders are in prison they might explain to us....

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It is naturally a loss for the union but the union got stronger, they just extended it. Where Ray left of other people came and just carried on building. We didn't go and build differently, we carried on building onto Ray's foundations."

"I think that, because Ray founded the union, what she taught the workers was very good and the workers realised this and felt that it was a direction well worth keeping.

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We did use the shop-stewards more than the constitution stipulated. There were only a few of us that could read and write, that could be used for that purpose.

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We just waited until Miss. Ray came again. Then she could inform us on the broader detail.....

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Then we weren't much interested in politics. It was only later, much later, that we started getting the idea that these people didn't treat us properly. She didn't speak to us about politics then. She did mention it, but in such a nice manner....She mentioned it gently. Later, when we got rebellious, when we started getting stronger, then we remembered that she had told us....But she never incited us. As we developed with time and the more young people joined the union, you could say that we opened our own eyes. The worse we were treated by the bosses..., because, you see, the more we demanded of the union the ruder the bosses became.

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I don't think so, if they did know then it was only a very little. As I say, it was very difficult to get to people. If you don't know what SACTU means and you get a circular letter, how are you going to follow it up. SACTU was discussed and explained a lot at 'managements'. But in the out laying areas, I wouldn't say they didn't take notice, but they had a difficulty in understanding.

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Actually we didn't tell the ordinary workers much about it. You had to be so careful and you didn't know who you could trust. When we did discuss it, it was only the committee members and then not in front of new members. We knew that it was political. In those days the boss and the police used to agree to everything. So we couldn't inform everybody about everything. So we concentrated on Food and Canning and tried to make it stronger.....If there was any time left over then we would discuss other things, but the union came first.

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General secretary of the FCWU  
between 1956 and 1964. Banned  
from 1964 to 1975. she rejoined the  
union in the late 1970s and  
helped to revive it.

Mrs. Annie Adams Wellington, 9.04.86.	Secretary of the Wellington branch of the FCWU.
Messrs. Ainsley and Du Toit Paarl, 18.04.86.	Engineers at H.G. Molenaars Paarl Food processing equipment company.
Mrs. Ray Alexander Lusaka, December 1985.	Founder and first General Secretary of the FCWU removed from office by banning order in 1953.
Mr. Martin Brand Bellville, 27.05.85.	Former Personnel Manager at LKB.
Mrs. M. Brown Amstelhof, 16.04.86.	Canning worker.
Mr P.J.F. Conradie Paarl, 9.04.86	Employee of the WFCC and manager of LKB factories in Wolseley, Mossel Bay and Ashton.
Mrs. Mary Debsch (nee Albertus), Wolseley, 6.01.86.	Wolseley canning worker.
Mr. J.P. Delpont Cape Town, 11.04.86.	Founder and former owner of the Wolseley Fruit Canning Company.
Mr. D. du Toit Bellville, 27.01.86.	Member of LKB management.
Mrs. Maggie Fransman (nee Mackuur) Wolseley, 6/9/21.01.86.	Worker at WFCC and a participant in the 1954 Wolseley strike.
Mr. G.S. Glendening Cape Town, 21.01.83; 15.04.85.	Secretary of the South African Fruit and Vegetable Cannery Association.
Mrs. Rally Hans Saron, 7.04.86.	Wolseley canning worker.
Interview No. 5 Durban, 05.83.	A copy of the tape is held under restricted access in the African Studies Institute at Wits.
Mrs. Betty Kearns Paarl, 5.02.83; 16.03.83; 5.04.85.	Retired canning worker.
Mr. Malone Cape Town, 15.04.85.	Assistant Secretary to the SAF&VCA.
Mrs. Annie Mbenge Mbekweni, 16.04.85.	Canning worker.

Mr. John Mentoor Pniel, 17.02.83.	General Secretary of the FCWU from 1966 - 1975.
Dr. J.A. Mouton Paarl, 9.04.86.	Former General Manager of Langeberg Koöperasie Beperk.
Mr. Oscar Mpetha by Alan Hirsch Cape Town, 5/20.06.82.	First General Secretary of the AFCWU. Banned in 1954 and 1959, he rejoined the union in the late 1970s and helped to revive it.
Mrs. Koko Ndinisa Mbekweni, 16.04.85.	Canning worker.
Mr. John Phendlani Paarl, 11.02.83; 1.04.85.	President of the AFCWU from 1961 - ....., now retired.
Mrs. Liz Phike Paarl, 4.06.85.	Secretary of the Paarl branch of the AFCWU and National organiser of the Canning section of the FCWU.
Mrs. Esther Tshali Mbekweni, 16.04.85.	Canning worker.
Mr. G. van Willing Cape Town, 10.04.86.	Former H.Jones employee.
Mr. G.F. Viljoen Bellville, 30.04.86.	Production planner at LKB.
Mr. Visser Strand, 4.04,85.	Food technologist at Gants.
Mrs. Rachel Williams Saron, 13.04.86.	A leader in the 1954 Wolseley strike.
Mrs. Magriet Wynand Saldanha Bay, 2.08.86.	A FCWU branch official for the West Coast fishing branches from approx. 1950 to 1982.
Mrs. Rachel Zeeman (nee Sass), Wolseley, 6/9/21.01.86.	One of the leaders of the 1954 Wolseley strike and the treasurer of the strike fund.