

**STRIKES AND STAYAWAYS IN RELATION TO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN
SOUTH AFRICA 1970 - 1987**

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to assess the degree to which strikes and stayaways in South Africa are related to broader political developments. Traditional theories of industrial conflict are first evaluated. This is followed by a direct study of industrial conflict in relation to wider political developments in South Africa in the 1970-87 period. The broad themes emerging from these chapters are then compared to established theories pertaining to strike action. The conclusion reached is that certain aspects of theory are of relevance to the South African situation, but none are adequate in their entirety. It is noted that it is important to include theories covering the nature of broader society to make possible a coherent explanation as to the nature of strikes and stayaways in South Africa.

The conclusions reached verify the stated hypothesis that political factors play an important role in determining the nature of strikes and stayaways. Furthermore, it appears evident that this relationship has become stronger over the 1970-87 period, especially following the declaration of the State of Emergency which has severely curtailed most other avenues of peaceful protest.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| AAC | - Anglo-American Corporation |
| AFCWU | - African Food and Canning Workers' Union |
| ANC | - African National Congress |
| ASSOCOM | - Associated Chambers of Commerce |
| AZAPO | - Azanian People's Organization |
| AZACTU | - Azanian Council of Trade Unions |
| B.C. | - Black Consciousness |
| BMWU | - Black Municipal Workers' Union |
| CCAWUSA | - Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa |
| CCOBTU | - Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions |
| COSAS | - Congress of South African Students |
| COSATU | - Congress of South African Trade Unions |
| CUSA | - Council of Unions of South Africa |
| CSIR | - Council for Scientific and Industrial Research |
| CWIU | - Chemical Workers' Industrial Union |
| DOM | - Department of Manpower |
| EAWU | - Engineering and Allied Workers' Union |
| EIWU | - Engineering Industrial Workers' Union |
| ESCOM | - Electricity Supply Commission |
| FCI | - Federated Chamber of Industries |
| FCWU | - Food and Canning Workers' Union |
| FOSATU | - Federation of South African Trade Unions |
| GFWBF | - General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund |
| GWU | - General Workers' Union |
| ICU | - Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa |
| IIE | - Institute for Industrial Education |
| IIR | - Institute of Industrial Relations |
| MACWUSA | - Motor Assembly and Component Worker's Union of South Africa |
| MAWU | - Metal and Allied Workers' Union |
| MWU | - Mine Workers' Union |
| NACTU | - National Council of Trade Unions |
| NIPR | - National Institute for Personnel Research |
| NMC | - National Manpower Commission |
| NUM | - National Union of Mineworkers |
| NUMSA | - National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa |
| NUSAS | - National Union of South African Students |
| NUTW | - National Union of Textile Workers |
| POTWA | - Post Office & Telecommunications Workers' Association |
| PWAWU | - Paper, Wood, and Allied Workers' Union |
| SAP | - South African Police |
| SAAWU | - South African Allied Workers' Union |
| SACTU | - South African Congress of Trade Unions |
| SALB | - South African Labour Bulletin |
| SALDRU | - South African Labour & Development Research Unit |
| SARHWU | - South African Railway & Harbours Workers' Union |

SASO - South African Students' Organization
SATS - South African Transport Services
SEIFSA - Steel and Engineering Industrial Federation of South Africa
SFAWU - Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union
TGWU - Transport and General Workers' Union
TUACC - Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council
TUCSA - Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWIU - Textile Workers' Industrial Union
UAW - United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers' Union
UMMAWASA - United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
UTP - Urban Training Project
UWUSA - United Workers Union of South Africa
WIP - Work in Progress
WPGWU - Western Province General Workers' Union
WPWAB - Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau

INTRODUCTION

i) STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

Political developments have played an ever-increasing role in determining the nature of strikes and stayaways in South Africa in the 1970 to 1987 period.

It is argued that the specific nature of strikes and stayaways in South Africa in the period studied have been greatly affected by political variables. In recent years state action has cast a political shadow on almost all aspects of life in that country. In the sphere of labour relations, even the most normal aspects of an industrial relations system have been permeated by political factors. The ever-increasing extent of state repression has had the effect of forcing the independent trade unions even further into the political arena, whilst increasingly political forms of protest have become manifest at the workplace (e.g. stayaways). Whilst economic factors as a determinant of industrial conflict clearly remain of import, it is argued that political factors have become increasingly of important significance. In a limited fashion, the applicability of traditional theories of industrial relations to the South African context will be evaluated.

ii) PREFACE

This is a study of conflict in the workplace in the 1970's and 1980's in the form of strikes and stayaways and how political developments have influenced the incidence and nature of this conflict. In the 1960's recorded instances of strike action were comparatively rare. By 1980 the situation had changed dramatically and strikes had become commonplace. In wider society significant changes had taken place. In the late 1960's there appears to have been but little organized resistance to the apartheid state. This contrasts sharply with the atmosphere of revolt of the mid-1980's. As Foucault (Poster, 1984; 158-162) has noted, studying conflict in a society may tell much about the functioning of wider relations of power. It is hoped that examining the linkage between industrial and socio-political conflict may prove not only historically interesting, but reveal new information on the relations of power operative in South Africa under apartheid.

The aim of Chapter 1 will be to provide a brief overview of some of the major contributions to the theory behind strikes and stayaways and in particular those theories which attempt to place conflict at the workplace in the context of wider society. This will enable one to refer subsequent observations and conclusions to the established frames of reference of industrial conflict. The following chapter will commence with a brief overview of the

situation in the late 1960's. It is hoped that just as with the theoretical overview, outlining the immediate past will enable the reader to contextualise more readily the enormity of subsequent developments.

This will be followed by reviewing and analysing the course of pertinent events from 1970. The 1971-2 period is of importance in that it saw the emergence of the forerunners of many of the independent unions in the form of worker training projects and benefit funds. During the same period, the Black Consciousness movement became established on a national level. Thus, the emergence of the independent trade unions was paralleled by the rise of the first significant black political organization since the post Sharpeville era. The year 1973 is best remembered by the Durban strike wave, an unprecedented development in post war South Africa. There is little doubt that the strike wave was the culmination of a growing dissatisfaction with the wider socio-political reality. The Durban strike wave was followed by an unprecedented rise in strike action on a country-wide basis, a rise that continued well into 1974. The following year, 1975, seemed a somewhat more peaceful year at the workplace. In reality, it should best be viewed as a year of concerted organization by the fledgling trade unions, against a background of rising political consciousness. The latter was to culminate in the 1976 Soweto uprising.

The post-Soweto wave of repression not only affected political organizations, but also weakened the emerging trade unions, whilst relatively few strikes took place. By 1980, however, instances of strike action began to increase again. This was to culminate in the 1981 East Rand strike wave, the second "rolling strike" to take place in modern South Africa. Indeed, the early 1980's may best be seen as a period of rising strikes and stayaways. By 1984 this was to be overshadowed by wider political developments. Originating in the townships of the Vaal triangle, an unprecedented wave of "unrest" spread country-wide. This was followed by other forms of resistance, from schools' boycotts to stayaways. The reaction of the state was to launch an ever-increasing wave of repression which would culminate in the declaration of three successive States of Emergency. As this to some extent resulted in a decline of political "unrest", yet was followed by unprecedented levels of strike action, it may be argued that repression only redirected and did not quell the underlying combativity. A further issue arising could be the possible role played by banned political organizations such as the PAC, SACP, and ANC. Such organizations can be seen as "hidden" socio-political actors. Owing to the fact that they operate underground, with most relevant literature on their activities being restricted, it has not been possible to analyse fully the effects of their actions on the nature of industrial conflict in this study.

The analysis of the basic course of events outlined above will be followed by a reassessment of traditional theories of industrial conflict, in the light of conclusions reached. The South African situation is an extremely complex one, and it is clear that any theoretical paradigm developed overseas will have no little difficulty in accommodating all the different factors present. In addition to assessing specific theories of industrial conflict, more general theoretical contributions that attempt to explain both the nature of certain manifestations of collective organizations and of the broader socio-political reality will be evaluated. Such contributions will include the work of Castells on social movements and Foucault's major new insights into the nature of modern society. Although developing new theoretical models goes beyond the scope of this study, some thoughts in this direction will be advanced. This will be followed by a general conclusion.

There is no doubt that a strike is an extremely complex occurrence. Indeed, even the term "strike" may be defined in a wide variety of ways (Hyman, 1981; 51). A useful working definition may be to define it as a collective action where workers withdraw from the labour process as a means of gaining a particular demand (*ibid.*; 17). This definition must be somewhat qualified in that in South Africa "stayaways" also take place. A "stayaway" may be defined as a collective action where workers across a wide range of industrial sectors withdraw from the labour process in order

to express a directly political demand on a regional or national level.

It has been argued that strikes can roughly be divided into two distinct groupings - "trials of strength" and "demonstration stoppages" (Hyman, 1981;19). The "trial of strength" is a prolonged dispute, embarked on as a last resort (ibid.;20). Having suffered all the losses a strike may entail, both sides are determined to gain something (ibid.;20). Only a minority of strikes fall into this category, the majority being "demonstration stoppages." Here, the decision to strike is quickly reached, often owing to the "perishable nature of the grievance - management will win if nothing is done" (ibid.;23). Generally, "demonstration stoppages" take place only on a limited scale and are quickly settled.

Again, there have been a range of definitions advanced for what is meant by the term "political." In this context, a good definition could be what relates to "the study and shaping of power", as well as rule and authority, with a political act being an action "performed in power perspectives" (Lasswell, quoted in Dahl, 1978;8). As Giddens (1979;91) notes, power in itself is not a resource, but to exercise power will require resources. In this sense power and politics should be seen as distinct from, but related to, the "economic", which is seen as being concerned directly with scarce resources and the production and

distribution of goods and services (Dahl,1978;10). As Dahl (ibid.;10) notes, "like most distinctions of intellectual enquiry, however, that between politics and economics is not perfectly sharp." Clearly, even the smallest and most economic of industrial disputes may have some affect on wider political reality. As Rex(1981;36) notes, all strikes will result in some relocation of power at the workplace. However, there remains the question of the extent of such an effect. It is clear that a major nation-wide stayaway will have a far greater effect than a minor wage dispute. In addition, overall trends in strike action will be analysed in order to assess whether a general pattern emerges, and the political repercussions of such a pattern.

It is important to note that strikes represent only one manifestation of industrial conflict. Other forms may include events such as absenteeism, go - slows, or industrial sabotage (Hyman,1981;53). Although cases of some of these events have been documented (see Chapter 2), they represent a "hidden" form of industrial conflict. There is little way in which the extent of industrial sabotage may be uncovered, and it is therefore beyond the scope of this study. Unless industrial sabotage occurs on a widespread (and clearly visible) scale, it will have far less political effect than major strikes. Thus, although of import, it can be argued that the extent of industrial sabotage will not directly affect the interpretation of the political effects of strike action. This study concentrates solely on strikes and

stayaways.

Owing to the complex nature of the South African situation, it is useful at this stage also to develop some definitions of trade unions and political organizations. In South Africa there are many conservative unions who rarely or never embark on strike action, and thus largely fall outside the scope of this study. The primarily black trade unions which emerged in the post-1970 period that had no formal ties to established unions, were democratically structured, and far more willing to embark on collective action have, for the purposes of this research been referred to as the "independent unions", in order that they might be distinguished from their established rivals, a term coined by the SA Labour Bulletin (see Maree, 1987a; viii). It can be argued that the independent unions in the 1980's have gone beyond the conventional functions of a trade union and have become social movements, as Lambert (1988; 34) suggested was the case with SACTU. However, in contrast to SACTU, the independent unions place primary emphasis on their organization, providing them with a far stronger base (see Maree, 1987b; 4). Likewise, there are a wide range of established political organizations. The commonly employed term "popular political organization" has thus been used to denote those (primarily black) political organizations that have emerged in the post-1960's period, be they "Charterist" (adhering to the Freedom Charter), Black Consciousness, or belonging to any other political philosophy,

that are opposed to all aspects of the apartheid system and appear to enjoy substantial popular support.

There is a growing interest in academic circles worldwide in the South African situation. It is hoped that this dissertation will go some way in shedding new light on a complex scenario, and provide a cautious first step towards developing fresh perspectives and new solutions to a specific political crisis.

iii) METHODOLOGY

This study is an attempt to test the stated hypothesis through the adoption of a historical perspective. The advantages of adopting such a perspective are manifold. Perhaps the benefits were most eloquently summarized by tenth century English historian, Bede, who saw the past as "a force to be reckoned with, silently moulding the present and the future."

Both primary and secondary material have been used for this study. The former includes some hitherto unpublished figures (of frequency and magnitude of strike action on a monthly basis) from the Department of Manpower. It is important to note that these strike totals appear to have been slightly adjusted from those initially published in DOM Annual Reports, which will explain some discrepancy in overall figures. A wide range of secondary sources have been employed. These sources are of both an empirical and theoretical nature. Established theory has been integrated with perceptions of the South African reality in order that a fuller understanding may be gained of an important manifestation of social conflict in a crucial period.

In recent years it has been increasingly common for Masters theses in the Social Sciences to use actual interviews as a source of data. Why then has this source not been employed for

this study? The reasons are manifold. Firstly, there exists a major need to consolidate existing information, to combine it with primary documentary source material, and to evaluate what major trends may be apparent over a period of time. By then interacting information gained with established theory, novel perspectives may be gained in a crucial area. There has been a growing trend on an international basis to conduct research in this manner. Indeed, powerful methodological tools have been developed to assist the researcher employing such methods. Most notable have been Michel Foucault's "archaeology" and "genealogy". Basically, the researcher evaluates source material from the following perspectives - as direct sources of data for evaluation, as products of a particular period of time, and to reveal through content and style much about relations of power in society (for a comprehensive overview of Foucault's methodology see, for example, Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982)).

This is not to dispute the value of interview-based research. Indeed, a number of surveys conducted at specific periods of time by a wide range of researchers have been used as source material. However, it can be argued that a need exists first, through a synthesis of primary and secondary documentary material, to seek new perspectives. Much social theory was developed in nineteenth century Europe, a far cry from modern South African society. It can be argued that by employing recently-developed methodological tools, the first step to developing new paradigms to explain more

fully the unique circumstances pertaining to South Africa can be taken. It is hoped that ultimately through synthesising empirical data and theory, this study will reveal something more about the true nature of a rather unusual socio-political situation.

iii) A GRAPHICAL OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT TRENDS 1970-87

While it is clear that an accurate picture of the relationship between industrial conflict and the wider political reality in South Africa can only be gained through a detailed assesment of the course of events, it is useful first to evaluate overall trends evident during the period studied. In this manner, a greater clarity on a macro-level can be gained, which will help to clarify subsequent points made. Where it is useful, correlation and curve analysis have been employed in order that the nature of relationships between the various variables might be more readily apparent.

Looking at overall strike totals in the 1970's and 1980's (please refer to fig. 1 at the end of this chapter), it becomes clear that strikes have come in two waves. The first is the rise of strike action in the 1973-4 period, beginning with the Durban strike wave. Strike totals then gradually declined, reaching a low in 1977, when the post-Soweto wave of repression reached a peak. From this lull, strike totals began to increase again, culminating in the all-time (for South Africa) high of 1987.

As can be seen from fig. 2 the inflation rate has generally risen

during the period under evaluation. However, some fluctuations have occurred, with a rise in inflation in the 1973-4 period and a decline in the years 1976-8 (data on the CPI rate for 1970 was not available). This was followed by further increases, a slight drop in the 1983-4 period, and then still further increases. Fig. 3 depicts this same data (for the 1971-9 period) in a line-graph form, over which has been superimposed a line-graph of strike totals. As can be seen, the 1973-4 period, era of the Durban strike wave and the subsequent rise of strike action on a countrywide basis, was paralleled by rises in inflation. While it is clear that inflationary pressures must have been a major stimulant on workers to strike, it is important to note that the rise in strikes was rather out of proportion to the increase in the CPI. Thus, the rise in strike action may be due rather to a combination of factors than simply inflationary pressures in isolation. This point will be further assessed in subsequent chapters. It is interesting to note that the decline in strikes in the 1975-6 period was paralleled by declining inflation. However, in 1977 strikes continued to decline despite increases in the CPI. Thus, it is clear that other factors came into play, which could well include the wave of political repression which followed the 1976 Soweto uprising. The years 1978-9 seem to demonstrate once again but little relationship between the CPI and strike action. The dramatic drop in strike action in the 1976-7 period and the peaks of 1973 and 1974 unfortunately distort a trend analysis of the 1971-9 period, with only a

negative relationship being apparent (see fig.4).

Fig. 5. depicts the CPI rate in line-graph form, over which has been transposed a line-graph of strike action in the years 1981-7. Between 1980 and 1984, a definite relationship seems evident, with fluctuations in the CPI rate being, once again, mirrored in similar fluctuations in strike action. From 1984-7 the picture changes somewhat, with changes in the CPI rate not always resulting in a proportionate fluctuation in strike action. The 1984-7 period was one of unparalleled political resistance, and maybe this resulted in pressures other than simply inflationary affecting the decision of workers to strike. A trend analysis (see fig. 6) echoes the above points - an overall relationship does exist in the 1980-7 period, but it is not a proportionate one. Thus it is clear that a range of pressures must be playing a role in affecting the willingness of workers to resort to strike action.

A number of interesting trends become apparent in evaluating strike triggers in the 1970-9 period (see fig.7). Most important of these is the changing role of wages as a strike trigger. It seems evident that in years of high strike action wages assume the role of the major strike trigger, but in years of lower numbers of strikes wage related factors become a significant trigger of strike action. Although wage related factors may be potentially more far-reaching a demand than simply demands for

more pay, they may also simply represent a reaction to some or other action by management, and thus reflected reduced working-class militancy or similar factors. As can be seen from the graph, there appears to have been no recorded instances of directly union-related strike action taking place.

As can be seen from fig. 8, the 1980-7 period was marked by high numbers of wage strikes. However, it is interesting to note that wage strikes declined in 1983, in both total numbers and in proportion to other triggers. Some of these triggers, such as wage-related factors may have been more "reactive", than simple wage demands, a response to either reduced working-class militancy, or more probably, the result of such militancy being rather channelled off into the political arena, where major developments such as the founding of the UDF were taking place. Also of interest is the general rise of union-related strikes during the period under evaluation, a symptom of the growing organisational strength of the working class. Unfortunately, the categories employed by the DOM in releasing the latest data on strike action in the 1980's differ somewhat from the categories employed by the CSIR/NIPR in the 1970's. Thus, it is unclear to what categories in the 1970's the "discipline" factor corresponds. However, the rise in disciplinary strikes in the 1980-7 period must clearly be seen as a product of increased levels of working-class militancy.

An overview of the regional distribution of strike action similarly reveals useful information about the nature of South African strikes. As can be seen from Figs. 9 & 10, the major centre of strike action in South Africa seems to be the PWV region. In every year other than 1973 (the year of the Durban strike wave)of the period studied, more strikes occurred in this region than any of the other major centres in South Africa. Although this can be partially ascribed to the degree of industrial concentration in the area, it seems that a wide range of other factors could also play a role. It is interesting to note that since 1985 this area, became relatively of even greater importance. As this region was also the centre of much of the political resistance taking place in the 1985-6 period, it could be that political factors may also have played a role. This point will be further evaluated in subsequent chapters. Although the second most strike-prone area seems, in general, to be the Durban-Pinetown area, in the 1978-81 period the P.E./Uitenhague area assumed an even greater importance. A resurgence of political activity took place in this area at the time. It seems likely that the rise in industrial conflict and political activism could have well had common ground in an upswell in working-class militancy in that area. Interestingly, East London seems (if the limited degree of industrial concentration in this area is borne in mind) to be throughout the entire period, unusually strike prone. This area has had a long history of working class militancy and activism, and may indeed fall into

Kerr and Siegal's thesis (see Chapter 1) on the tendency of certain communities to be unusually strike prone.

Figs. 11-14 deal with the relationship between unemployment and strike action. Once again, the paucity of official information in the 1970's has necessitated the use of two separate sources. In the 1970's Simkins' (in Bell & Padyachee, 1984) estimates have been employed. From 1981, fairly comprehensive official information is available on black unemployment levels. Although information from these two sources is not directly comparable, overall trends in unemployment will be reflected in both these indicators. Fig. 11 depicts a bar-graph of black unemployment in the 1970's, parallel to which a bar-graph depicting strike totals has been superimposed. Conventional wisdom holds that high unemployment will deter workers from striking for fear of risking their jobs and vice-versa, and this does seem to have been particularly the case in South Africa in the 1973-78 period. As can be seen from the graph, the 1973 Durban strike wave was paralleled by a drop in unemployment. From the peak in 1974, strike totals declined rapidly, while unemployment rose. It therefore seems likely that rises in unemployment could well under certain circumstances have discouraged workers from striking. Although this does not always seem to hold (e.g. 1980), generally it seems that fluctuations in unemployment result in strike totals fluctuating in the opposite direction. This becomes even more apparent if curve analysis is employed (see fig. 12) -

rises in unemployment seem to result in a decline in strike totals and vice-versa.

In the 1981-7 period, this relationship no longer seems to be as strong. Although there appears some evidence for it in the 1981-4 period (see fig.13), by 1985 major increases were taking place in both, a trend that was continued into 1987. This change appears even more dramatic if curve analysis is employed (see fig.14). Thus, it seems that conventional wisdom on unemployment no longer holds in the post-1984 period. Clearly, there must have been broader reasons why workers increasingly chose to strike despite the risk of losing their jobs in an era of high unemployment. The reasons for this unusual occurrence will be assessed in the following chapters.

Fig.15 depicts the number of Industrial Court cases from its inception to 1987. As can be seen there has been a definite increase in its activity. However, during the same period the number of strikes also increased (see fig.1). Thus, strikes have not been reduced through Industrial Court activity. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, the reforms aimed at co-opting the unions into the system markedly failed to do so. An assessment of the legal provisions governing strikes is contained in section (iv) of this introduction.

Fig.16 depicts black real wages in specified industrial sectors. Changes in black real wages will have a different effect to inflation. The latter will directly effect workers' savings and pensions, while the former may have a more direct effect on day-to-day living. If inflation is high, but real wages remain constant, workers will not be directly affected in terms of take home pay. However, any savings will be devalued. In this sense workers will get poorer. Conversely, workers will be affected by shifts in real wages, even if the inflation rate remains constant. Where information was available the number of strikes taking place in different industrial sectors have also been depicted. Unfortunately, only very limited data is available on the industrial distribution of strikes action in the 1970's, and where data is available it is often grouped into categories which are not directly comparable to officially available real wage categories. Thus only compatible figures for the mining and construction industries could be obtained by the researcher. After 1980 much more data is obtainable. However, after October 1985 the Chamber of Mines stopped releasing data to the general public on black real wages as it saw such racially-based figures "as discriminatory" (SAIRR,1987;337). Nonetheless, the relevant data for the 1985-7 period is available in Hirschsohn (1988, n.p.) and this source has been employed where figures from the Chamber are not available. This figure has been used on the graph for black miners' real wages for 1986. Unless otherwise indicated, the term "real wages" throughout this dissertation

refers to black real wages at 1975 prices. As can be seen from the graph, black miners' real wages did not increase significantly until the 1973-4 period, when they rose substantially. It has been argued that this was largely due to the high gold price, the sinking of new shafts on the Reef, and new mineral deposits in Namaqualand (all of which led to greater optimism in the mining industry) (SAIRR, 1974; 281). This led to the more progressive employers on the Chamber breaking ranks and increasing wages and the more conservative employers being forced to follow suit (ibid.; 283). However, the increase cannot be solely explained by such factors. It does not necessarily follow that if employers are able to grant wage increases they will do so. The most plausible explanation has been advanced by Wilson (1980; 155), who notes that by the early 1970's the number of South Africans working on the gold mines had fallen dramatically, owing to more attractive employment being available in the growing manufacturing sector. By this time the continued supply of foreign labour had become rather uncertain. In 1974 a plane crash killing 74 Malawian miners resulted in that country's government stopping recruitment by the South African mines (ibid.; 156). The coup in Portugal and the prospect of Mozambican independence made recruiting from the latter country uncertain. Wilson argues that these factors led to increases in wages in attempt to attract more South Africans to the mines to replace these sources (ibid.; 157).

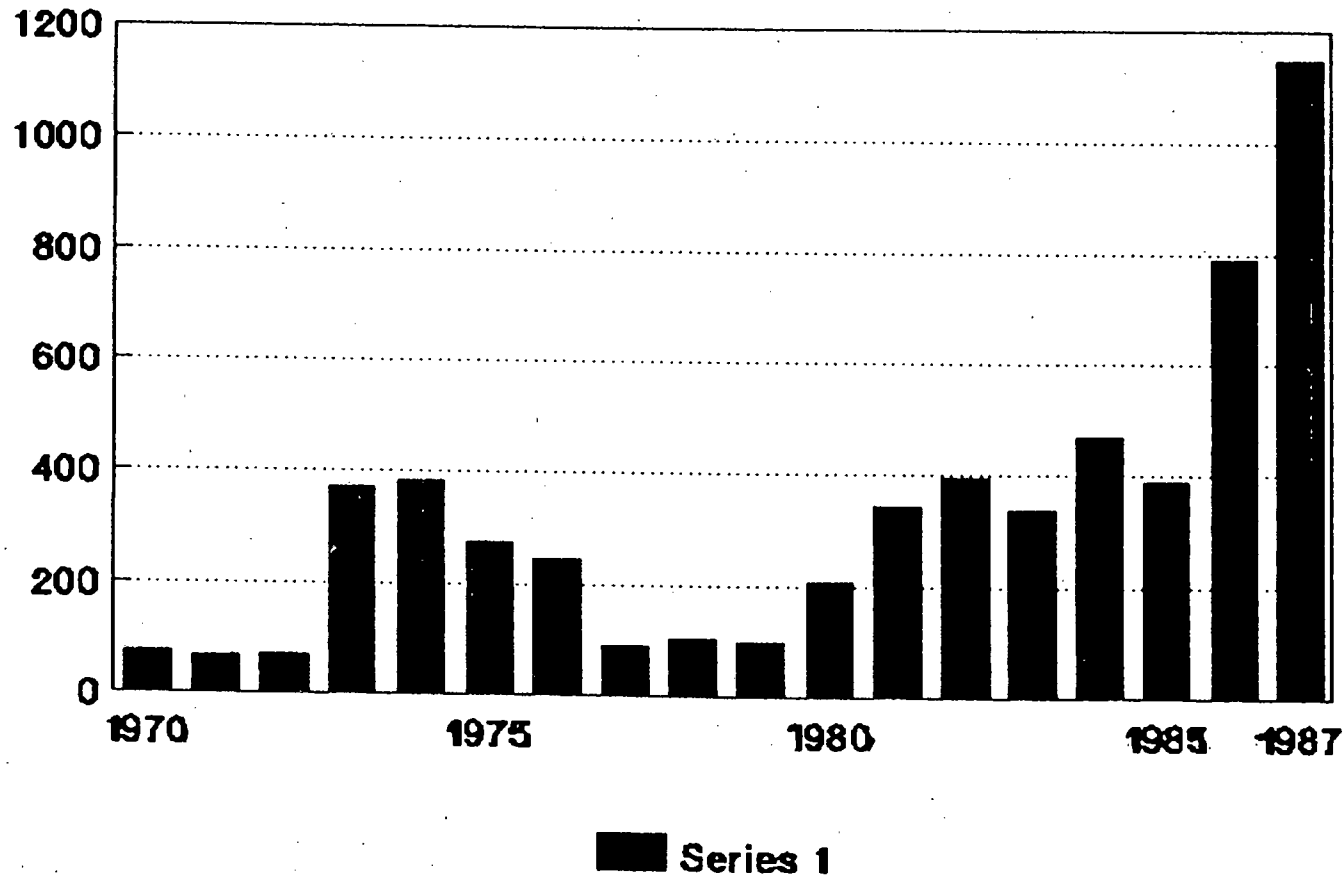
A further pressure could have been the increase in strikes on the

mines. In the 1975-9 period real wages increased gradually, the proportionately most significant increases taking place in the mining industry (again) (see fig.16). Interestingly the significant drop in strike action in the construction industry in the 1975-9 period was matched by a decline in real wages (see fig.17). The 1980-4 period was marked by both increasing strike action in all sectors of industry and a rise in real wages. However, after 1984 real wages began to decline despite further rises in strike action.

As can be seen from the above, a number of interesting trends may be apparent. These include the changing nature of the economic pressures of unemployment, fluctuations in real wages and inflation as strike triggers/disincentives. In view of these changes it seems evident that other variables must also be playing a role as determinants of industrial conflict. In the highly-charged socio-political environment of South Africa, political variables have pervaded many aspects of everyday life. Although evaluating the changing role of economic determinants of strike action does not by itself shed light on the nature of political forces, it does seem probable that the "second variable" determining the frequency of incidence of South African strikes could well be political. This seems even more probable if some of the aspects pertaining to the changing nature of worker demands and the regional distribution of strike action is borne in mind. However, the ultimate accuracy of the hypothesis will

only become clear in the more detailed assessments of the following chapters, where specific instances of strike action will be evaluated, as well as particular trends apparent from these graphs, in the light of relevant political developments.

Number of Strikes 1970-1987



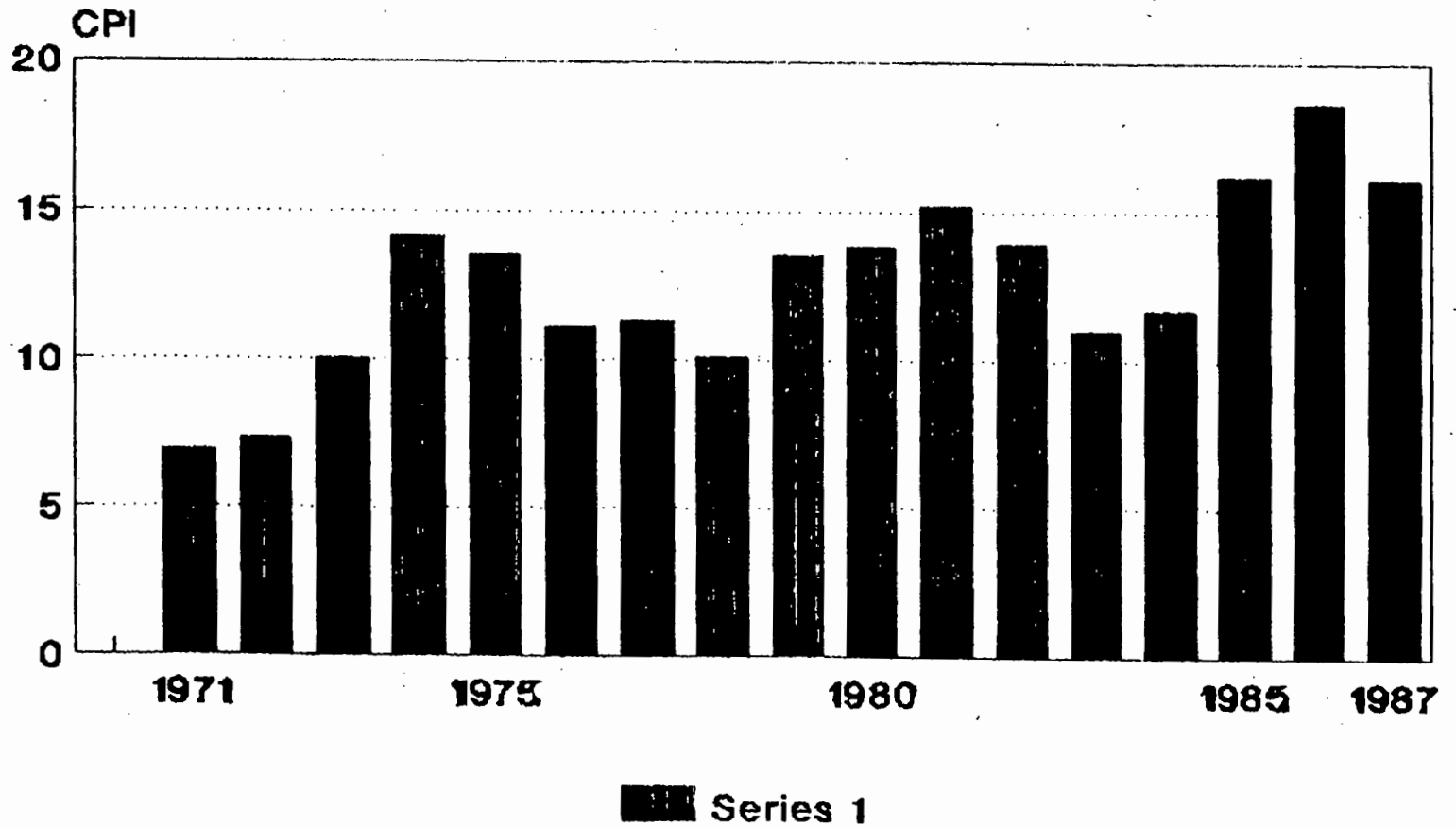
14

25

Figure 1

Source: DOM 1970-82

Consumer Price Index 1971-87



Source: SA RESERVE BANK 1970-87

Strikes vs CPI

1971-9

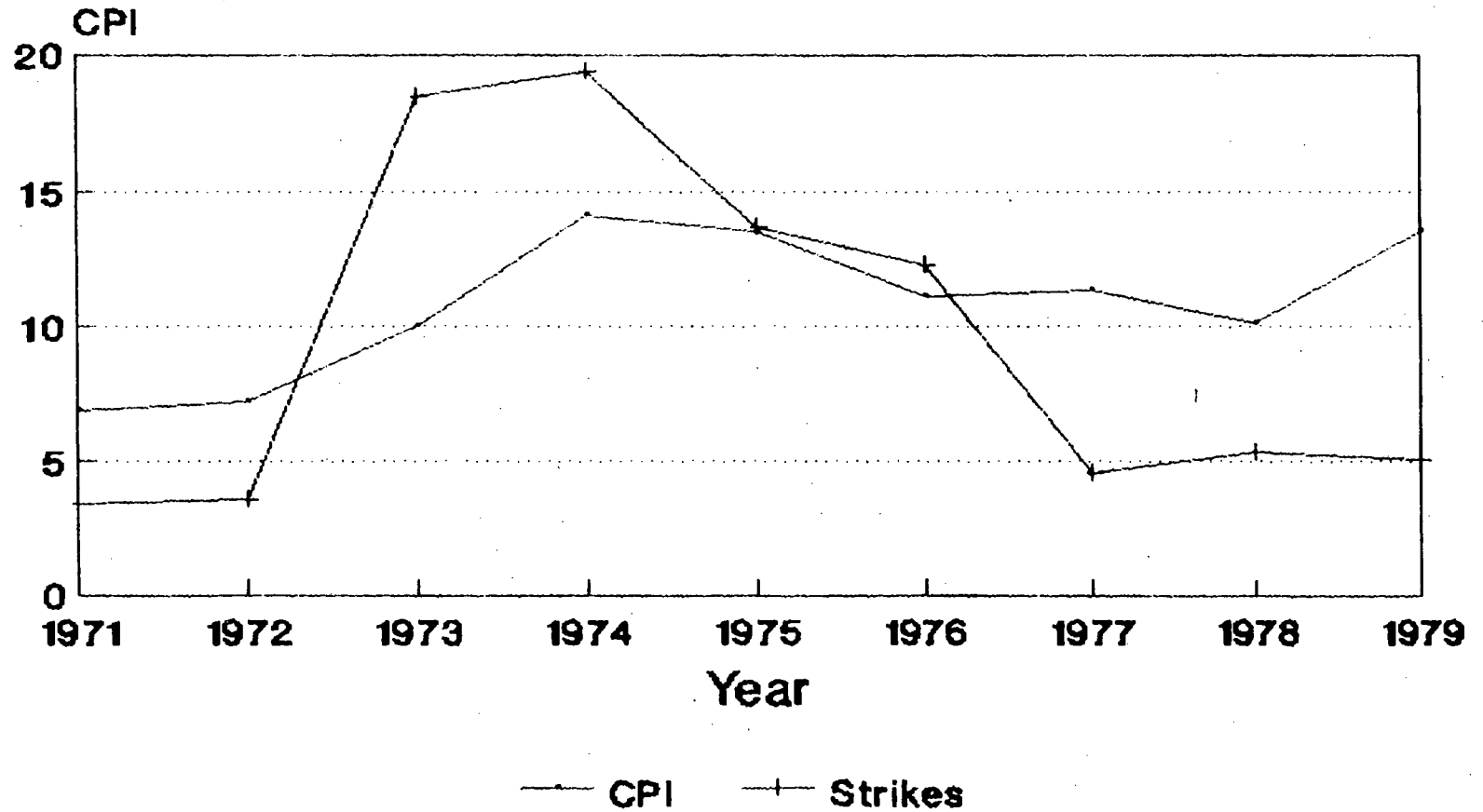


Figure 3

Source: DOM 1985; SA Reserve Bank 1970-80

Strikes vs CPI

1971-9

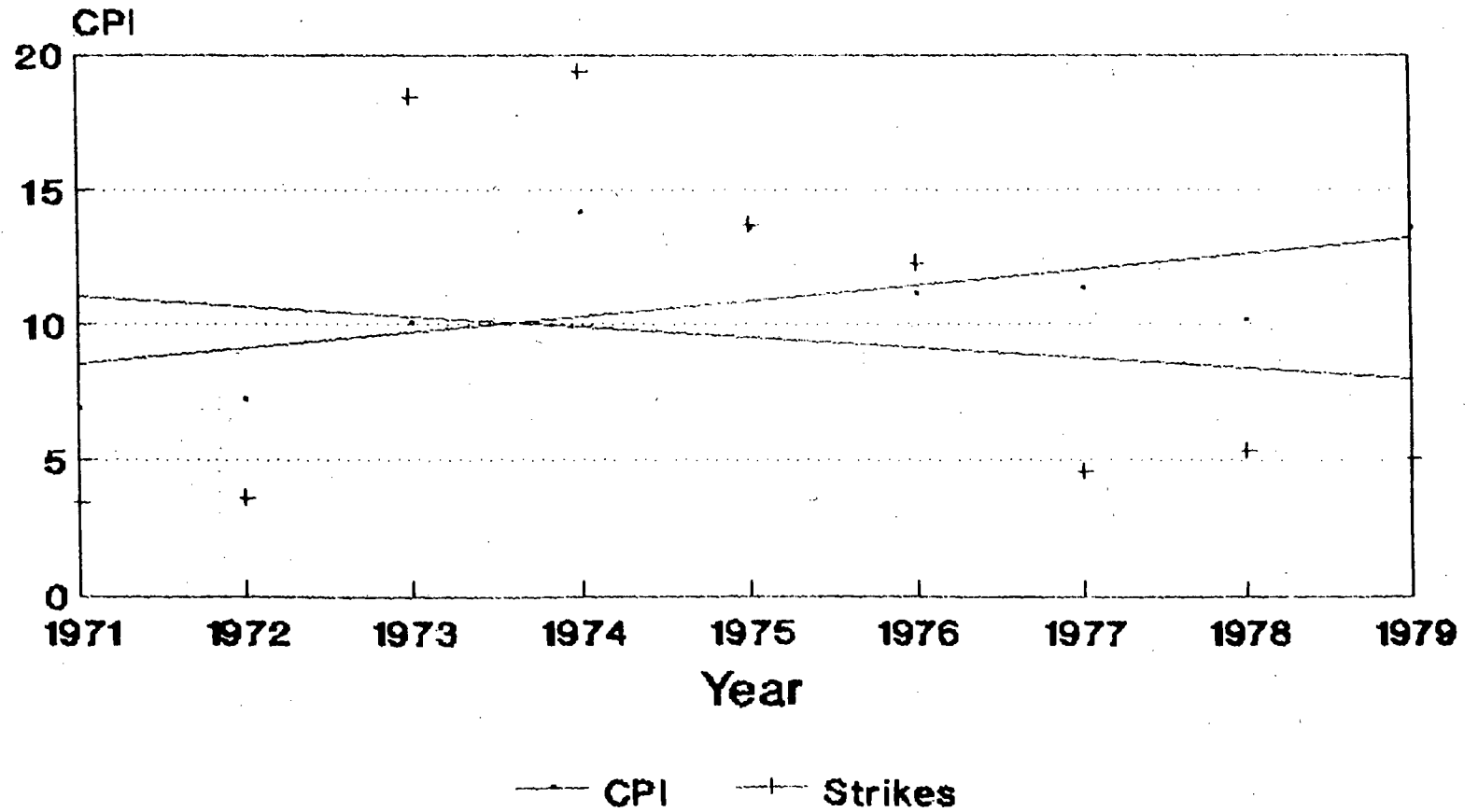


Figure 4

Source: DOM 1985; SA Reserve Bank 1970-80

Strikes vs CPI

1981-7

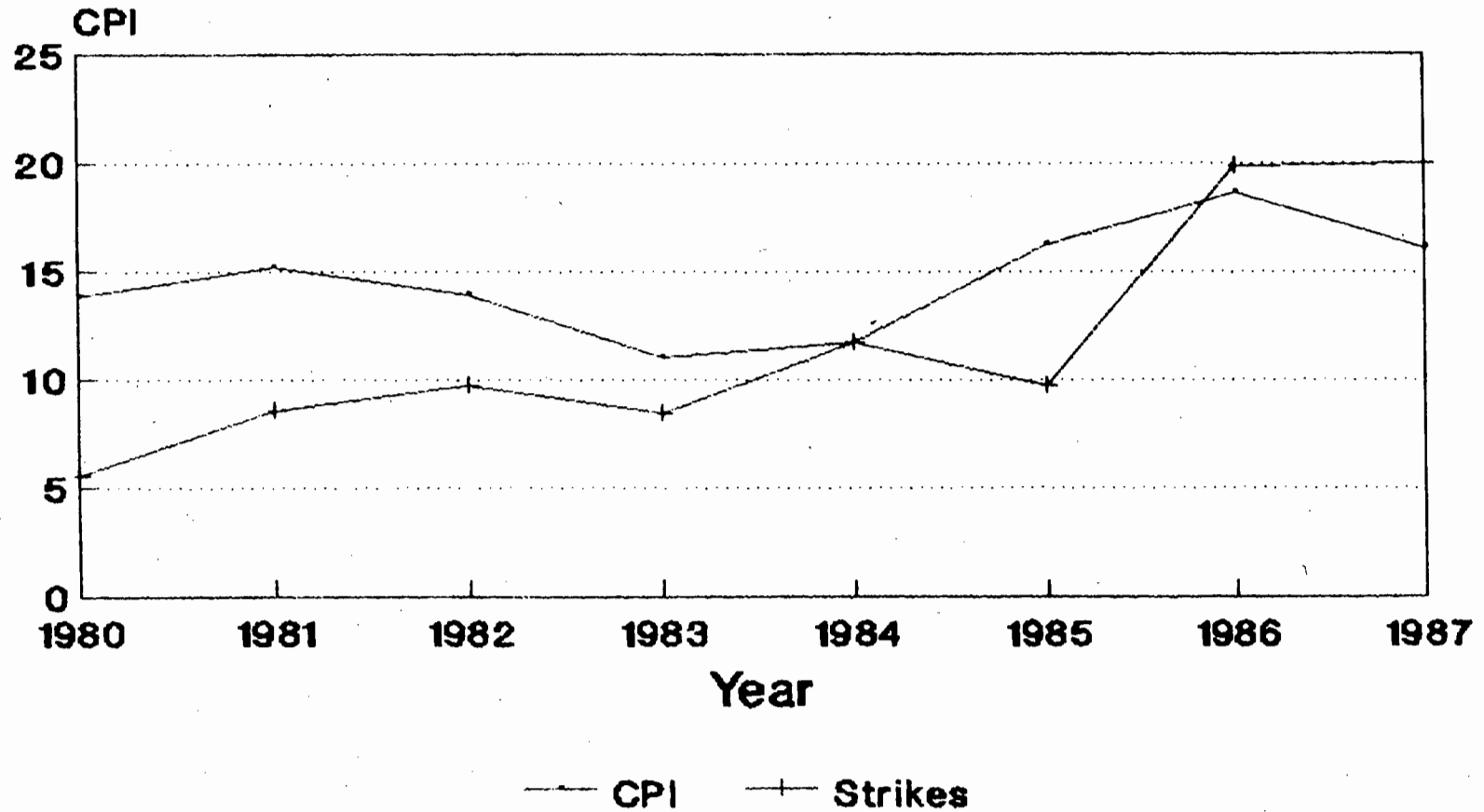


Figure 5

Source :DOM 1987;NMC 1986;SA Reserve Bank 1980-7

Strikes vs CPI

1981-7

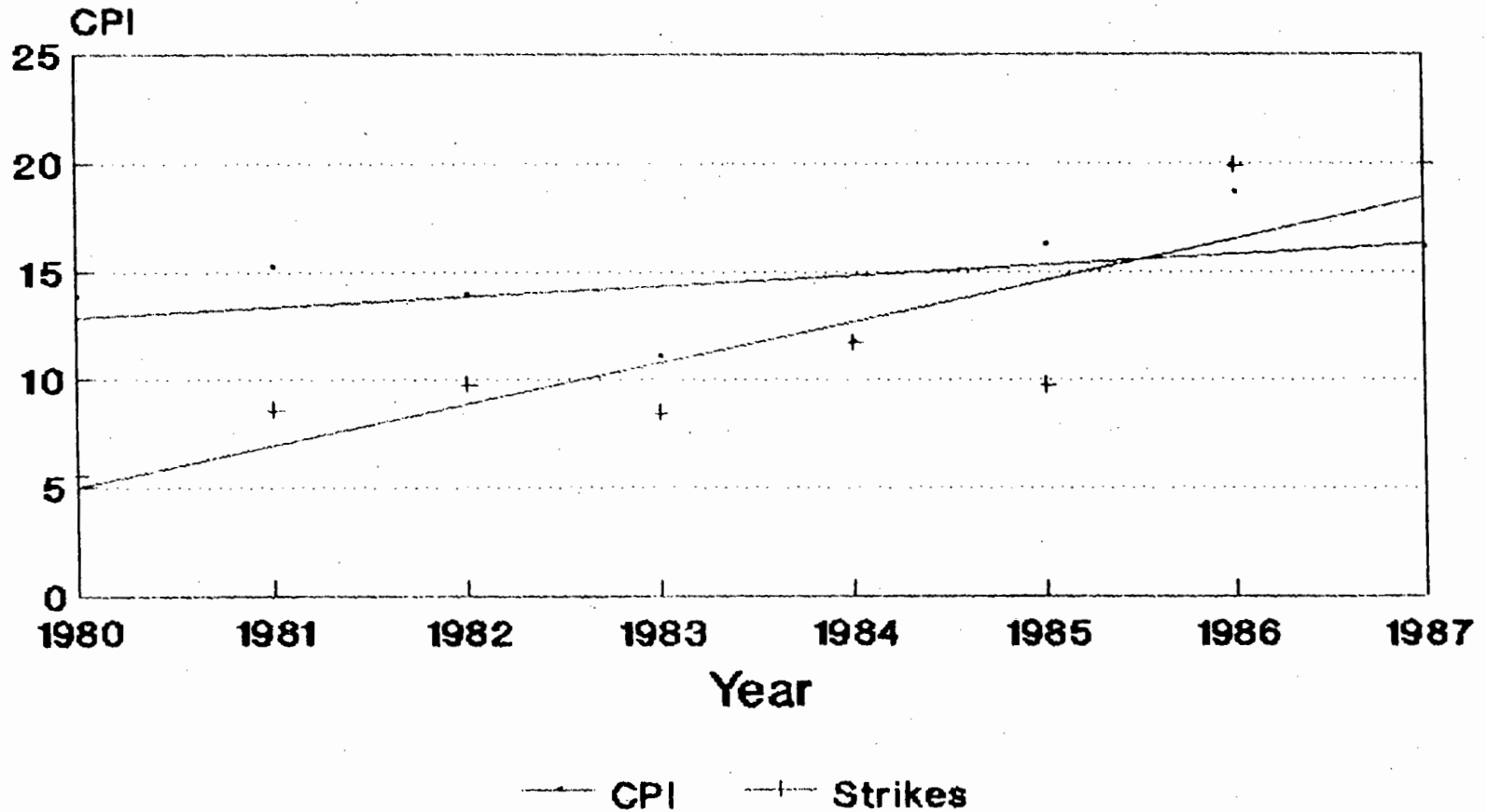
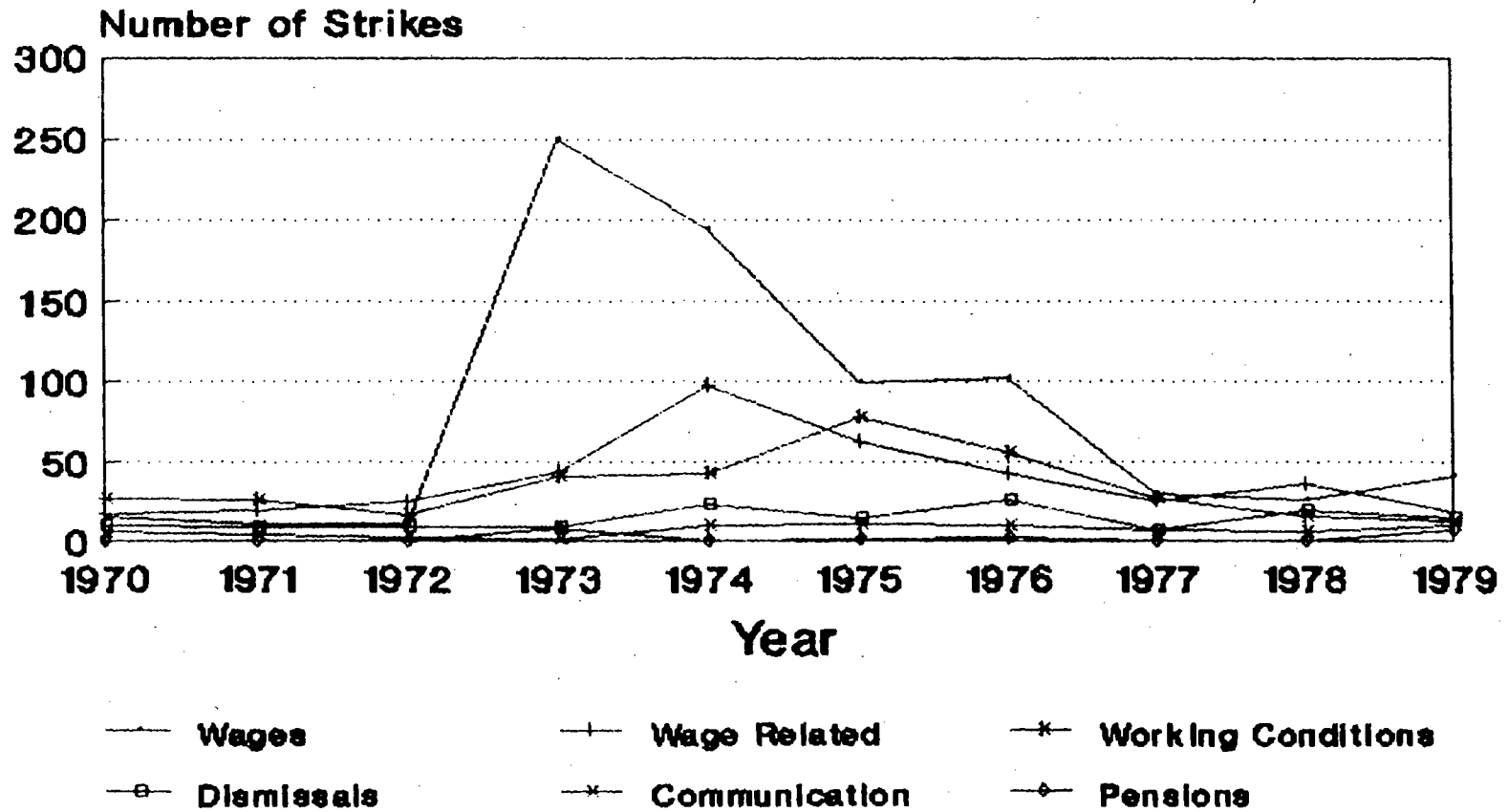


Figure 6

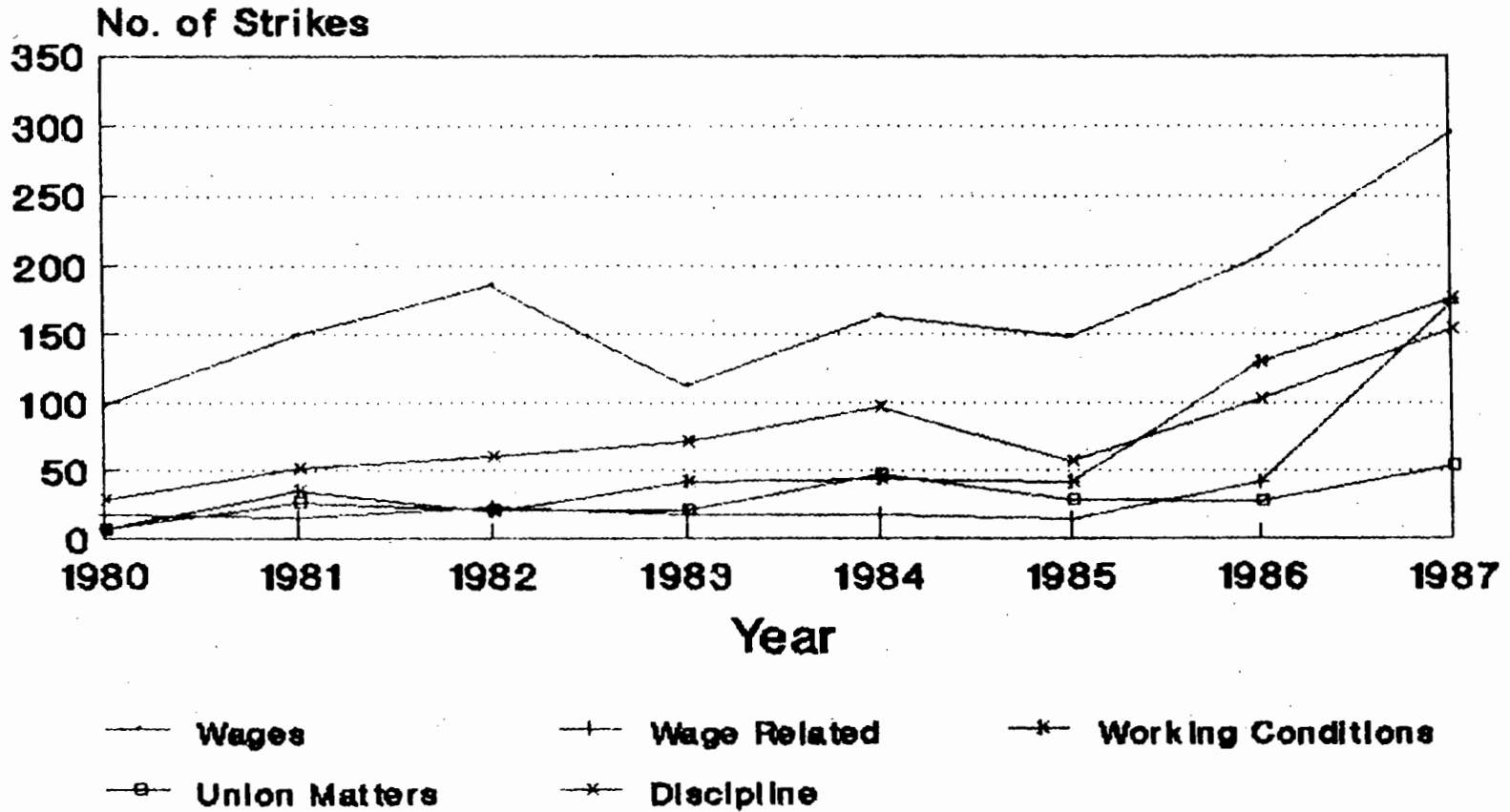
Source: NMC 1986; DOM 1987; SA RESERVE BANK 1980-87

Strike Triggers 1970-9



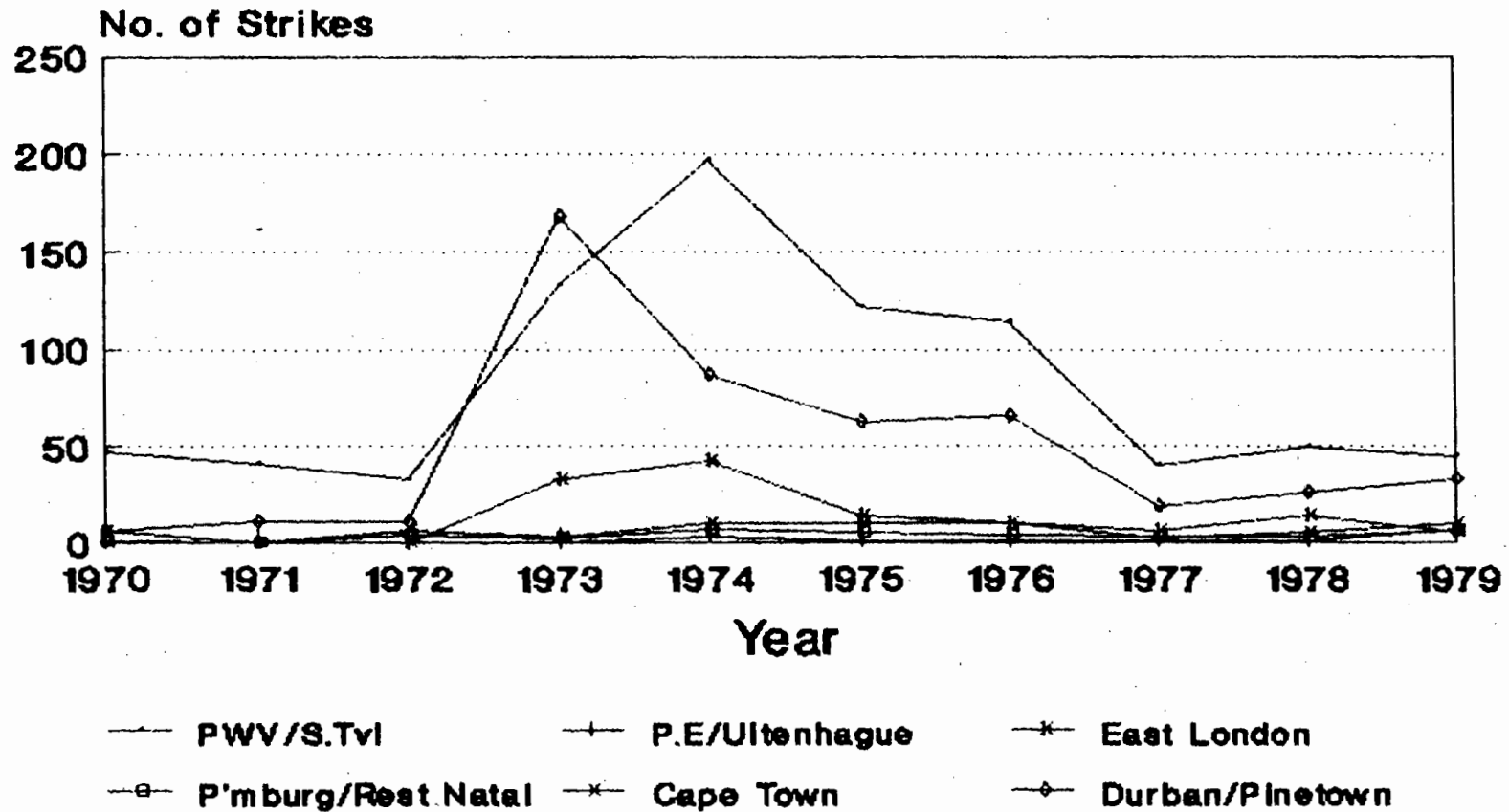
Source: DOM(1985); NIPR/CSIR(1983)

Strike Triggers 1980-7



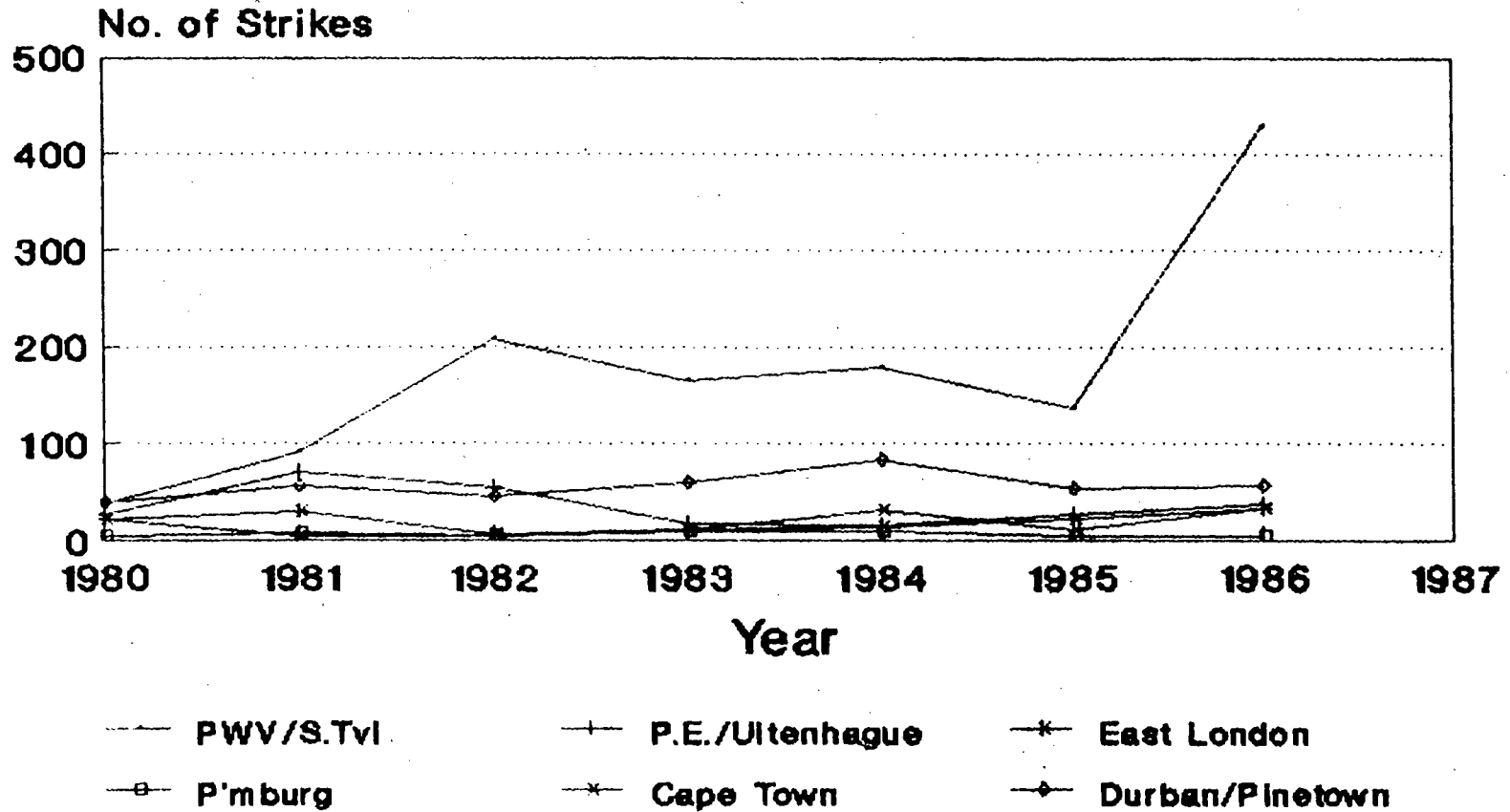
Source: DOM (1985; 1987); NMC (1986)

Strikes in Major Centres 1970-9



Sources: DOM(1985); CSIR/NIPR(1983)

Strikes in Major Centres 1980-7



Source: DOM (1983; 1986; 1987); NMC (1986)

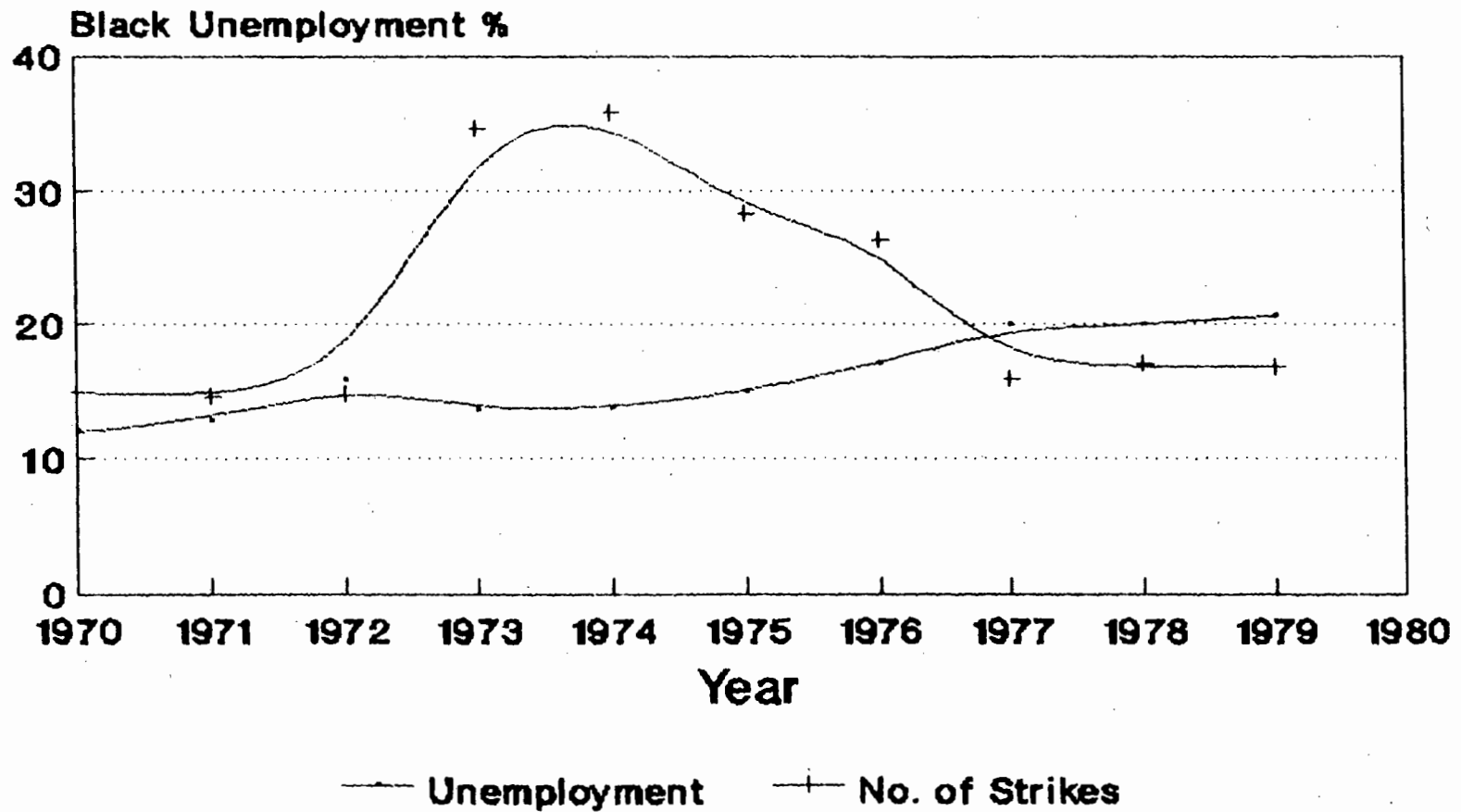
Unemployment vs Strike Action 1970-80



Source: Bell & Padyachee (1984); DOM (1985)

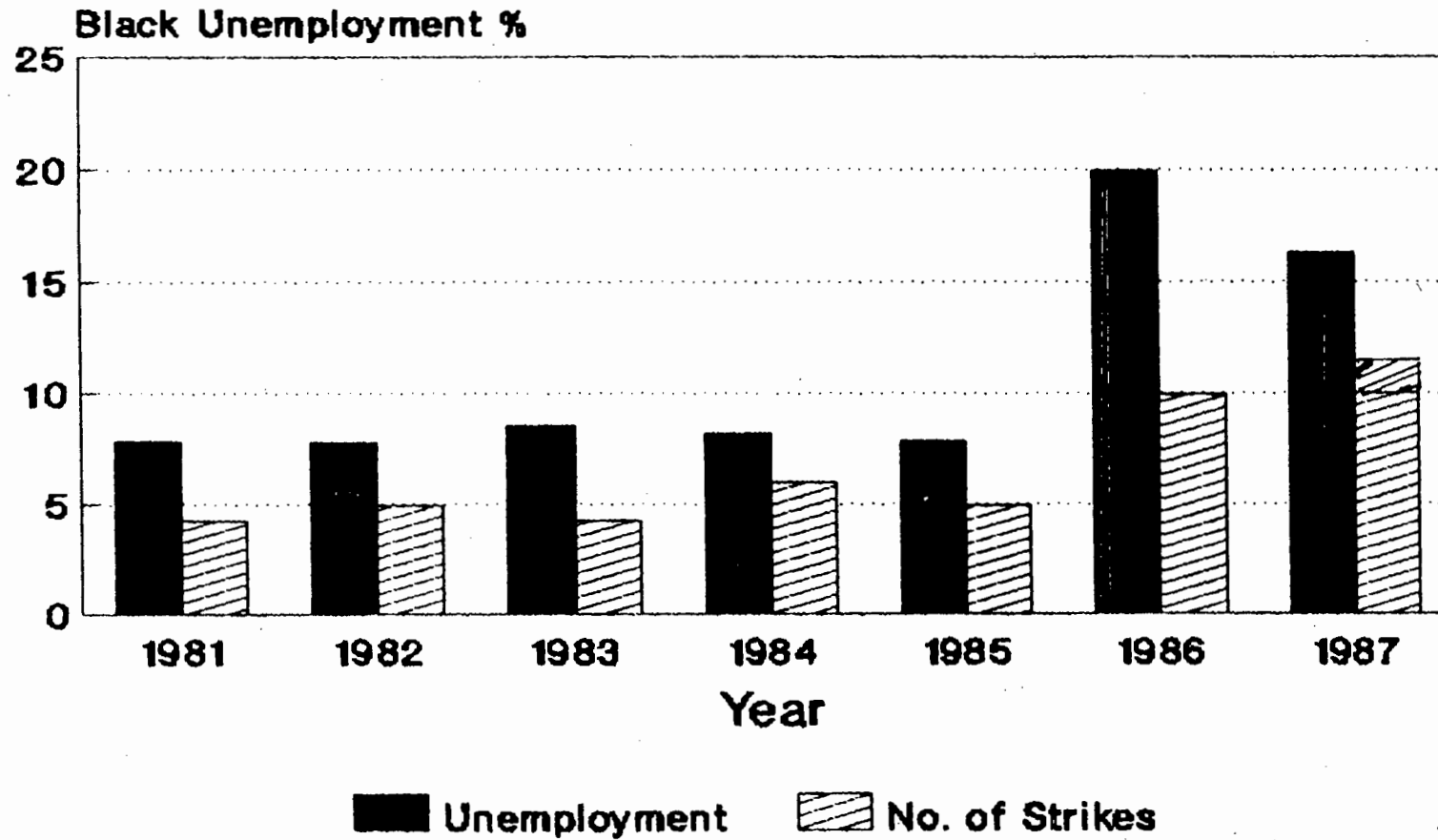
Figure 11

Unemployment vs Strike Action 1970-80



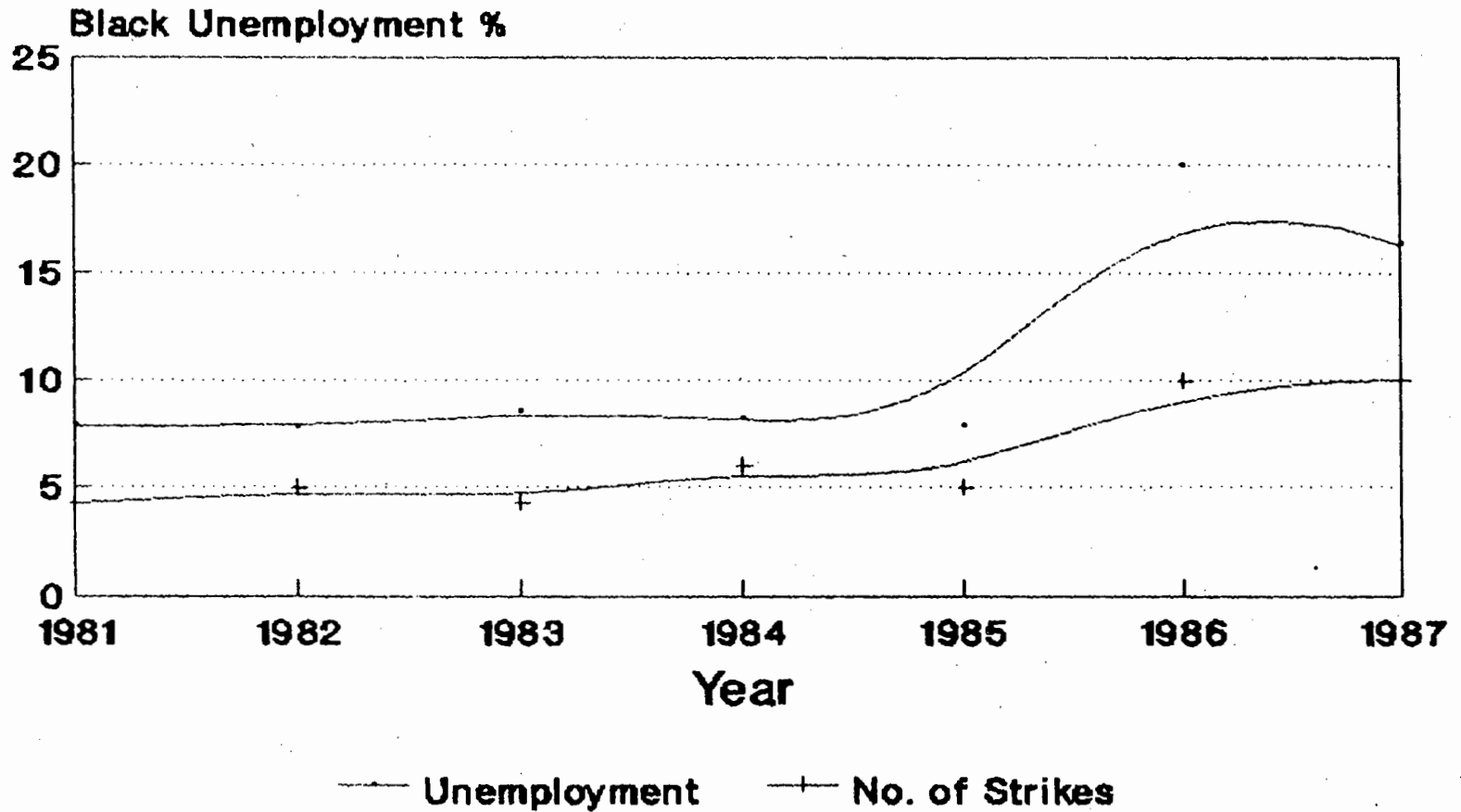
Source: Bell & Padyachee (1984); DOM (1985)

Unemployment vs Strike Action 1981-7



Source: DOM(1986); NMC(1986); NMC(1987)

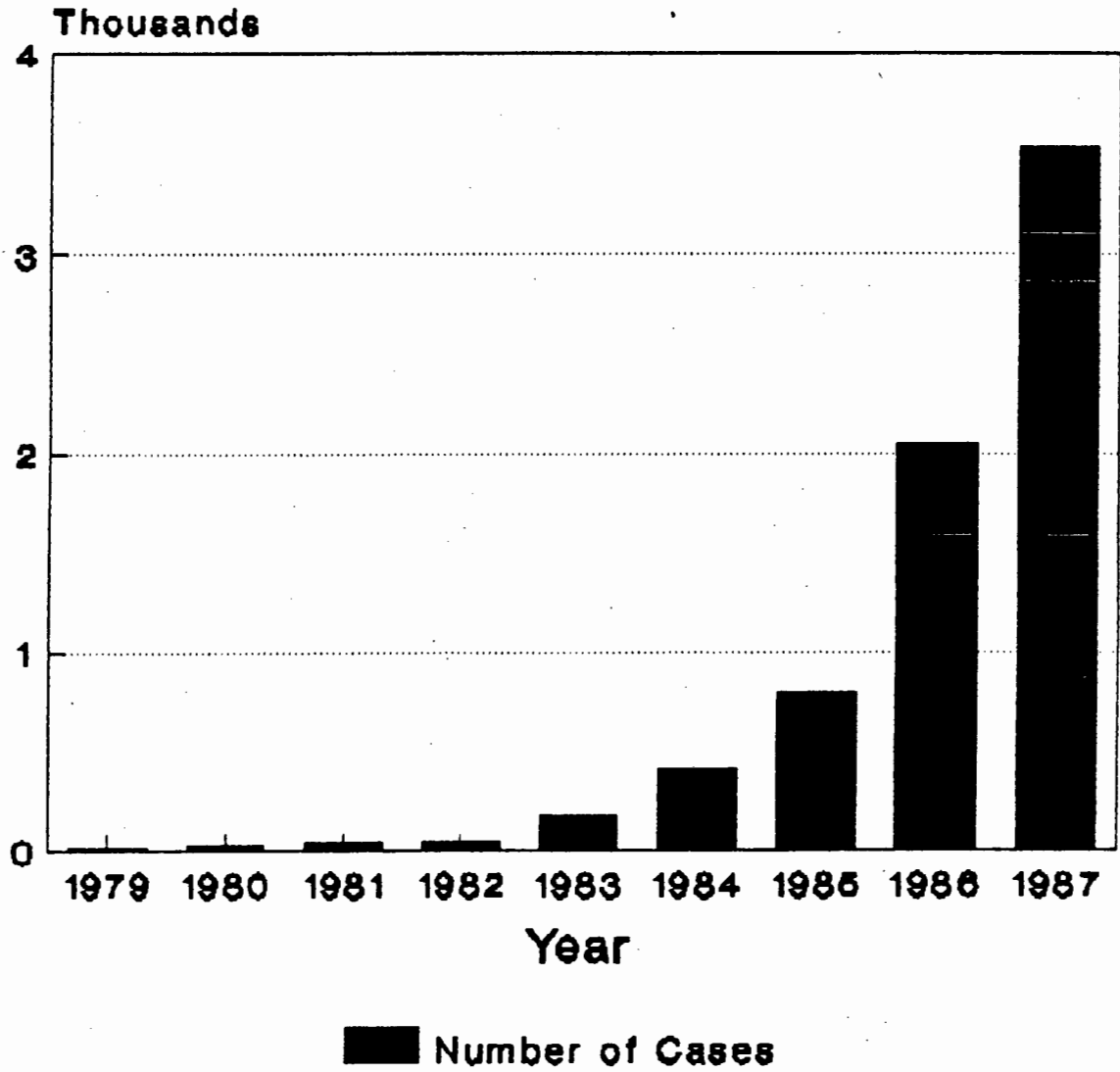
Unemployment vs Strike Action 1981-7



Source: DOM(1986); NMC(1986); NMC(1987)

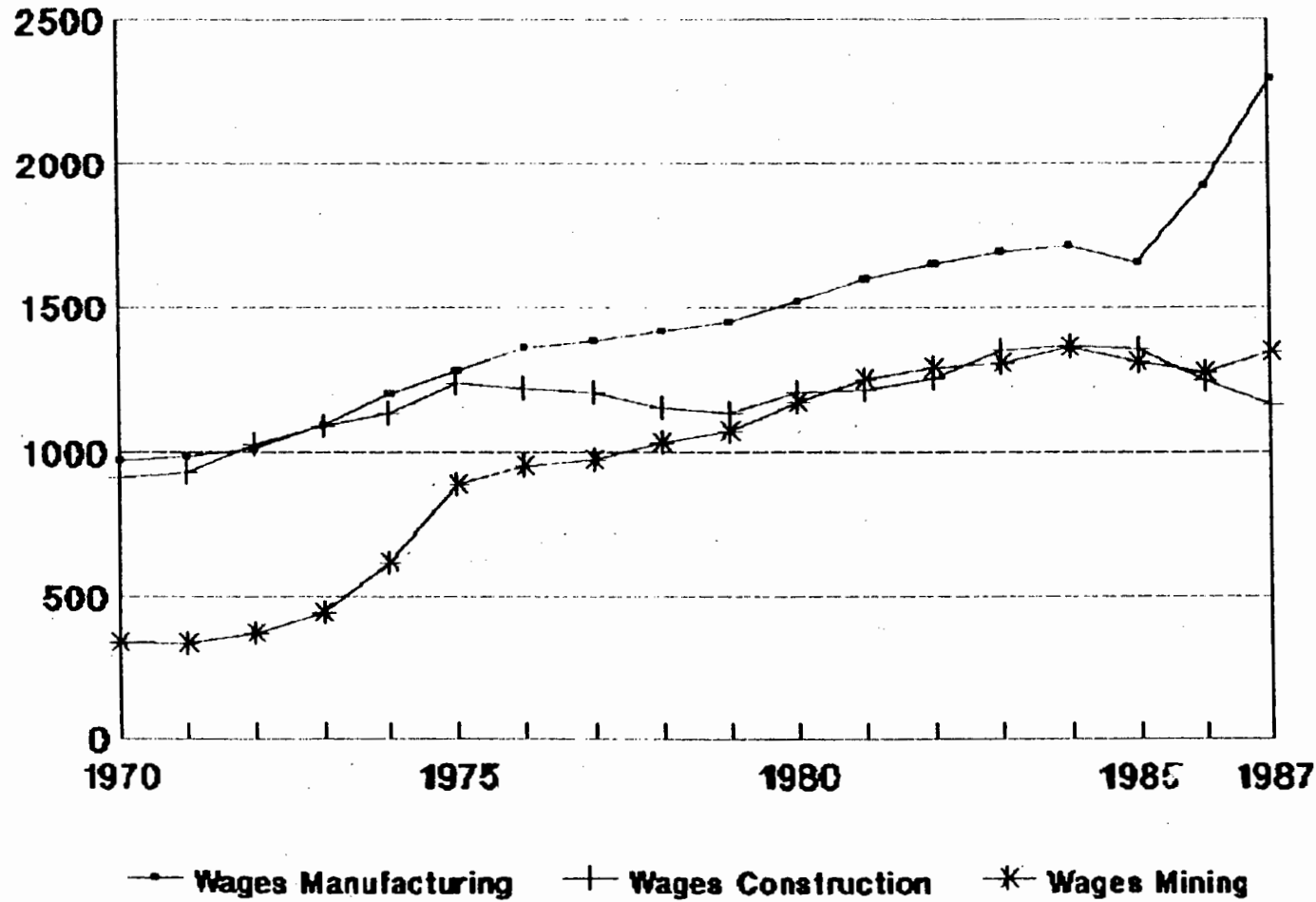
Figure 15

INDUSTRIAL COURT CASES : 1979-87



Source : DOM (1987)

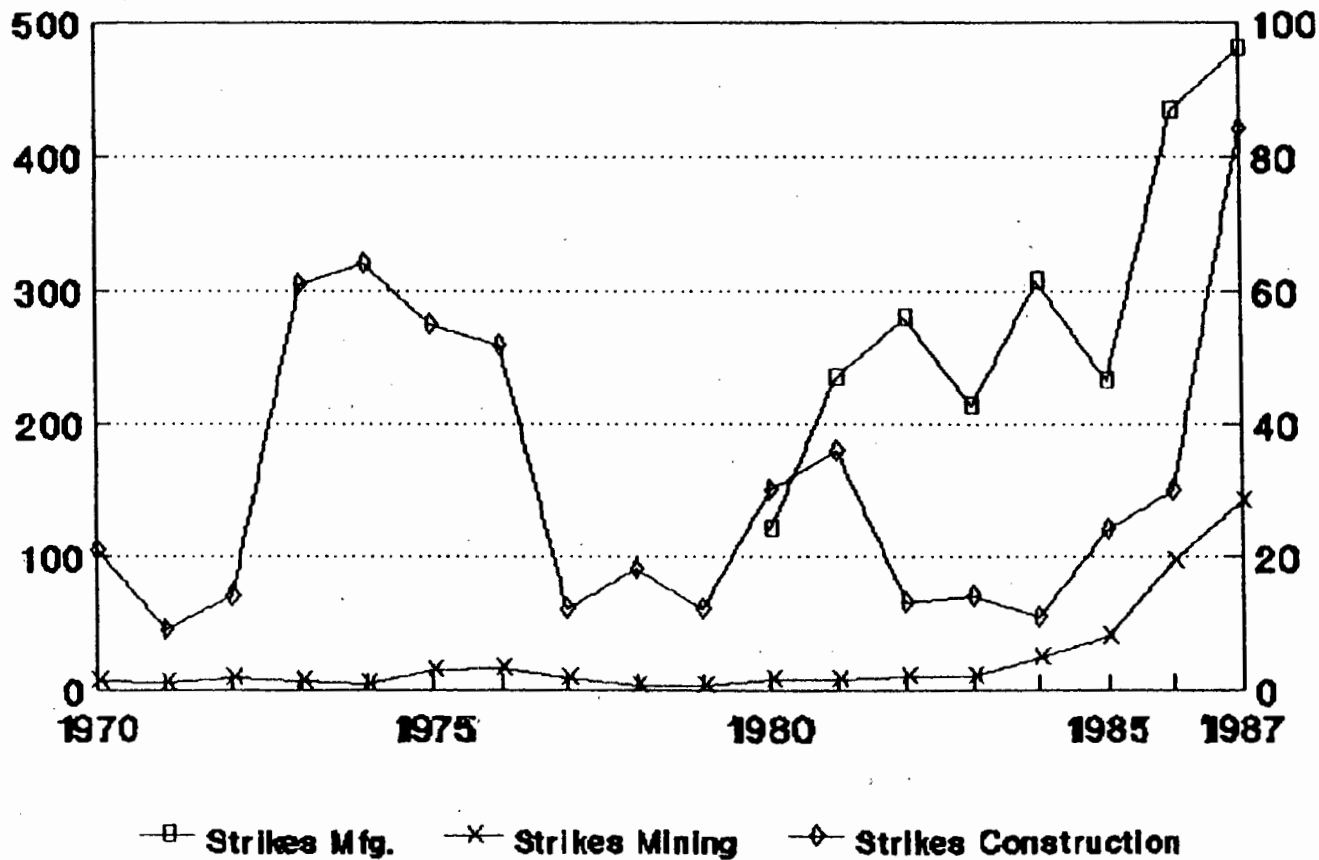
Black Real Wages



Sources: NMC 1986-1988, CSO 1976/1982

Strikes by Sector

1970-1987



Sources: CSIR/NIPR (1983), NMC 1986-1988, NMC 1987a

iv) LEGISLATION GOVERNING STRIKE ACTION

Whilst the legislation of the greatest relevance to this study was introduced in the post war period, it is necessary to take account of the original Industrial Conciliation legislation which laid the groundwork for much of the subsequent system. Space precludes a full discussion of all aspects of labour related legislation. Instead the major provisions of most relevance to strikes in the 1970-87 period will be evaluated. The legislation dealing with strikes has undergone a long period of evolution aimed at incorporation and control since the original 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act (no.11). This act was based on the principle of negotiation at an industry-wide level, enabling employers to bargain with a number of trade unions at once (Horner,1976;125). Blacks who were "non-pass bearing" were excluded from the Act's provisions (ibid.;126). A complex range of procedures had to be followed before workers could embark on strike action.

The accession of the National Party to power in 1948 led to a rethink of the legislation governing industrial relations and in this regard a new Industrial Legislation Commission was appointed (see Thompson,1989;501). The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act (no.48) of 1953 prohibited all strike action by black workers and excluded all blacks from the provisions of the original 1924 Act (Horner,1976;134). It is important to note that official terminology defines the word "blacks" as Africans,

both before the law and in terms of official statistics (such as real wages). Instead, legislation allowed for the establishment of Works Committees in those enterprises employing more than 30 workers, regional Native Labour Committees (under a white Chairman), and a Central Native Labour Board (ibid.;126). Any industrial dispute arising would first be dealt with by the Works Committee. Under the Industrial Conciliation Act (no.28) of 1956 trade unions were generally forced to split up on racial grounds (Webster,1985;111). However, black trade unions were never outlawed and loopholes in the legislation allowed mixed trade unions at the discretion of the Minister of Labour (see ibid.;112-3).

The Works Committee system was never very successful. Indeed, by 1973 only 24 such committees existed (Horner,1976;127). The 1973 Durban strike wave showed the inadequacy of existing legislation. In reaction to this, the 1973 Bantu Labour Regulation Act (no. 70) was introduced, largely in an attempt to provide alternative structures to black trade unions (Bonner,1987;56). This Act established a system of works and liaison committees, the former wholly, and the latter only half composed of workers. The former were only advisory bodies, whilst the latter were intended to serve as a vehicle for communicating the aspirations of workers. Strikes by black workers were legalised under certain circumstances (see Horner,1976;135), but the procedure for striking legally was so complex and lengthy that few workers

actually used this concession (see the discussion on the Armourplate strike in Chapter 3).

The report of the Wiehahn Commission (discussed in Chapter 4) led to amendment of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1979. The Amendments extended the definition of the term "employee" to include blacks and allowed for the establishment of both an Industrial Court and an advisory National Manpower Commission (Maree & Budlender, 1987; 119). Liaison Committees were renamed Works Councils and were opened to all races (SALB, 1979; 62). The 1981 Labour Relations Amendment Act extended state control over the trade unions to prohibit further any political activities (Benjamin et al, 1981; 159). Unions were prohibited from granting financial or other assistance to illegal strikers, whilst further administrative controls were also introduced (ibid.; 160). Up until the end of the period studied (1987) no further major changes took place in industrial relations legislation, with limited amendments in 1982 (to increase the power of the Industrial Court) and 1983 (to allow unregistered trade unions access to the Conciliation Boards) (Maree & Budlender, 1987; 120).

Under the Industrial Conciliation (later Labour Relations) Acts, a strike may normally only legally take place if the statutory collective bargaining machinery (either Industrial Councils or Conciliation Boards) has first been exhausted or the Minister of Manpower has refused to appoint a Conciliation Board in an

industry where no Industrial Council exists (Thompson, 1989; 642 G-H). In addition a 30 day "cooling off period" must pass before the strike can take place unless certain provisions have been met (such as the Industrial Council pronouncing that the dispute cannot be resolved) (ibid.; 642 G-H).

The Industrial Court has the power to assess a spectrum of Unfair Labour Practices and grant status quo orders (ibid.; 620 O). While the latter do not constitute final pronouncements, they have served to provide guidelines on what constitutes an Unfair Labour Practice (ibid.; 620 O). In order to gain access to the Industrial Court a state of legally defined "dispute" must exist. The 1979 Act extended the definition of this term from basically a change in conditions of employment pertaining to a dismissal or suspension to include Unfair Labour Practices. The Court has considerable discretion in deciding what constitutes such a practice (ibid.; 621). It is only possible to gain access to the Industrial Court if the dispute has first been referred to the Industrial Council, in the absence of a Council if the party concerned has applied for the establishment of a Conciliation Board or if "any party to a dispute.....engaged in (an industry) providing essential services, where they have first reported to the Minister that a Conciliation Board will not be able to settle the dispute" (ibid.; 598A). This in effect allows the Minister of Manpower to prevent workers from gaining access to the Industrial Court in industries not covered by an Industrial Council or the

"essential services" provision.

The Court has made a number of decisions ranging from those forcing employees to bargain in good faith (see Chapter 5) to specific decisions dealing with strikes. Thompson (1989;642P) argues that the Court grants protection to strikers where the action is seen as "legitimate" and "acceptable", but has not shown a great deal of consistency in this regard. Some early cases adopted an unsympathetic "basket of factors" approach (e.g. the BTR Sarmcol Case), but later decisions (e.g. the Sentrachem Case) were considerably more sympathetic (ibid.;642T). Thompson sees the latter case as particularly significant in that it granted job protection to strikers in disputes where intensive negotiation had failed (ibid.;642V).

The legal provisions governing strike action are extremely complex and have been subject to a great deal of change over the period studied. The Industrial Court has had a poor record of consistency (see Maree & Budlender,1987;121) and numerous amendments, the latest being the 1988 Labour Relations Act Amendments (beyond the period studied), have altered both the definition of a legal strike and the rights pertaining thereto. It is hoped that this section has provided a useful background to the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 1

Theory Reassessed

Being a review of the existing major theoretical contributions on the nature of strike action and its place in the broader arena of social conflict.

Recorded instances of strike action are as old as history. Even as formidable a character as William the Conqueror faced a builders' strike in 1066. However, industrial conflict is essentially a feature of the post-feudal era. The emergence of the urban proletariat created the conditions for a new manifestation of social conflict, where the worker withdraws from the labour process as a means for seeking redress of grievances, thus striking at the heart of the relations of production of industrial society. Particularly in modern times, there has been a growing collection of literature which attempts to explain the reasons behind this particular manifestation of social conflict and its role in wider society. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an assesment of such literature. This literature will, in the second theory chapter, be re-evaluated in the light of the South African socio-political reality.

Essentially, this literature can be divided into a number of distinct categories. Firstly, there are those contributions which attempt to provide a general explanation for the existence of strike action from a particular frame of reference (such as unitarist, pluralist, or Marxist). Secondly, there are those which attempt to provide explanations for specific characteristics of strikes (such as why particular industries are strike prone). Whilst not attempting to be a comprehensive review of all the literature available on this topic, this chapter attempts to provide a broad overview of some of the major

contributions.

Overall Theoretical Frames of Reference

i) Unitarism. The unitarist school of thought is based on the belief that employers and employees share the same basic goals, with the result that it is possible to envisage a completely strike free economy (Hyman, 1981; 153). This perspective assumes that society is based on consensus. Central to unitarism is the notion of a "team" unified by a common purpose (Fox, 1969; 391). Some unitarists, such as Reddish (1980; 298), even object to the use of the term "worker" as it "implies management does not work." The participation of organized labour in any decision making concerning the company is seen as undesirable (Fox, 1969; 398). If employers and employees have ultimately the same objectives then industrial conflict is neither rational nor necessary. Strikes have no structural base in social relations (see Allen, 1966; 153). Indeed, from this perspective strikes can be seen as simply due to "agitators", "intimidation", or the idleness of the average worker. This approach fails to explain class-based inequalities in broader society, or, for that matter, basic issues such as the distribution of political power. However, by virtue of its very simplicity and inherent conservatism, the unitarist approach remains an attractive one to

many employers. In addition, unitarism gives management an essentially comforting definition of their own role (Nichols, quoted in Hyman, 1981;154). Thus, despite its crudity, unitarism merits being taken seriously as it remains an important managerial ideology.

ii) Pluralism. Critics of unitarism have pointed out that this school of thought denies workers the right to question their role at the workplace (or even the amount of their remuneration) (Fox, quoted in Jackson, 1983;30-1). In contrast (and rather in reaction) to unitarism, the pluralist approach argues that industrial conflict is both normal and to be expected (Jackson, 1983;30). Trade unions are seen as fulfilling a crucial role in that they restore a balance in what would otherwise be a most unequal situation. They shield their members from market fluctuations and limit the power of employers (Flanders, 1969;22). In the collective bargaining process trade unions serve to represent workers' interests (ibid.;22). Fox (1983;215) has noted that by balancing conflicting interests and managing conflict in a competent fashion, pluralists believe that the long term welfare of the enterprise can be ensured. In the end, although it recognizes competing interests at the workplace, pluralism fails to take cognizance of broader inequalities present in society. In his later writings Fox shifted to a more radical position citing as his reasons the often unequal relations of power at the workplace (1977;136-7). He suggested that pluralism had failed to

take account of the possibility that agreements reached at the workplace could be unequal "one-sided" affairs, serving the interests of the employer only (ibid.;141). Fox argues that trade unions may be incapable of countering such imbalance (ibid.;141). Essentially, pluralists see industrial conflict as containable and even being a potential source of strength, by permitting a range of interests to voice themselves. Based on the Parsonian model. Pluralists have argued that strike action (and related forms of protest) represent in general a form of negative inducement - i.e. more an attempt to increase one's leverage over certain sectors of society, than to change the underlying social structures. ^{see Hyman, 1981;156-8)} This perspective fails to take account of the potential for strikes to destroy (or at least to attempt to challenge) the existing social order, such as took place in Czarist Russia in 1905. In such cases conflict could not simply be resolved (or even contained) in the workplace. Thus, it can be argued that pluralism does not take account of the possibility that broader political struggles may extend into the workplace. As Rex (1981;17) notes, the strike represents but the first step in the direction of total withdrawal from the employer/employee relationship (ibid.;17). If taken to the ultimate conclusion it would necessitate the restructuring of the relationship on rather different lines (ibid.;17). Thus strikes may be seen as the potential first step towards ultimate revolutionary change.

iii) Marxist Perspectives. In contrast to the pluralist approach,

Marxist writers have argued that industrial conflict is an ongoing and inevitable process owing to the irreconcilable interests of employer and employee, the former seeking to maximise profits, and the latter wages, as well as to alter broader relationships of control.

Whilst critical of the role of established trade unions, Lenin (1977b;61) argues that every strike is "school of war" that teaches workers to unite and shows them that their real enemy is the government. However, the working class can by no means confine their struggle to strike action (Lenin,1977b;62). Miliband(1969;140-5)notes that even if aims are limited, strike action has utility in the sphere of collective bargaining. Demands which employers claim are unrealistic "become realizable when organised labour shows that it will not desist"(ibid.;40-5). Thus, striking workers have the potential to challenge existing relations of power at the workplace. Lenin's arguments on the lack of potential of trade unions have been taken one stage further by Perry Anderson (1967;264), who argues that trade unions represent an accomodation with existing power structures within society. Unions are in the contradictory position of being both an opponent of capitalism and an integral part thereof (ibid.;264).

Engels viewed strike action as an unlikely vehicle for social

change. Indeed, he suggests that a mass strike (the only strike he sees capable of bringing about such change) is unlikely to occur, as this would necessitate both perfect organisation and large reserves of strike pay (quoted in Luxembourg, 1971; 224). Luxembourg rejected this viewpoint, claiming that it became outdated by the 1905 Russian revolution, when the dream of a mass strike became realized (ibid.; 225). Indeed, she views the mass strike as "the most perfect weapon in the struggle for political rights" (ibid.; 227). In her writings, Luxembourg argues that politics and economics are "inseparably interrelated" (ibid.; 241). Interestingly, Luxembourg rejects Engels's stress on organisation, seeing the mood of workers as being of greater importance (ibid.; 245). Indeed, she argues that a mass strike is more likely to occur spontaneously as the culmination of political and economic developments and not as a result of organisation (ibid.; 245). However, it can be argued that strong organisation will increase the chances of a mass strike succeeding (after all, the 1905 revolution was, in the end, unsuccessful). As Rex (1981; 17) points out, a major constraint against using strikes as a vehicle for revolutionary change is the ability of employers to recruit alternative labour supplies. Unusually high levels of organisation and solidarity would be required to prevent this from occurring.

It can be argued that although making many valuable theoretical contributions, much of the established radical thought

incorporates major shortcomings in (as is the case with unitarist and pluralist theory) its attempts to impose theoretical unity without taking full account of the range of social forces operating in various different situations. Oakeshott (quoted in Minogue, 1975; 127) argues that social theory frequently represents merely the abridgement of social practices current at the time of that theory's formulation. As Hyman (1979; 323) notes, third world strikes tend to differ from the "typical Anglo-Saxon bargaining strike" in that they frequently represent a form of direct pressure on government rather than individual employers, thus incorporating an overtly political dimension. Indeed, it is even difficult to gain an overall conception of the third world owing to its diverse nature, with economies ranging from those with a substantial "modern sector" to feudal backwaters (ibid.; 323).

Hyman argues that the dominant theoretical orthodoxy assumes trade unions will become incorporated into the system (1979; 325). However, several third world trade unions have shown little sign of this and in fact may be further radicalised through state action (ibid.; 328). This argument appears to be particularly true of South Africa, where the independent trade unions have adopted an increasingly outspoken stance following unprecedented levels of state repression in the mid-to-late 1980's. Although Hyman accepts that many issues facing workers are universal, he is critical of the "theoretical imperialism" of many established paradigms (ibid.; 323). Thus, although Marxist theory clearly

provides many useful tools of analysis, it can be argued that there exists a need to go beyond established theory to develop new theoretical constructs in the light of the relevant social circumstances. Theoretical contributions attempting to explain specific characteristics of strike action will now be assessed.

Causes and Characteristics of Strikes

i) **Community Structures.** An interesting approach in industrial relations has been provided by Kerr and Siegal (1954;193) with their argument that certain industries will automatically tend to be strike prone, which will especially be the case when the work force is drawn from small, closed communities. By such they mean communities where workers from a particular industry are concentrated and are poorly integrated with wider society (ibid.;199). Of course, the ultimate closed community would be the South African mine compound, and this argument will be further assessed in the South African context. Kerr and Siegal (ibid.;193) argue that closed communities will give birth to their own sets of norms, attitudes and values, which will have direct effect on relations at the workplace. Eldridge (1968;37) sees group cohesion as the most likely variable underlying strike action, the factor which lies at the base of the Kerr-Siegal thesis - that particular industries, whose workforce is drawn from certain types of community, will show an unusual propensity

to strike. It can be argued that whilst a degree of community cohesion may be necessary for striking, it cannot provide a sufficient explanation on its own. The question emerging from this theory is whether the structure and nature of society in the country/continent when this theory was conceived is similar to contemporary South Africa and thus applicable to this country.

ii)Alienation at the Workplace. The question of whether certain industries will tend to be more strike prone than others has also been raised by Blauner. However, Blauner(1966;176-8) sees technology, and not the nature of communities, as being the determining factor. As McCord argues, the very nature of the work situation could contribute to increased levels of conflict (1980; 117). In other words, jobs that are unpleasant, dirty or dangerous will result in a more militant workforce than would be the case in industries where the work is less so. If one's employment involves physical danger, one is bound to feel more strongly about certain issues. However, this argument is often disproved in practice. For example, British car workers seem to exhibit a far greater tendency to resort to strike action than their West German counterparts, despite similar technology in the industry (Hyman,1981;63). Hyman (1981;64) argues that workers in one industry may indeed have different views to workers in another(or,as is often the case, another part of the same industry), some seeing strikes as part of the collective bargaining process, others as a last resort. However, he argues

that it is extremely unlikely that workers may react solely to the technology of production, and let this alone dictate whether they choose to strike or not (ibid.;63). It is even harder to label particular industries as strike prone in view of the ever-changing nature of technology. For example, the modern robotised motor assembly line is a far cry from methods of production employed in the 1930's, or for that matter the 1970's.

iii) Communications. In contrast to the above approach, the "human relations" school sees poor communication as the basic cause of industrial conflict (Hyman, 1981;58-9). This school of thought has been largely identified with the works of American sociologist Elton Mayo, and seems to be largely an extension of the unitarist school of thought which stresses the common aims of management and labour (see the discussion of unitarism in preceding sections). By providing "supportive leadership", encouraging cohesive social relations within the workforce, and keeping channels of communication open, it is possible to ensure harmony at the workplace (ibid.;58). Critics of this approach, such as Kerr & Siegel, have argued that it fails to take account of differences that may exist between various sectors of industry (ibid.;59). Also, this approach does not allow for any regional differences to exist.

iv) Strikes as a Cyclical Phenomenon. Writers such as Cronin (1979;17) have argued that "strikes tend to come in waves,

clumping together in some years and dying down in others"(1979;17). Cronin goes on to suggest that strike waves tend to correlate with waves of unionisation(ibid.;17), which seems to have some merit for South Africa if the parallel rise of recorded instances of strike action and the rise of the independent unions is borne in mind. The concept of "repetitiveness" implies that certain industries will face frequent strikes less concerned with issues such as wages, and more with factors such as organisation on the shop floor or the possibility of new technology being introduced into an industry (ibid.;35). In other words strikes tend to be cyclical, whilst common demands in strike prone industries will hinge less around basic economic factors, and more on far reaching demands aimed at pushing back the frontiers of control. Indeed, the character and nature of the economic system may be determined by the nature of labour disputes.

Cronin (1979;17) argues that the cyclical nature of strike action represents the product of historical forces and not the result of particular industries being strike prone. He points out that in years where strikes are frequent, most major industries are hit by strikes (ibid.;17). The changing percentage of union membership and the cyclical nature of strike action are seen as part of a "broader learning process" by union members that is the product of "different phases of economic development" (Cronin,1979;40). Unfortunately, Cronin is rather vague as to

what is precisely meant by "different phases of economic development". Perhaps it might be useful to broaden this concept to include issues such as the changing nature of society and relations of power therein.

v)The Complexity of Strike Action. It can be argued that a cautious approach should be adopted before assigning the cause of strike action to a single factor. Clearly, strikes differ greatly in both the form in which they manifest themselves and their objectives. McCord(1980;116) argues that strikes represent such a complex form of social dispute that it is indeed extremely difficult to impose any concepts of uniformity. In retrospect, it is hard even to comprehend all the forces that brought the strike about. Key factors could be a decline in the standard of living of the average worker, or workers being declared redundant in a depressed industry (ibid.;116). However, the simple contention that increased levels of conflict will be the direct response to social or economic change remains debateable (Tilly & Tilly,1981;328). From this it can be argued that there is a need to develop more advanced tools of analysis to explain fully the nature of industrial conflict. This point will be taken up further in subsequent chapters.

In his study on strikes, Knowles(1952;6) argues that it is always of crucial importance to note that strikes are

frequently unpremeditated and represent spontaneous outbreaks of conflict. Whilst often economic in origin, they are frequently more all-encompassing, having broader effects which are far harder to forecast or assess (ibid.;7). The question emerging from Knowles's writings is the circumstances under which spontaneous strikes occur.

In reality, a strike is but one manifestation of industrial conflict, which may also include sabotage, restrictions on output, or extend to the wider community in the form of consumer boycotts. Strikes are normally far more visible than other forms of protest at the workplace. Indeed, it is often hard to gauge the extent of the latter. It is important to note that workers have a range of options when seeking to register their dissatisfaction at the workplace, and that certain strategies (such as strikes) will only be attempted once a certain degree of militancy, solidarity, and organisation has been attained.

However, if workers suffer a certain degree of deprivation, their grievances will be expressed in some form (even if only increased absenteeism) (Hyman, 1981;53). Hyman argues "that attempts to suppress specific manifestations of conflict without removing the root causes... may merely divert the conflict into other forms" (ibid.;53). Whilst Hyman was referring specifically to workplace issues, it can be argued that in a society such as South Africa, where no adequate channels exist for voicing a broad range of

grievances, this argument may be true on a far broader basis.

It can be argued that if the state with its monopoly on legal violence intervenes in a dispute, the result could be that the basic collective bargaining situation could be altered to one escalating towards a civil war (Rex,1981;36). It is clear that this perspective needs qualification. Worldwide, states have intervened in industrial disputes without this taking place. However, under certain social conditions state action in repressing instances of strike action could merely serve to spark off broader resistance as the events in Russia in 1905 and 1917 have shown.

In summary, it can be seen that strike action, and indeed broader socio-political conflict, may be ascribed to a variety of causes from relative deprivation, to poor communication, or to irreconcilable class-based differences. It can be argued that none of the established theoretical constructs provides a wholly satisfactory account of the causes of strikes nor of the nature of trade unions. As Hyman (1979;323-5) notes, there is a vast diversity in material conditions prevailing in the third world, making it difficult to justify the maintenance of the established theoretical orthodoxy. In particular, it can be argued that it is important to take cognizance of the wider socio-political reality, which is often not taken account of in established

theories. It is hoped that theories on the role of unions as social movements seeking far reaching political change and insights on broader power relations may be useful in filling this gap.

Beyond Established Theory

It is clear that important questions remain on the role of the independent trade unions vis-a-vis community organizations and the extent to which the former can be termed social movements in the sociological sense of the word. One of the most influential writers in the area of social movements has been Manuel Castells, who has developed new theoretical tools and insights, using them to explain the nature of a wide variety of such movements from the Paris Commune of 1871 to the Paris Grandes Ensembles of the 1960's and 1970's. Castells argues that social movements can fall into three broad categories: those which seek autonomy at a local level from central government; those which seek to establish/defend specific communities; those concerned with creating a system of living where their needs can be fulfilled, in place of an existing system orientated around capital seeking to accumulate profit (Lowe, 1986; 33). Interestingly, Castells (1983; 4) argues that class analysis is not sufficient to understand urban change. Instead, he argues that there is a need for a more comprehensive view of social causality able to account for the full diversity of human experience (ibid.; 4).

In contrast to locally-based social movements, political parties tend to be bound to the "political level" - concerned with influencing the state apparatus, an apparatus which is inexorably tied to political interests (Lowe,1986;35). Owing to this linkage, only social movements can serve as the vehicle for achieving real change in society(ibid.;35). Clearly, neither the independent trade unions nor locally based community organizations fall into the category of a political party. In fact, both seem to have much in common with Castells' third type of social movement - those seeking a more equitable society.

Castells (1983;301) admits that his theories owe much to the writings of Alaine Touraine. Touraine (1981;79) sees the key point in studying social movements as their historical location. He suggests that when class relations and relations of production hold the "centre stage" social movements will become increasingly involved in social conflict (ibid.;100). However, he raises the possibility of conflict becoming institutionalised and thus the role of social movements declining (ibid.;100). Castells largely differs with Touraine over the issue of class analysis. Castells argues that such analysis is insufficient to account for the complexities of urban change (Castells,1983;4).

Lambert (1988;34) argues that social movement trade unionism arises when the trade union leadership consciously seeks to break

down barriers and establish alliances with political social movements. By doing so the orthodox nature of trade unionism is transcended (ibid.;34). Trade unions can thus escape being frozen into a reformist pattern (see ibid.;468). The lesson to be learnt from worker organizations such as SACTU is that there is a need to get away from the "pessimistic tradition" of trade union theory (ibid.;468) - trade unions can avoid being incorporated into the system. Although Lambert bases this argument on the experience of SACTU, it seems even more valid in the light of the rise of the independent trade unions in the 1970's and early 1980's.

Probably the most comprehensive evaluation of the role of the South African independent trade unions as social movements has been provided by Webster. Webster argues that the independent trade unions have defied established pluralist theory in that they have not been incorporated to such an extent that industrial conflict has become institutionalised (1986a;16), just as Lambert suggested was the case with SACTU. This has been the result of the failure of the state to incorporate politically the independent trade unions owing to exclusion of blacks from meaningful political rights (Webster,1987a;217). This situation has been further prevented owing to a worsening economic situation(ibid.;217). A further factor is the democratic internal structures of the independent trade unions, which has forced them to be sensitive to the needs of their members. This stance represents a reaction to declining standards of living and a

continued lack of political rights for blacks. This has led to the independent trade unions becoming both economic and socio-political movements. Webster's writings clearly provide useful insights, especially if considered in the light of Castells' contributions to the theory of social movements. Greenberg (1983;216) argues that if democratically structured, popularly based worker organization may give members valuable experience of the democratic process, which will have wider social applicability should far reaching change occur. In this manner, the independent unions may serve as harbingers of a new, more equitable society.

On a more global basis, insights can be gained through Foucault's notions of power. As Poster (1984;158-162) notes, Foucault provides a major new contribution to social theory, in his argument that underlying all social relations is power and strategies for domination. In modern society these strategies have become increasingly sophisticated, even to such an extent that greater freedom of expression may be tolerated as long as ultimate relations of power remain unchanged (ibid.;158-162).

Giddens has provided further insight into the nature of power with his inclusion of the effects of structural constraints. Giddens can be seen to reject both those who rule out the possibility of any structural factors and the "scientific Marxist"/Althusserian "base-superstructure" metaphor. Giddens

argues that in essence there are two basic views of power: the "will intended action" of Dahl and Weber and Arendt's notion of a social community (Giddens, 1979; 89). Giddens argues that while power in itself is not a resource, the use of power depends on the amount of resources available (ibid.; 91). Thus, power has no inherent connection with will. This provides a useful critique of much of established industrial relations theory which makes the error of assuming a system of relations that actually functions - that interests will act in a predetermined fashion, ruling out the effects of different sets of circumstances.

Giddens (1982; 32) rejects established "structuralist/Marxist" theories of trade unions on account of the fact that it discounts working class resistance. In this manner, Giddens' theories allow for the possibility for power relations to change - the powerless can gain power through the mobilisation of resources through organization. There is particular scope for worker action in advanced capitalist societies, where workers have to be managed without the moral and military power available to ruling groups in previous types of society (ibid.; 41). Many third world states have a greater freedom to resort to overt repression. Nonetheless, the third world has become a major site of struggle, with the unions actively resisting incorporation (ibid.; 44).

As can be seen by the above, few of the established theoretical constructs provide a wholly satisfactory account of the causes and nature of strikes, nor the role of trade unions. As Hyman

(1979;32-3) notes, there is a vast diversity of material conditions prevailing in third world countries, making it difficult to justify the retention of the established theoretical orthodoxy. In particular, it can be argued that it is important to take account of the wider political reality, a factor often neglected in established theories. It is hoped that by evaluating questions such as the role of trade unions as social movements seeking far-reaching change, or the nature of broader power relationships may help fill this gap. The applicability of established theory and recent theoretical constructs to South African strikes in relation to the broader political environment will be assessed in the second theory chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Before the Awakening

1970-2

The 1970's and 1980's clearly have been an era of resistance, collective action and revolt unprecedented in South African history. In the labour sphere, this resulted in a record number of industrial disputes taking place. By contrast, at the workplace, the late 1960's and, indeed, 1970, seemed a far more peaceful period. Nonetheless, these years are of interest when evaluating industrial conflict in modern South Africa, if only because of the fact that they represented a lull after the storm of Sharpeville and before the disturbances of 1973 Durban. It was in the "quieter era" of 1970-2 that the foundations of the independent union movement were laid. Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg were to all emerge as centres of the fledgling advice bureaux, benefit funds and training projects.

Background to a New Era: The Late 1960's

By the late 1960's most of the apartheid edifice was already in place. Subsequent legislation was to prove more concerned with fine tuning discriminatory measures already in place, or with increasing the repressive power of the state. In fact, the late 1960's can best be viewed as largely a period of inaction. Repression had not only silenced most representative black political organizations, but also the few black unions that had survived till then. It was in this period that the Nationalist government appeared to be at its strongest. As Davenport (1987;417) notes, Africans were voiceless and totally vulnerable

to the government's social engineering projects. In the sphere of white politics it had made further advances against the already-dying UP. The government had a massive battery of legislation at its disposal to counter any stirrings. These included such all encompassing measures such as the Suppression of Communism and Riotous Assemblies Acts. The shock of Sharpeville had largely been forgotten. Indeed, the government and its allies had already convinced themselves that it could never happen again.

In the sphere of labour the various attempts at mass unionization of Africans over the years had largely failed. This left most Black workers unrepresented by the late 1960's. Fisher (1977;343) argues that many black workers, having seen so many earlier attempts at worker organization fail, had come to the conclusion that trade unions for blacks were simply not viable. However, the real reason for the failure of these attempts was not only state repression, but also the fundamental mistakes committed by most of the pre-1970 unions. Before 1970 many black unions had tended to rely far more on charismatic leadership figures than on a sound organization. Unions such as the ICU of the 1920's had placed but little emphasis on internal democracy. As Bonner (1978;118) notes, "the ICU had been created and the leadership imposed from the outside." It was thus a simple matter for the state to crush such organizations should it so desire. The state had not hesitated to intervene whenever it felt its position was threatened. As Webster (1985;128) notes, whenever it appeared

that African trade unions were about to be established, they faced state action. Furthermore, such repressive action had created a more invidious weakness - a lack of will. Many felt that organizations such as SACTU owed their downfall solely to state repression and adopted a strongly "survivalist ethic" - it was safer not to risk state action by attempting to organize black workers (Browne,1987;56). It was only when a fresh direction was given by intellectuals were foundations of a new generation of more effective unions laid. As will become evident in subsequent sections, this was initially not undertaken through founding unions , but rather through the establishment of organizations which, it was hoped, would seem less threatening to state and capital (Maree,1987;2).

It has been suggested that SACTU made the mistake of entering the political arena prematurely, whilst not paying enough attention to workplace organization. For example, Lambert (1980;104) suggests that "SACTU swept unprepared into the midst of the political struggle." SACTU was forced into exile in the early 1960's in the post-Sharpeville period of repression. Despite the de facto banning of SACTU, some of its member unions, such as the African Food and Canning Workers' Union survived and retained their former militancy. It can be argued that the surviving unions both gave lie to the belief that it would be impossible ever to effectively organize black workers, and served as beacons of hope in a bleak era.

Strikes in the Late 1960's

Strikes in the late 1960's were fairly rare. The few surviving unions were both organizationally weak and vulnerable to state repression. What few strikes that did take place tended to be of a fairly short duration and involved on average few workers. Demands expressed by workers tended to reflect short term concerns and focussed on immediate issues such as the manner in which workers received their payment (see fig. 7). Strikes in the late 1960's tended to attract a hard line response by managers and resulted in an unusually high number of dismissals, when compared to either the 1970's, or indeed the early 1960's (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 39-41). Plentiful supplies of unskilled labour were available and there were few incentives to reach negotiated settlements.

In late 1969 Durban dock workers struck for more pay. As Friedman notes, to many this has been seen as the first sign of a new era of worker revolt (1987;44). Although seemingly economic, this strike should be seen as having a far broader significance - as a harbinger of a new era of collective action, and as the first indication of an unusual degree of combativity in the Durban district. Indeed, this dispute adds credence to Knowles' assertion (1952;6) that strikes may have a far broader effect than might seem the case at first. Even if its limited objectives

are acknowledged, it is important to note that such action represented an opportunity for a disenfranchised grouping in society to register protest when all other channels were closed (see March, 1977;56). The Durban strike ended a period largely characterized by inaction.

Trends in Strike Action in 1970

Few, if any major instances of strike action took place in 1970. All in all, a total of 75 strikes took place (see fig.1 in the introduction). This was a marginal decrease from 1969, despite a small increase in the inflation rate - the average rate of increase of the CPI for the period 1963-70 had been 3.3% (SA Reserve Bank, 1974;10), but had now begun to rise to over 5%. 10% of strikes ended in the firing of striking workers (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37). This represents a generally more hardline response from employers than was to prove the case for most of the decade to follow. It seems that employers on the whole were unaccustomed to strikes with many refusing to accept them as legitimate means by which workers could express their demands (see Dekker et al,1975;214). The near-total lack of effective trade unions made it all too easy for employers to take punitive action against workers who resorted to strike action (see Bonner,1987;36).

The number of workers involved in the average strike was slightly fewer than was the case in 1969 (NMC,1979;45). However, in both the late 1960's and 1970's, the average dispute involved far fewer workers, than was to be the case in subsequent years. This can be seen as the result of almost any formal collective organization. The 1973 Durban strikes did indeed show that successful collective action on a large scale could take place, despite the absence of a union presence. However, this was only possible owing to a specific set of circumstances and the pent-up frustrations of a lifetime, and was not repeatable.

Significantly more strikes were triggered off by wage-related factors and working conditions than straight wage demands during 1970 (see fig. 7). Although disputes revolving around these issues may have far-reaching consequences, they may represent the defensive reaction of workers to some or other action by management. The latter would be particularly the case prior to the 1973 Durban strikes and the re-emergence of the independent union movement. Of course, the economy was in a far less parlous state in the late 1960's than it would be in the 1980's, which would serve to make the need for higher wages somewhat less pressing. Some degree of latent solidarity amongst workers was indicated by the several disputes caused by dismissals (ibid.).

The Birth of a New Militancy

Between the respective storms of the Sharpeville crisis and Durban of 1973, the late 1960's and 1970 have been rather overlooked by those researching the South African labour relations scene. The apparent calm of these years can be directly attributed to repressive state action in the post-Sharpeville era. Few black unions had existed in the 1960's. The structure and focus of most of them (e.g. many of the SACTU unions) enabled the state to take effective action against them. Following the banning of the PAC and ANC in the earlier half of the decade, the late 1960's appeared to be relatively politically peaceful. However, as noted earlier, the first warnings of a new era of resistance emerged in the Eastern Cape, where the philosophy of black consciousness had begun to develop (Kane Berman, 1978; 103).

By 1971, there were already signs of a growing combativity amongst the black working class. In a survey conducted by Schlemmer (1975; 5) during this year 70% of black workers interviewed were dissatisfied with the wages they received. The inflation rate had increased, with the CPI now reaching 6.9% (SA Reserve Bank, 1974; 12), as is reflected in figs. 2-4 (introduction). Repeated price rises were to be one of the major causes of the 1973 Durban strike wave. A high degree of relative deprivation was indicated by the fact that seven out ten of those

who indicated that low wages were a major problem, blamed it on factors such as discrimination and "ill will" (Schlemmer, 1975; 5). Thus a sizeable percentage of the black workforce ascribed their problems ultimately to arbitrary social injustice. This was to have direct effects on the subsequent nature of collective action. Interestingly, although very few black workers were unionized during this period, 45% (ibid; 7) of workers surveyed were aware of the considerable bargaining strength the black working class had at its disposal. It seems evident that the potential existed for a scenario of mass unionization, and explains why the early worker service organizations got such a good response from workers. As noted in Chapter One, the concept of relative deprivation has often been used to explain unusually high levels of working class combativity. However, it is important to view this as the ultimate product of the underlying structures of society and apartheid, with all the attendant inequality, both at a basic class level and with regard to consequent access to political power.

Intellectuals as Union Founders

In 1971 a mass breakaway of NUSAS's black members took place, to align themselves with the Black Consciousness movement. Meanwhile, many white students had become increasingly critical of the

dominant part of the liberal opposition, which they believed had become ineffectual and incapable of addressing the question of class-based inequality (Webster,1985;132). As a result of this "Wages and Economic Commissions" were established on all NUSAS campuses. Originally these commissions were concerned with gathering data on wage levels. The first commission was established on the Durban campus of the University of Natal. Most of these commissions soon changed from their original data-gathering role, to a more direct one of assisting in the organization of black workers (NUSAS,1980;39).

The Durban "Benefit Fund"

With student help, Harriet Bolton (a TUCSA union official) established the "General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund" in Durban. As the name suggests, one of the primary functions of the Fund was to provide benefits for its members, in this case, funeral benefits. It was decided to avoid a more overtly trade union type role for fear of attracting the unwanted attention of the repressive arm of the state. At this stage, it was still unclear what the state's response to independent trade unions for blacks would be, but the experience of SACTU in the 1960's had shown that it was unlikely to be favourable (see Maree,1987;2). Despite this, the Fund attempted to represent some basic worker demands. Fisher (1977;342) argues that the success of the Benefit Fund can be ascribed to the fact that many workers recognized it

as having the potential to become a genuine workers' organization.

Eleven strikes took place in the Durban/Pinetown region in 1971 (CSIR/NIPR, 1983;45-7). Although by contemporary standards this might seem relatively few, it was at the time proportionately speaking significant (only 69 strikes had taken place country-wide [NMC, 1979;45]), as can be seen from fig.9 (in the introduction). The success of the "Benefit Fund", and the number of recorded instances of strike action that took place in this region, shows that in at least two respects the Durban area set a lead that most of the rest of the country was to follow. It also serves to demonstrate the tendencies of "simultaneosity" in collective action - that strikes come in "clusters" (see Cronin, 1979;17).

Bolton soon attracted the attention of the security police (SALB, 1975;3). Eventually she was forced to resign from the Garment Workers' Union over the issue of her support for black unionism (ibid.;2). Garment Workers' Union officials then distanced themselves from her stance, arguing that to attempt to organize black workers "was not worth the trouble", as one would "be in trouble like her" (quoted in SALB, 1975;3).

The Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau

Meanwhile, the activities of UCT's Wages Committee in conjunction with former SACTU organizers had led to the establishment of the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau in 1972 (see Mareel 1986;324). Although officially an advice bureau, it was involved in the organization of workers at factory level (NUSAS, 1980;39). This led to a change of name in 1977 to the Western Province General Workers' Union. The surprising degree of success with which the bureau was met demonstrates the extent of the organizational vacuum that existed. The role played by both students and academics (e.g. Turner and Maree) has few precedents. Although the independent union movement is now firmly established, with workers themselves playing the major role in organization, the contribution of students and academics in the early days is both historically significant and creates interesting possibilities for future joint action.

Other Philosophies of Union Organization

In Johannesburg, the South African Students Organisation (SASO) had also started to enter the field of worker organisation with the establishment of the Black Allied Workers' Union (BAWU). BAWU formed part of a broader plan by SASO to link black students with workers, under the overriding Black Consciousness philosophy (Kotze, 1975;184). Fisher (1977;347) ascribes the lack of success

of the Black Consciousness movement in organizing black workers to its failure to address the nature of the oppression of the proletariat. Black Consciousness was overwhelmingly a middle class movement and their ideology reflected this (ibid.;347). SASO lacked an awareness of the issues facing the average worker, and thus had very little influence amongst the working class(ibid.;331). Indeed, the basic aim of the Black Consciousness movement seemed often more that of "conscientising" workers, "making them aware of their potential", than developing worker organization (NUSAS,1980;45).

In 1971 the Urban Training Project(UTP) was founded in Johannesburg by a two former TUCSA officials who were dismissed owing to their commitment to organizing black workers (Maree,1986;361). The UTP was originally intended to be a service organization, assisting black workers, but by 1973 it had changed its avowed objectives to assisting directly in the development of independent trade unions (Maree,1986;362). Initially, the UTP depended largely on church assistance (see Maree,1986;362). A small number of unions, including former TUCSA member unions (who had been expelled on account of their black membership) affiliated to this project. From the unlikely source of a fairly conservative union federation a significant part of the independent union movement was to emerge. Of the nine original UTP unions, five formed the basis of what would eventually be CUSA, the remaining four, FOSATU (ibid.;30).

Meanwhile, a group of former trade union activists met in 1972 in a little-known (and still-born) attempt to revive SACTU (Webster, 1985; 132).

Increases in Unemployment

By 1971 unemployment had reached 12.8% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee, 1984; 12), an increase of almost 1% from 1970. This is reflected in figs. 11-12 (in the introduction). Conventional wisdom holds that increases in unemployment serve to discourage strike action. This would account for the slight drop in the total number of strikes from 1970. 7.1% of strikes ended in the dismissal of striking workers (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 37). This represents a substantial increase in the figure for the previous year. It is difficult to account for this fluctuation, but it may simply be explained by the continued uncertainty of employers as to what response to adopt to what was still a comparatively rare occurrence. The willingness of many employers to fire striking workers adds additional credence to the assertion that rising unemployment may have served to discourage workers from striking. However, the success of the advice bureaus demonstrates that unemployment would not serve to deter latent worker militancy. In fact, as borne out by the Schlemmer poll, it may only serve to increase the degree of latent deprivation present and thus fuel working class combativity.

The Strike of the Ovambo Migrants

In late 1971/early 1972, a major industrial dispute took place in Namibia. This was the strike of the Ovambo migrants. There seems to have been much evidence that Ovambo workers were very unhappy with the contract system, many going so far as to see it as a form of slavery (Voipio,1972;4). Despite this, most whites believed workers were happy with the system, the strike coming as a total surprise (ibid.;3). The first signs of dissatisfaction were manifested at Walvis Bay, where workers demanded an end to the contract system, or failing that, repatriation (Dekker et al,1975;228). News of the strike reached the Windhoek township of Katatura. Following a mass meeting, this led to a strike of 5500 workers (ibid.;228). Eventually over 13500 workers in twelve centres were on strike (ibid.;228). Large numbers of the strikers were repatriated. A strike committee elected by these workers managed to negotiate eventually some concessions from white employees and Bantu Department Officials (ibid.;229). One of the most interesting demands expressed was the persistent demand for repatriation, which later manifested itself in strikes on the South African mines. Whilst not in South Africa, it can be argued that the Ovambo strikes set a precedent in sustained collective action to be emulated by South African workers. In addition, the manner in which the dispute unfolded (and especially conspicuous riot police action) (ibid,;228), provided evidence of the

interlinking of political and economic (and specifically labour-related) factors in both countries.

Strike Triggers in 1971

The major causes of strike action 1971 are reflected in fig.7 (introduction). Four strikes were caused by "poor communication" during this year (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 39-41). This can once more be seen as the product of a complete lack of effective channels for workers to voice grievances. Whilst the "Human Relations" school of thought can be criticised for being over-simplistic, it seems that it does contain a germ of truth - poor communication and a lack of effective channels of communication can be a significant cause of industrial conflict. Ten strikes were caused by wages and 19 by wage related factors (ibid.; 39-41). Whilst the latter may be potentially a more far-reaching demand, it can also be seen as a "softer" demand, for workers to express, if they feared to ask directly for more wages. Twenty five strikes were caused by dissatisfaction with working conditions. Probably the high number of strikes in this category can be ascribed to similar causes as the wage related strikes. The Schlemmer survey indicates that the primary concern of workers during this year was strictly with wages. Eight strikes were caused by dismissals (ibid.; 39-41) and is indicative of latent working class solidarity despite a lack of representative trade union organization. By 1972, the total number of strikes taking place had increased to 71, not a significant increase over the total

figure for 1971 (NMC,1986; 107) (see fig.1).

Demands expressed by striking workers in 1972 were, in general, similar to those expressed in 1971 - a relatively high (by the standards of the 1980's) number of strikes caused by factors such as poor communication and wage-related issues (CSIR/NIPR,1983;45-7). Only in periods of unusually high working class militancy would demands shift to a more explicit and sophisticated level. This is reflected in fig.7 (introduction).

The PUTCO Strike

The June PUTCO bus drivers strike represents one of the most significant manifestations of strike action in 1972. PUTCO threatened to fire the striking drivers, and 300 were arrested by police, which resulted in the strike's end (Maree,1986;366). However, the Drivers' Action Committee then contacted the UTP (ibid.;366). This was to result in the formation of the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU). The action by police in arresting some of the strikers, indicated that the state viewed collective action by workers as a direct threat, despite the seemingly economic aims of the strike. All in all, 33 strikes took place in the PWV region in 1972 (NIPR/CSIR,1983;45-7). Thus, working class combativity in this region was not confined to transport workers. Owing to its

conspicuous nature, the PUTCO strike may well have encouraged workers to resort to similar action elsewhere.

Collective Action by Stevedores

In September 1971 African stevedores threatened to resort to strike action (SAIRR, 1972; 325). A wage increase was granted, but the Durban Stevedore's Labour Supply Company said that this was not as the result of the threatened action (ibid.; 325). However, in November the African stevedores did resort to strike action. Workers refused to elect spokesmen for fear of victimisation, with an apparent incident between workers and police taking place (ibid.; 325). Many workers returned after being threatened with dismissal (ibid.; 326). Whilst workers returned to work the following day, it nonetheless is unusual for the time on account of its magnitude. In addition, it seems to have represented a further symptom of the unusually high degree of working class combativity in that area, with 11 strikes in all taking place in 1972 (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 45-7). Dekker et al (1975; 221) see the dispute as a sign of "smouldering worker discontent", that was also expressed in the 1969 dockers' strike and eventually led to the 1973 strike wave. On the 24th of October Cape Town African and "coloured" stevedores instituted an effective overtime ban (SAIRR, 1972; 326). Interestingly, this dispute attracted some overseas attention with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) sending a telegram of protest to the South

African Prime Minister and calling on the United Nations to take up the dockers' case (ibid.;327). The wage board eventually recommended a 40% increase in stevedores wages(ibid.;327).

Real Wages vs. the Industrial Distribution of Strike Action

From 1970 to 1972 there was a slight overall increase in black real wages, from R745 to R801 p.a. (NMC,1979;45/ SA Reserve Bank,1974;12). In the two industrial sectors where comparable figures existed for the number of strikes taking place, miners and construction workers both experienced a slight increase in real wages: from R339 to R369 and from R914 to R1025, respectively. In the mining industry strikes began to rise by 1972, while in the construction strikes dropped significantly in 1971 and began to rise again in 1972 (see fig. 17). Little is known about these strikes and at this stage it is difficult to draw any conclusions.

Overall Trends in the Pre-1973 Period

In general, strikes in the 1971 period are characterized by the lack of a formal union presence, and the seemingly economic nature of demands. However, the Schlemmer survey indicated that workers already often ascribed their economic misfortunes to the Apartheid system. In itself, this system cast a political shadow on all disputes.

The period of inaction in the late 1960's was ended with the establishment of the first workers' advice bureau, benefit society and training project. However, strikes still tended to be short spontaneous affairs with little evidence of formal worker organization present. By 1972 this situation had changed somewhat, with several major instances of strike action taking place. At least one of these disputes led to the formation of a union. Nonetheless, there was to be a considerable lapse of time before the fledgling unions became firmly established.

As was the case with employers, the state seemed uncertain as to what response to adopt towards striking workers. However, it stepped in in the case of at least two major disputes - the strike of the Ovambo migrants in Namibia, and the PUTCO bus drivers' strike. Fear of state action discouraged the fledgling worker advice bureaux from taking up political issues. Nonetheless, there were indications of a latent working class consciousness and solidarity, which finally was to emerge in the Durban strikes of 1973. Furthermore, during the 1971-2 period the foundations were laid on which the independent union movement was built. Thus, this period is of import in that the first signs of what was to become an era of unprecedented resistance became evident. The fact that the establishment of the first independent unions would be soon followed by a wave of strike action seems to add credence to Cronin's (1979;17) assertion that "strikes tend

to come in clusters", paralleled by waves of unionization. In the "lull period" of 1970-2 most collective action seemed largely the result of short term economic stimuli, with little evidence of a broader political dynamic that was to become an integral part of many instances of collective action in the 1980s.

CHAPTER 3

The Crowded Years

1973-6

As can be seen from the previous chapters, the 1970-2 period was by no means tranquil in terms of either industrial conflict or wider social issues. However, a new era of opposition was ushered in by the Durban strikes of 1973. The following year was to see unprecedented increases in strike action on a country-wide basis. By 1975 the total number of strikes had decreased somewhat, a trend that was continued into 1976. However, the wider socio-political tumult of that year cast a shadow over both the nature of collective action at the workplace and on trade union organization.

The Course of the 1973 Durban Strike Wave

To many, the 1973 Durban strike wave came rather as a bolt of lightning on a clear day, a totally unexpected development. The first strike was to occur at the Coronation Brick and Tile factory. This strike affected a relatively large work-force and was, to a degree, successful. From this start, the strikes spread rapidly throughout the Durban district. Most notably hit was the FRAME group of companies, perceived by many workers to have extremely poor labour relations (SAIRR 1973a;226). In fact, the role of Mr. Philip Frame came under no little criticism from a range of quarters, most notably the English language press (Institute for Industrial Education [IIE],1974;18). Taken by surprise, many managers were quick to grant wage increases, resulting in the strikes being of comparatively short duration. The situation was further complicated by rumours of an impending transport boycott (Institute for Industrial Education, 1974; 16-

17). Police turned out in force on the morning the boycott was meant to take place, yet nothing occurred (ibid.;16-17). It can be argued that despite its failure to materialize, rumours of the boycott could have served to fuel worker militancy and popularize the idea of striking. The entire strike wave came to a halt when the Durban corporation threatened to dismiss all striking workers at its premises. The state's reaction was surprisingly muted. Although riot police were flown in from Pretoria and a strong police presence was visible in the townships, almost no violence occurred (Fisher,1977;329). Indeed, it seems that police hardly ever interfered in disputes (ibid.;329). Significantly, only 3% of strikes ended in dismissals during the entire year(CSIR/NIPR,1983;37). Arguably, this was the result of state and capital being confronted with a totally unexpected and almost unknown occurrence. This resulted in a greater willingness to compromise to some extent, the former in the 1973 proclamation (this permitted legal strikes by blacks, but only once a complex process had been exhausted), and the latter by granting limited wage increases. Of course, the lack of readily identifiable leaders made it hard for state and capital to take effective action. It would be far harder to fire an entire work-force than a few supposed "instigators". Likewise, as Dekker et al (1975;225) note, it would be virtually impossible to detain an entire work-force.

Nonetheless, the shock of the 1973 strike wave led to the state adopting a range of strategies from simple repression to attempts to develop more complex methods of control (see Chapter 8), all (as Sitas,[1983;382] notes) with the aim of disorganizing the unions. The government initially rejected the idea of extending union rights to blacks and instead attempted to revitalise the committee system by amending the 1953 act to introduce liaison committees and upgrade works committees (Maree & Budlender,1987;17). However, black workers opted for proper trade unions and tended to only use works committees as a temporary expedient to gain a presence on the shop floor, enhance their position and to protect the rights of black workers (ibid.;118).

All in all, 61 000 workers were involved in the Durban strike wave (Maree,1986;125). Clearly a major cause of worker grievances was economic deprivation. The 1974 Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) report argues that the central grievance of workers was low wages (1974;84). The lack of any effective negotiating mechanisms and the unwillingness of employers even to consider the needs of workers exacerbated the problem (ibid.;84). The fact that wages in the Durban region were slightly lower than in other major centres, does not appear, on its own to provide a sufficient explanation why the strike took place in Durban (ibid.;88). Other factors could have been present in the Durban area. However, once the first strikes took place, the sight of workers striking and the "general atmosphere of crisis" seems to have encouraged further workers to strike

(ibid.;100) - a concertina effect not unlike the chain of events during the 1971-2 Namibian strikes. Fisher (1977;344) argues that there was much dissatisfaction amongst workers with the apartheid system of discrimination, which had placed them in a most unfavourable position. However, workers had yet to "develop a detailed understanding of the relationship between the socio-political system and economic exploitation "(ibid.;344). Despite this, there was a "dim awareness" of the link between the wider socio-political reality and work-place struggles (ibid.).

Indeed 81% of the strike-hit firms paid the minimal wages of less than R50 a month, compared with the general figure of 67% of all firms located in the Durban-Pinetown area (Fisher,1977;355). In fact there had been a general decline or slowing of the rate of increase of real wages, owing to a rising inflation rate (see fig.16). In 1973 the rate of increase of Consumer Price Index had risen by some 2.7%, from just over 7.3% in 1972 to 10.0% in 1973 (SA Reserve Bank, 1974; 12).

The 1973 Durban Strikes and a Broader Political Inequality

It is important to note that in the South African context, an issue such as wages cannot be viewed in complete isolation. Basic social issues, such as housing assume far reaching political significance. Indeed, the housing issue became particularly significant after the Vorster government's use

of housing, and specifically its restrictions on constructing further units as a means of promoting a return to the bantustans (see Dekker et al, 1975; 210).

In general, demands expressed were strictly economic. Of all the strikes in 1973, 293 (by far the most) were ostensibly caused by either demands for better wages, or wage-related factors (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 39-41), as reflected by fig. 7 (in the introduction). Fisher makes the point that traditionally South African managers have viewed their prerogative as absolute (1977; 335). Consequently, wage demands may not only be economic, but also represent a challenge to far broader issues of control (ibid.; 355). Thousands of Durban workers had resorted to collective action, with (as can be seen by the above), high levels of solidarity. This in itself represented a political act, no matter what the demands expressed were, when the government's attitude towards strikes by blacks is borne in mind. In addition, striking Durban workers often drew up long lists of demands (probably including community issues) with wages (the reason cited in the DOM returns) simply being the one at the head of the list (ibid.). Thus, demands for higher wages may be simply one of many other demands, others of which could well have been more political. It seems likely that Fisher's assertion could well hold true not only for the Durban strikes, but also for many other instances of strike action in South Africa as well. The fact that wages may only be the first of many demands should always be borne in mind. Although wage demands were central to

the strikes, the IIE Report sees them as also being political - the large increases demanded (far larger than workers could hope to receive) demonstrated dissatisfaction with the status quo and the desire for a better society (IIE,1974;101).

Significantly, black unemployment declined by some 2.3% from 15.8% to 13.5% from 1972-3(Simkins, quoted in Bell and Padyachee, 1984;12)(Please refer to fig.7, in the introduction). Although the role of unemployment as a deterrent to striking in the South African context remains a complex one, conventional wisdom holds that declining unemployment will result in workers being more willing to risk their jobs by resorting to collective action. This could have been particularly the case with those Durban companies paying their workers less than R50/month.

In his survey of workers involved in the strikes, Mare (1975;21) notes that 98% of strikers surveyed said that they chose to strike from their own volition, and not as a result of pressure and/or intimidation from "instigators". Most of the strikes were of relatively short duration. Indeed, 70 % of strikers surveyed by Mare said that they ended their strike as soon as their wage demands were acceded to (1975;20). Clearly there was a strong underlying militancy, but it can be argued that workers lacked the basic resources to press for anything more than readily-realizable short-term demands.

The Unions and the Strikes

The established unions appear to have played little or no role in the disputes. Indeed, as Fisher (1977;343) points out, it would have been virtually impossible at the time for any trade union legally to organize a strike of black workers. Thus, any involvement by the unions (there was a limited role played by the new worker service organizations) would, of necessity, be post hoc (ibid.). In fact, the all-white Building Workers' Union blamed "the left" for permitting the situation to arise. Whilst other unions blamed employers (IIE, 1974;18), very little seems to have been done in the way of support. It appears that the decision to go on strike was reached independently by the workers themselves. It was far more viable for workers to adopt informal methods of collective organization, employing strategies such as "wildcat strikes" than to rely on the established unions (Fisher, 1977;347). It is clear that workers must have had some form of highly efficacious informal organization which, when combined with the high degree of relative deprivation, resulted in well organized "total strikes". In view of the limited coercive action taken by state and capital, it seems that a lack of formal organization could, at times, prove an asset. Workers had been very reluctant to elect spokesmen (Fisher, 1977;330). Indeed, workers seemed aware that requests by employers for "somebody to negotiate with" could simply be a ploy to identify activists who would then face dismissal (ibid.;330). However, the

ability to mount successful collective action would then largely depend on a high degree of latent working class combativity. There is no doubt that in most circumstances formal organization is advantageous, but the success of collective action without such organization demonstrates the limits of the state's coercive power. The Durban strikes had the effect of encouraging workers to formalise their organization and establish new structures. As noted in the following sections, several new worker organizations were established in the Durban region in the aftermath of the strikes.

Buthelezi and the Strike Wave

Equally unclear is the role some have argued Buthelezi played in the strike wave. Today, many South Africans identify both the man and Inkhata with the status quo. However, in 1973 Buthelezi had yet to break with the ANC, or indeed the independent unions. The break with both these movements only came in the late 1970's. Buthelezi has argued that the split with the independent unions came when FOSATU failed to invite him to the launch of their Northern Natal branch (see Green, 1986b; 74). He was, in fact, invited, and a more likely explanation seems to be that it followed Buthelezi's sacking of the pro-union Councillor, Barney Dladla, who had gained great popularity amongst Zulu workers and could have thus posed some threat to Buthelezi's leadership (Maree, 1986; 349-350). In 1973 many employers viewed him as being the chief instigator of the strikes, despite the fact that he was

visiting the United States at the time the strikes occurred (Mare,1975;24). Despite the fact that many of the intellegentsia viewed him with suspicion, Fisher (1977;332) argues that Buthelezi enjoyed much worker support at the time, and his anti-government stance could have served to strengthen the resolve of striking workers. However, such support must have been rather tenuous if the results of a 1975 survey by Webster (1979;24) are anything to go by - when members of three different trade unions (then Natal-based) CWIU,MAWU, and NUTW, were interviewed only 1% saw increased ties with KwaZulu as being of value in making worker organization more effective. On dubious ground, the SAIRR report into the strikes (SAIRR,1980; 226) argues that factors which could have caused the strikes include the homogeneous composition of the Zulu work-force and the coronation of King Goodwill. The latter, it is argued, caused an upturn in Zulu nationalism. However, Zulu nationalism is an intrinsically conservative force, whilst even in 1973 King Goodwill was generally perceived to be highly conservative (more so than Buthelezi). Despite this Buthelezi did not publicly oppose the strike wave. Arguably, at the time his silence could have been taken as tacit approval. (In 1973, many, including the ANC,perceived Buthelezi to be less pro-establishment than he is believed to be today.)

Indian Workers and the Strike Wave

Also of interest is the role that was played by Indian workers during the strikes. Most of the literature on the Durban strike wave describes it as a primarily black phenomenon. However, 1973 is characterized by an unusually high percentage of Indian workers taking part in strike action. In 1973 40 per 1000 "Asian" workers struck, whilst none did so in 1972 (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 18-25). In comparison 31 per 1000 blacks struck during 1973 (Ibid.; 18-19). As the centre of strike action during this year was the Durban-Pinetown region (168 out of 369 [ibid; 45-7]), the area where most Asian South Africans reside, it seems fair to assume that there was a high degree of solidarity across racial barriers during the 1973 Durban strike wave. The 1974 IIE report (1974; 19) points out that many Indian workers seem to have joined the Durban Corporation strike. In addition, in a poll conducted at the time, most Indian workers supported the idea of non-racial unionism (IIE, 1974; 64). It could be argued that the success enjoyed by black workers during the initial strikes had the effect of encouraging Asian workers elsewhere in the district to resort to similar action.

Major Unions Founded

All in all, 229 281 work-days were lost through strike action in 1973, whilst an average of 267 workers were involved per strike (NMC, 1979; 46). This represents a substantial increase over

figures for the previous year, which can be taken as a reflection of the high degree of worker solidarity which exhibited itself during the Durban strike wave. This year is also significant in that it saw the emergence of the first independent unions, MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers Union) in May, and NUTW (National Union of Textile Workers) and CWIU (Chemical Workers' Industrial Union) in October. MAWU was founded in Durban and may best be seen as the result of an increased consciousness (and arguably politicization) amongst workers. There is little doubt that there was a considerable rise in working class militancy in Durban as a result of the strike wave (see Maree, 1986; 144). This resulted in the Durban region leading the rest of the country in the establishment of independent worker organizations. Thus, the long-term effects of the 1973 Durban strikes on wider power relations within society (see Chapter 8) were considerable. This adds credence to the argument that strike action in itself may serve to increase worker consciousness and politicization (see, for example, Dekker et al [1975; 231] on the 1972 Namibian strikes). The formation of these new unions soon resulted in the need for a co-ordinating body (NUSAS, 1980; 26). This led to the formation of the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC). TUACC would eventually form the core of the Federation of South African Unions (FOSATU). Meanwhile, UTP associated unions such as the recently-emerged SFAWU (Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union), EAWU (Engineering and Allied Workers Union) and PWAU (Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union) formed the

Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions(CCOBTU). CCOBTU was strongly committed to black leadership in the independent union movement, and had a general political orientation towards the Black Consciousness movement (NUSAS,1980;32).

As can be seen by the above, 1973 saw not only a resurgence of strike action, but also the re-emergence of independent trade unions, against a backdrop of growing political and economic discontent. The role, nature and causes of strike action in 1974 will now be assessed.

General Trends in Strike Action in 1974

Altogether, 387 strikes occurred on a country-wide basis in 1974 (NMC,1979;46), which represents an increase from 1973 (please refer to fig. 1 in the introduction). The PWV region emerged as the most strike prone area in the country, reflected in fig.9 of the introduction (CSIR/NIPR,1983;45-7), hardly surprising if the degree of industrial concentration in this area is borne in mind. A mini - strike wave broke out on the Reef in July, affecting 14 firms, with approximately 5000 workers being involved (Hudson,1974;45). Although there is very little material on what actually took place, the strikes were largely blamed on "agitators" (ibid.;45). What is clear is that they were of comparatively short duration, owing to a lack of resources, or indeed effective union organization (ibid.;45).

The East London region and the Durban/Pinetown district remained important centres of industrial conflict(see fig.9). A second strike wave took place in East London in July-August, involving at least 21 firms (Mare,1974;26). The basic demand expressed by most of the striking workers was for more wages, which were extremely low in the region owing to the government's policy of decentralization (ibid.;26). There was considerable intervention in the disputes by both police and bantustan leaders (ibid.;26). Although the latter were less rabidly opposed to collective action by workers than would later become the case, already their role had become highly problematic(ibid.;26). Despite the greater number of strikes country-wide they were of far shorter duration, with only 98 583 work-days being lost (NMC,1979;46). In addition, strikes involved fewer workers on average (153 per strike [ibid.;46]).

A Rising Consciousness:The Changing Nature of Worker Demands

Significantly, 5 % of strikes ended in dismissals of workers (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37), almost twice as many as in 1973. This could be owing to strikes affecting more smaller enterprises in 1974, where managers would be more likely to adopt a harder line. This would also explain why fewer workers were involved per strike and the shorter duration of strikes on average (see NMC,1979;46). An alternate explanation for the latter two factors could be that a

lower degree of working class militancy was manifest on a country-wide basis when compared to the Durban-Pinetown micro-climate of 1973. The primary cause of strikes in 1974 remained wages and wage-related factors (approximately 194 and 97 respectively [CSIR/NIPR,1983;39-41]) (see fig.7 in the introduction).

Indeed, it is significant that proportionately more strikes were caused by wage related than purely wage issues than was the case in 1973. This could reflect a growing sophistication in demands, especially when the fact that 22 (ibid.;39-41) strikes were caused by dismissals (essentially a "solidarity" factor) is borne in mind, possibly a reflection of growing organization at the workplace. This represents a more than two-fold increase over 1973. Several industrial disputes showed further evidence of of an underlying militancy, combined with a surprising degree of solidarity. For example, an overtime ban by Cape Town stevedores was highly effective, despite the difficulty of organizing collective action of such a nature (Maree,1975;59). Indeed, workers interviewed by Maree voiced a strong commitment to the ban, with one worker seeing such co-operation as being a prelude to co-operation on a far bigger scale (ibid.;60). The dispute was marked by security police intervention and a number of "ring leaders" were arrested (ibid.;63). The dispute was eventually resolved through a change in the working hours of shift workers (ibid.;62-3). The relative success of the action demonstrated the potential of collective action, but at the same time demonstrated

that the state viewed collective action at the workplace in the same light as wider socio-political resistance. Indeed, it was becoming clear that a definite linkage existed between the two. This would have definite consequences in shifting worker demands away from purely economic issues onto a more sophisticated level. The actual material conditions of black workers and their struggle for betterment remained inherently linked to wider political issues. It seems evident that the state would view any large protest action by black workers in a most serious light.

Real wages in the non-agricultural sector generally rose in 1974 (see fig 16). In the two sectors of industry where comparable detailed figures of strike totals were available, construction and mining, real wages increased from R1089 to R1135 and from R442 to R618 respectively (NMC,1979;45/ SA Reserve Bank,1977;12). Please refer to figs. 16 &17. The most likely reason for the mining houses' decision would be changes in recruiting policy (see introduction section c.). Nonetheless, fears of rising worker discontent (see subsequent section dealing with conflict on the mines) could have helped prompt the decision.

A number of politically significant events occurred in 1974. For example, Mozambique and Angola achieved independence which seems to have had some effect in increasing black political consciousness (Kirkwood,1975;4-10). Meanwhile, there was an

increase in state repression, with several prominent Durban trade unionists being arrested and then barred from engaging in future union activity. Despite this, the evolution of the new, independent unions continued apace, against a backdrop of growing black political consciousness. However, as we have seen, many of the demands expressed by strikers continued to be primarily economic in focus. Indeed, factors such as increased inflation (the rate of increase in the Consumer Price Index increased to 14.1% {SA Reserve Bank, 1977;1}) alone have accounted for the increased numbers of strikes. Clearly, however, the political variable continued to have significance in determining the nature of industrial conflict.

Declining Strikes yet Renewed Challenges

Standing between the "rolling" strikes of 1973 and the tumultuous events of 1976, 1975 has been rather overlooked by those studying industrial conflict in South Africa. In fact, a new era of labour relations was being ushered in, with renewed challenges by the mine workers. To many, the gold mines form the foundations on which the entire apartheid edifice was constructed. It was originally to ensure cheap and regular labour supplies for the mines that the entire bantustan system was established.

Conflict on the Mines

As noted in previous chapters, there had been a substantial rise in violent conflict, ostensibly "faction fighting" on the mines in the early 1970's. This growing conflict was the subject of a substantive article by the labour editor of the Financial Mail (quoted in Kirkwood, 1975; p30). In interviews conducted with mine workers, a frequent complaint expressed was the complete lack of any effective channel for articulating basic grievances (ibid.; 30), let alone any power to change them. These grievances could include a wide range of areas, from poor food, to a lack of any means of political expression. Seemingly irrational violence and destruction of property was the only means many miners had of drawing attention to their plight.

Significantly, many miners interviewed argued that mine managers often ascribed any form of violence to "faction fighting", in an attempt to draw attention away from any range of grievances miners may have had (ibid.; 30). This adds credence to McNamara's (1985; 186) argument that crudely racially-orientated explanations were often advanced to explain any resistance or conflict on the mines. Kirkwood (1975; 32) argues that the mine disturbances of January 1975 ushered in a "new age of struggle". Significantly, strikes on the mines during this month crossed tribal barriers. Indeed, as Kirkwood (ibid; 32) notes, reports suggests that militant Basotho miners attempted to use

force to ensure cross-tribal solidarity. The resultant conflicts were described by mine management as "faction fights", in this context rather a misnomer. Owing to the nature of the compound system, with segregation on tribal lines, it would be extremely difficult to organize unified strike action across tribal barriers (Sitas & Joakamides, 1979b;18). Although a far cry from the European mining village, the compounds have many of the characteristics of closed communities in the sociological sense of the word. Segregation on a tribal basis had resulted in groups of miners developing different sets of norms, attitudes and values. Some groups of miners appear to be more militant than others, a good example being the Basothos. Thus, it seems that the Kerr-Siegel thesis (see Kerr, 1964;80-189) is not universally applicable. Miners from different ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Xhosas) seem to have been less militant, although subjected to the same compound system.

A broader perspective seems necessary here. It is essential to bear in mind the sending country/district. Workers from the Transkei, subject to a highly repressive government, may have been more reluctant to challenge the system and be seen as "troublemakers" than workers from the more enlightened Frontline States. Interestingly, workers from some regions seem to have had little incentive to stay on the mines and a frequent demand expressed by workers after protracted instances of conflict was repatriation (McNamara, 1985;206). Similar demands were expressed by the 1972 Owambo workers striking in Namibia.

Although attempts to organize workers across tribal lines were not always successful (the militant Basotho miners were opposed by other, less militant, miners from other ethnic groups), there are several instances of successful cross-tribal solidarity. For example, the Lorraine/ Harmony/ Merriespruit strikes seemed to involve miners recruited in a wide range of different regions (ibid.;34). Arguably, these early instances of cross tribal solidarity paved the way for the future National Union of Mine workers.

In addition to the above-mentioned strikes, abnormal levels of violence continued to be exhibited in many of the mining compounds. Kirkwood (ibid.;35) argues that this was but a reflection of the powerlessness felt by the average miner. Significantly, the Financial Mail report (quoted in Kirkwood,1975;30-35) argues that the continued restlessness on the mines was partly a response to broader political developments. These included the rise of the Black Consciousness movement, and the independence of Mozambique and Angola. Meanwhile, the Durban strikes had demonstrated the efficacy of strike action(ibid.30-35). Thus, for the first time in many years miners began to view the weapon of strike action as a means of articulating their grievances.

In their study of conflict on the mines Sitas and Joakamides

(1979b;9) evaluate the abnormally high levels of violence present. This violence assumed a variety of forms from "faction fighting" to destruction of property. It has been argued that the violence was not only the product of an absence of unions (which would limit the manner in which workers could voice their grievances), but also the result of the high degree of violence inherent in the system of control (ibid.;9). At the centre of this system lies the compound, and endemic to the compound is autocratic control (ibid.;13). As McNamara (1985;206) notes, much conflict revolved around issues of scarce resources (usually issues such as access to women, liquor, and gambling). The fact that such resources could be a major source of conflict should be seen as an inevitable product of the entire system of control. Although the demand most commonly expressed by striking workers was for higher wages, it was common in the resultant violence for symbols of the system of control (such as beer halls and "acclimatization chambers") to be attacked (Sitas and Joakamides, 1979b;14). Consequently, it seems evident that wage demands were but the articulation of discontent with the entire system of control. This ties in with Fisher's (1977) previously-noted assertion that wage demands cannot be simply dismissed as economic. Indeed, wage demands and an underlying desire for far-reaching political change may be interrelated.

Overall Trends in Strike Action in 1975

Despite these growing stirrings on the mines, the total number of strikes during this year, 274 (NMC,1986;32), represents a substantial decline from the figure of the previous year (see fig.1 in the introduction). This could have partially been a result of an increase in the unemployment rate of blacks to 13.8%(Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee,1984;15). This is depicted in figs. 11-12. Arguably, increases in unemployment could have resulted in workers concentrating their attention on consolidating their gains, rather than risking their employment in a situation of economic decline. Far fewer workers were involved per strike (85.06 on average) and only 18 709 man-days were lost owing to strike action (NMC,1979;46).

Fewer strikes resulted in the firing of strikers. This figure now stood at 4% (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37), possibly an indication that employers were becoming more used to strike action on a country-wide basis, and were therefore prepared to adopt a more pragmatic approach than was the case in 1974. Nonetheless, as noted above, increased unemployment could have provided a disincentive to strike action, as could declining inflation. The Consumer Price Index's rate of increase now stood at just under 13.5% (SA Reserve Bank 1977;13), reflected in figs.3-4, in the introduction.

Regional variations are depicted in fig.9. As can be seen, PWV/Southern Transvaal region emerged as the most strike prone

area in 1975, with a total of approximately 122 strikes occurring (CSIR/NIPR,1983;45-47). This was followed by the Durban Pinetown region, with a total of 63 (ibid.;45-7). It can be seen that proportionately far fewer strikes occurred in the Durban/Pinetown region when compared to previous years. Possibly the relatively high figures for 1974 were the result of the legacy of the 1973 strike wave, which had somewhat dimmed by 1975.

Interestingly, at least 77 strikes were caused by disputes over working conditions (ibid.;39-41), country-wide, representing an increase from the previous year. Working conditions is in some ways a more sophisticated demand than wages, and demonstrates that workers were now seeking to improve their position in a wide range of areas. However, the ravages of inflation alone would ensure that wages remained high on the bargaining agenda (please refer to fig.7). Black real wages in the non-agricultural sector increased in 1975 (refer to fig 16) to R1098 p.a. (NMC,1979;45/SA Reserve Bank 1977;13). It was in the mining sector that the most significant increase took place, from R618 to R1098 p.a. (CSO;1976). The number of mining strikes increased significantly (see fig.17). However, as a proportion of the total number of strikes taking place the figure remained small. Nonetheless, the strikes could have further motivated the Chamber of Mines to grant wage increases.

Setbacks for the Independent Unions

By 1976, the organization of the independent trade unions had proceeded apace. However, they were still extremely vulnerable. For example, at the Heinemann strike of March of that year, MAWU suffered a major setback. MAWU had attempted to challenge the liaison committee system at Heinemann by organizing a boycott thereof. This led to an apparent lockout, and police intervened, baton charging workers (see MAWU,1977;49-59). Workers gathered at the factory gates, but began to disperse peacefully when instructed to do so by police (Maree,1986;476). Nonetheless, they were then attacked by baton and pick wielding policemen (ibid.;477). MAWU officials were then arrested and charged with inciting a strike and obstructing the police (MAWU,1977;49-59). Eventually, the officials were found not guilty on appeal, and MAWU workers won R20 000 in an assault case against the Minister of Justice (Webster,1985;141). However, at a time of high unemployment trade union members were in an extremely vulnerable position making it easy to victimise workers identified with the trade union (see Webster,1985;143). As a result of the dispute MAWU's organization at the plant was effectively destroyed.

A few months later, South Africa's first legal strike by black workers took place at Armourplate. Here management seemed to have had adopted a very hard line policy towards the unions. The Glass and Allied Workers' Union claimed that management's attitude made

it hard "to organize" both on the shop floor and at Works Committee level (1977;61). Finally, three workers were fired without consultation, one of the fired being a works committee member (ibid.;61). The union began the cumbersome procedure for instituting a legal strike. When the required 30 days "cooling off period" had elapsed, the strike began. Despite the strikes legality, workers were dismissed, with a Bantu Labour Official claiming they had deserted (ibid.;64). The union then attempted picketing action, but workers were promptly arrested under the Riotous Assemblies Act (ibid.;65). They were rushed before a magistrate and quickly sentenced (Maree,1986;439). However, the convictions were then set aside on Appeal on the grounds that they had not received a fair trial (ibid.;439). In addition security police intervened, interrogating groups of workers (ibid.;439). The fact that workers were vulnerable to both instant dismissal and police action demonstrates the total inadequacy of the pre-Wiehahn industrial relations legislation.

The Soweto Uprising

On June 16th 1976, police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrating school pupils, providing the spark that ignited the 1976 Soweto uprising. Twenty thousand schoolchildren had marched in protest against the government's decision to introduce Afrikaans medium instruction into Soweto schools (Kane-Berman,1978;1). This was the result of a decision made three days earlier at the launch of the Soweto Students' Representative

Council(SSRC), on June 13th, to hold a demonstration against proposed changes in the education system (Lodge,1983;328). Following the shootings the revolt spread to the black townships in Pretoria and on the East Rand. The first stage of the revolt was a class boycott, with sporadic incidents of arson (ibid.;329). This was followed by a series of stayaways. These developments were to have severe economic repercussions, including a decline in investment, especially by foreign firms. Unemployment climbed to 15% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee,1984;13). It can be argued that this was responsible for the decline in the total number of strikes to 245 (NMC,1979;46) (see fig. 1). A further factor which could explain the decline in the total number of strikes is that the Consumer Price Index rate declined to 11.1% (SA Reserve Bank 1977;13). This is depicted in figs.2-4 (introduction). The decline could have had the effect of removing some of the immediate pressure on workers to seek wage increases. A third factor which could be responsible for the drop in the number of strikes could be the effects of the widespread social unrest in the second half of the year. It could be argued that much of the underlying discontent which would have found expression at the workplace was channelled elsewhere. In addition, workers may have been reluctant to resort to collective action in view of rapidly escalating repressive action by the state.

Five percent of strikes ended in the dismissal of strikers, up

from 4% in 1975 (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37). This could be partially the result of some employers adopting a harder line towards strikers as a result of the growing political turmoil in society, albeit that the increase in firings was fairly limited on a country-wide basis.

A number of explanations have been advanced for the uprising. Kane-Berman (1978;14-16) from a liberal perspective ascribes the revolt to a combination of dissatisfaction with the educational system and the system of influx control, as well as heavy-handed police action. He sees the rise of the Black Consciousness ideology as one of the major causes of the "growing assertiveness" amongst black schoolchildren which led them to take collective action (ibid.;103). Brickhill and Brooks (quoted in Lodge,1983;331) see the revolt as largely the result of increased pressures being placed on the black educational system as a result of the shortage of skilled labour. They play down the role of Black Consciousness and suggest that increased ANC activity may have played a role in fuelling militancy (ibid.;331). Even more critical of Black Consciousness is Hirson (1979;142-3). Instead, he sees rising working class militancy as playing a key role. This would directly affect schoolchildren faced with the prospect of structural unemployment. Working class self-confidence was boosted by both the 1973 strike wave and by events in Angola (ibid.;142-3). However, the lack of concrete ties between township and worker organization precluded the success of

the Soweto uprising (ibid.;142-3).

Probably the most convincing explanation would be a combination of the causes listed above. While the educational system clearly provided the necessary stimulus, the underlying causes were far more complex. These should be seen as including a general rise in militancy, reflected by the rise of Black Consciousness, ANC activity and possibly the growth of worker organization. As Hirson (see ibid.;142-3) notes, the lack of co-operation between organizations helped government suppress the revolt. Hirson (ibid;142-3) suggests that the increased militancy should be seen as the result of events such as the 1973 Durban strike wave, but economic pressures should also be borne in mind, including the struggle for improved material conditions, itself the inevitable result of the government's bantustan policy (see Bonner,1987;56). Conventional industrial relations theory fails to take account of either such a possibility, or how a political uprising could directly affect the trade union movement, even if unions have ties with political organizations.

Struggles over Wages

During 1976 102 strikes occurred over wages (CSIR/NIPR,1983; 39-41), a small increase over the previous year. Further increases would largely have to be won through work-place struggles. It is

interesting to note that the number of strikes over dismissals increased to 25(ibid.). This, and the rise of sympathy strikes, can be seen as the result of increased working class militancy and solidarity, itself a result of wider political developments during this year.

The Stayaways of 1976

During this period SASO attempted to extend its influence from that over students into mobilizing workers to participate in work stoppages. The 4-6 August stayaway on the Reef resulted 50-60% of workers not going to work (Kane-Berman, 1978; 112). The stayaway was enforced by students, who set up roadblocks and stoned buses and taxis (ibid.; 112). This sparked off a conservative reaction in Alexandra, where factory workers attacked a crowd of youths (ibid.; 112). Realizing their mistake, students employed more peaceful methods of persuasion in obtaining support for a subsequent stayaway on the Reef between the 23rd and 25th August. Nonetheless, some groupings of hostel dwellers went on the rampage, and attacked crowds of youths. Allegedly, the police were responsible for inciting them (ibid.; 113). A third stayaway, took place between 13-15 September. Students organizing the stayaway stressed the need for peaceful co-operation by all sectors in the community, including migrants (ibid.; 114). The stayaway seems to have been widely observed by all sectors of the community (ibid.; 114). The police response was to employ the old

tactic (employed as early as 1911) of going house to house and questioning or arresting those who had not gone to work.

The 1976 stayaways were not confined to the Reef. In Cape Town a stayaway took place on the 16-17th September, following the spread of "unrest" to that centre. This stayaway seems to have enjoyed the support of +/-50% of workers in Cape Town (SAIRR, 1978; 86). A further stayaway on the Reef was called in November 1976. This stayaway was generally unsuccessful and can probably be ascribed to threats of a hardline response by many employers (ibid.; 115). However, it was observed by 100% of black matriculants in the Soweto/Katlehong area (SAIRR, 1978; 26-27). In December, students called for a two-day stayaway in Cape Town. This was unsuccessful and led to much violence between students and migrants (Kane-Berman, 1978; 130). There were persistent allegations that police prevented householders from defending their homes against attacks by migrants (ibid.; 131). Two reports detailing this were published, but both were subsequently banned, along with the author of one, the Rev. David Russell (ibid.; 131). This conservative reaction has some interesting parallels to the "unrest" of the 1980s, during which frequent clashes took place between conservative elements (such as the notorious "witdoeke") and more left wing groupings.

Setbacks for Unions yet Rising Militancy

In November, a number of prominent trade unionists were banned (Bonner, 1983; 16). This had the effect of weakening the independent union movement. However, all was not totally bleak. As noted earlier, there were indications of greater worker solidarity during this year. Although fewer strikes took place than was the case in 1975, they involved far greater numbers of workers (28 013 [NMC, 1979; 46]). Many more worker-days were lost, all in all 59 861 (ibid.; 46). An average of 114 (ibid.; 46) workers participated per strike, again a substantial increase over the previous year. Thus, it appears that the political unrest of the year, whilst proving detrimental to union organization, had the benefit of building working class solidarity.

Once again, the PWV was the centre of strike activity, with a total of 114 (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 45-47) strikes occurring. This is reflected in fig. 9 (in the introduction). Although this can be partially explained by the degree of industrial concentration in that area, it is important that the political context be borne in mind. This region was the epicentre of the 1976 uprising. Many workers had been mobilized into resorting to collective action in the form of stayaways. Given a graphic example of the strength of the major weapon they had at their disposal, the ability to withdraw their labour power, they would clearly be encouraged to

employ it again, even if only for more mundane demands.

Real wages for blacks increased slightly, as can be seen from fig. 16. Likewise, only a small change in the number of strikes in the chosen sectors took place (see fig. 17). In the mining sector the total number of strikes taking place increased only slightly (see fig. 17).

Overall Trends in the 1973-6 Period

During the 1973-4 period, the number of strikes taking place had increased dramatically. This increase was partly a response to economic factors, such as declining unemployment and rising inflation. However, it is also important to note the rise in general political consciousness during this period, with strike action being often the only vehicle available for voicing a wide range of grievances. Thus, although strikes for higher wages may appear economistic in orientation, they may simply represent the articulation of a plethora of grievances. Although there appears to have been little role played by trade unions in organizing the Durban strikes, the stoppages were characterized by a high degree of working class solidarity. This represented a sound foundation on which the independent unions could be built. While less spectacular than the 1973 Durban strike wave, strikes in 1974 are significant in their broader geographical distribution., the seemingly greater sophistication of demands,

and the fact that they occurred against a backdrop of rising political consciousness.

It appears evident that despite a decline in total strike figures for 1975 and 1976, from the peaks of 1973 and 1974, these years remain of extreme significance. This is particularly so if the effects of wider political developments are borne in mind. In 1975, continued dissatisfaction on the mines led to outbreaks of strike action. These strikes are important, in that they involved workers drawn from a wide range of regional/ethnic backgrounds, paving the way for a single, united mine workers union. Also, it became clear that much of the violence endemic to the compound system represented the response to a complete lack of effective channels for voicing a wide range of grievances.

Events in 1976 are rather overshadowed by the repercussions of the Soweto uprising. As noted above, it seems as if there was a general rise in workers' solidarity during this year, a solidarity inculcated by events in the townships. 1976 is also significant in the emergence of stayaways as a means of voicing protest of a specifically political nature. However, the failure of the November Reef stay-away is indicative of the need for a democratic decision making process, based on the shop floor. As workers were not consulted in November, they felt little inclination to risk their jobs by staying away for a longer

period than was the case in August and September. Thus it became clear that organizational democracy lay at the root of successful collective action. However, on the whole 1976 should be viewed as a bad year for the independent unions. The political disturbances weakened organization, several major strikes (such as the Heinemann and Armorplate disputes) ended in defeat, and the November bannings were the start of a fresh wave of repression. Only in 1980 would the unions have fully recovered from the damage suffered in 1976.

Although demands expressed by striking workers throughout the 1973-6 period may on the surface seem economic, it is clear that they often represented a more far-reaching dissatisfaction with many aspects of the status quo. From the 1973 Durban strike wave to the rising unrest on the mines, many workers sought not only short term betterment of their economic plight, but also more far-reaching political change. Incidents such as the rising conflict on the mines had in themselves intensely political consequences, owing to the close relationship between the control of mine labour and the origins of the entire apartheid edifice. Even more overtly political was the emergence of political stayaways in 1976 - workers withdrawing their labour power as a means of registering political protest. Thus it is clear that the nature of strike action in the 1973-6 period had become increasingly affected by political factors.

CHAPTER 4

Reform and Repression

1977-9

By the late 1970's it had become increasingly clear that the momentous events of 1976 had irrevocably changed the entire South African socio-political scenario, with far-reaching repercussions into all aspects of South African life. Major changes were to take place in state policy towards trade unions for blacks. The reforms of 1979 and the legacy of the revolt of 1976 would change the nature of collective action at the workplace irrevocably.

Declining Strike Totals

Altogether, 91 strikes took place in 1977 (see fig.1), involving an average of 168 workers per strike (DOM;1985), being a decrease over the previous year's figures. Bonner (1980;189) argues that the decline in strike totals was the result of the ongoing economic depression, which resulted in workers being extremely reluctant to risk their employment. Indeed, unemployment increased to 17% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee,1984;12). This increase is depicted in figs.11-12. According to conventional wisdom, unemployment serves as a deterrent to strike action. However, it is important to note that a further deterrent existed in the form of the massive increase in state-directed repression that followed the 1976 Soweto uprising. As Hyman (1981;13) notes, the suppression of protest may simply redirect the underlying latent resistance into a different direction. It can be argued that an alternative effect may be simply to defer

much of the protest to a later date, in the case of strike action to the post-1980 period. Likewise, political "unrest" would only re-emerge in the mid-1980s, albeit on an even larger scale than was the case in 1976. Thus, the state's repression of protest in both workplace and township would only result in a greater future challenge, in which the common ground between political factors and strike action would become increasingly apparent.

Cronin's (1979;17) argument that strike action is cyclical may go a long way towards explaining the drop in strike totals during this period. Cronin (ibid.) argues that strikes tend to come in clusters, which he sees as being linked to waves of unionization. This could explain why strikes declined in periods where unions were weakened by state repression - in other words the nature and frequency of strike action being directly affected by state action, further demonstrating the linkage between industrial conflict and political variables. State action in November 1976 against the independent unions had reached unprecedented heights (Maree,1987;5). This resulted in worker organization being severely damaged and necessitated a period of reconstruction (ibid.;5).

All in all, 15 471 man days were lost owing to strike action during 1977 (NMC,1979;46). Interestingly, the average South African strike continued to be of relatively short duration, when compared to those of Western Europe. As can be seen from fig 16,

there was only marginal increases in real wages in the mining and construction sectors, with a dramatic drop in strike totals in both such sectors. The lack of serious worker resistance would remove one of the reasons for increasing real wages.

Reconstruction of Union Organization

Significantly, although the total number of strikes for 1977 represents a significant decrease over the previous years figures (see fig.1), the independent unions had survived the setbacks of 1976 and commenced their reconstruction, laying the foundations for the challenge of the 1980's. The mounting economic recession had exacerbated the problems the independent unions faced following the arrest and/or banning of several prominent trade unionists (Bonner,1983;16). No less than 24 trade union activists were banned, including proven leaders in the Western Cape, Natal and on the Reef (Maree,1986;119). This would prove damaging to those unions which lacked internally democratic structures. Already by late 1974 it had become clear to the TUACC unions that there was more to effective action than simply signing on members - there was a need for organizational growth to be balanced by a sound base on the shopfloor (Maree,1986;590). This resulted in the unions generally adopting a defensive posture and retreating into their strongest factories in order to consolidate their gains (Bonner,1983;16). Many workers still only belonged to TUCSA unions. For example, in the Cape Peninsula (albeit an area where

TUCSA was fairly strong), they accounted for 54% of unionised workers (Hendrie & Horner, 1977;23).

A total of 40 strikes took place in the PWV region (CSIR/NIPR, 1983;45-7). Thus, this area remained the centre of strike action in the country. Nineteen strikes took place in the Durban/Pinetown district (ibid.;45-7). Although this represents a decline over figures for the previous year, a significant proportion of the overall number of strikes continued to take place in this area. This can be ascribed not only to the degree of industrial concentration in this area, but also to an apparently significant degree of working class combativity. This combativity first became fully apparent with the 1973 strike wave. Six strikes took place in the East London region (ibid.;45-7), again a proportionately fairly significant figure. This is especially so when the far lesser degree of industrial concentration in this area, when compared to, say, Cape Town, or even the adjoining Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage district (where no strikes occurred during this year). This can be seen as but a further reflection of the long tradition of political militancy existent in the East London district. This trend was to continue into the following year, with 14 strikes taking place in this district (ibid.;45-7). These trends are reflected in fig.9.

Strike Triggers and Worker Perceptions

The relative importance of the main strike triggers are depicted

in fig. 7 of the introduction. Altogether 29 strikes were over wages (ibid;39-41), more than one third of the total number of strikes for the year. This indicates that basic economic factors remained of crucial import. Meanwhile, 24 strikes were caused by wage related factors (ibid.;39-41). As noted earlier, it can be argued that wage related factors can represent a more sophisticated long-term demand, when compared to purely wage demands. As the Tillys (1981;328) note, changes in conditions may simply change the form of contention, without eliminating the underlying conflict per se. This would explain the rise of wage demands, while accounting for the continued high degree of dissatisfaction with all aspects of the existing relations of power in the broader socio-political context. Six strikes were caused by "dismissals" (CSIR/NIPR,1983;39-41), an indication that working class solidarity had not been weakened by the post-1976 repression.

It is interesting to compare these apparent causes ascribed for strikes with Graaff and Maree's (Graaff,1977;87) survey of worker grievances in a non industrial dispute situation. In their sample, 77 % of the 211 workers interviewed complained about low wages, and 43 % about wage related grievances. Thus, it appears that a far greater proportion of workers were dissatisfied with wages, as averse to wage related factors, than is reflected in the actual figures for strike action. This serves to back up the above assertion that although potentially a more sophisticated

demand, wage related factors may be used by workers seeking a "softer" demand, less likely to bring on retaliatory action by either employers or the apartheid state. According to Graaff (ibid.;87), 39% of workers surveyed were dissatisfied with their basic relations with management. This does not appear surprising, in view of the near-total lack of adequate channels other than strike action for voicing grievances. 10% were unhappy with living conditions in the townships and blamed management for this (ibid.;87). This demonstrates that already a significant proportion of workers were linking political inequality with workplace issues. Indeed, it can be argued that significant numbers of strikes during this period could well be the end product of a broad dissatisfaction with all aspects of the political status quo.

Rising Unemployment and Strikes

By 1978, the total number of strikes per month began to increase again, with a total number of 107 being recorded for the year (DOM;1985). This rise in strike action came despite an increase in the unemployment rate to 19.9% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee, 1984;12). This rise in unemployment vis-a-vis strikes is depicted in figs.11-12. It was becoming clear that unemployment was structural, partially brought about by the very nature of the South African state and exacerbated by discriminatory legislation such as the colour bar laws

(SALB,1978;1-2). Rising unemployment resulted in many Africans being placed in an increasingly desperate situation (ibid.;1-2). In view of the massive deterrent of unemployment, it is significant how many black workers actually resorted to strike action during this period. This demonstrated the high levels of dissatisfaction with conditions of employment, high levels of solidarity and broader issues.

There was a small decrease in the CPI rate for 1978 to approximately 10.1% (SA Reserve Bank, 1979;12), depicted in figs.3-4. It can be argued that this drop was so slight as to have had only a very limited effect. Meanwhile, the general economic environment had become one of virtual stagnation. The number of workers per strike declined to 132 (NMC,1979;46), whilst the total number of man-days lost decreased to 10 558 (ibid.;46). In this case, these decreases can probably be ascribed to strikes spreading away from larger enterprises to smaller ones as well. Despite this, no strikes (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37) ended in the dismissal of workers, continuing evidence that many employers had become reconciled to the prospect of endemic strike action.

Increasing State Involvement in Industrial Disputes

Although, following the 1973 concession, it was technically possible for black workers to embark on legal strike action, most

strikes remained illegal. By mid-1979 there appeared to be an increase in police interference in strikes, most notably the riot police and special branch (Sitas and Joakamides, 1978;65). This increase can be seen as a continuation of the increasingly repressive policies of the South African state in the post-1976 period. However, it is interesting to note that a parallel development was the government's gradual recognition of the need to grant black labour some basic form of representation (Maree & Budlender, 1987;118-9). Despite limited earlier reforms, the government had failed to prevent the establishment of black trade unions, or stop their growth (see *ibid.*;118-9). This gradual shift allowed blacks to establish an organizational base in the economy (*ibid.*). It is doubtful if the independent unions would have been tolerated in the South Africa of the 1960's. Significantly, this was probably the first instance of the government's reform and repression policy, which has become so much a feature of the South African political scene of the 1980's. This provided further evidence of the linkage between workplace conflict and wider political issues.

However, in the pre-Wiehahn period, the government still hoped to bypass the independent unions by creating alternative bargaining structures by simply amending existing industrial relations legislation (Sitas and Joakamides, 1978;10). Union involvement in strikes remained low key for fear of attracting unwanted state attention. This had the result that most strikes continued to

erupt on an apparently spontaneous basis, with very little evidence of a union presence in many cases. This was even more true where Liaison Committees existed, as they proved ineffectual, with their recommendations being ignored (e.g. the Armorplate strike). Meanwhile, however, the independent unions had established sound organizational foundations, to assume the role of an autonomous force within society.

The major strike triggers in 1978 are reflected in fig. 7. All in all, 25 strikes were caused by demands for higher wages in 1978 (ibid.;39-41). This represents a decrease over the figure for 1977. However, the number of strikes over wage related factors increased substantially to 36 (ibid.;39-41). This represents the culmination of wage-related factors as a strike trigger in the 1970's. Once again real wages increased only slightly (see fig.16). As can be seen from figs. 16 & 17 there was only a slight increase in mining real wages, and a drop in miners' strikes. However, in construction where real wages had dropped the number of strikes increased (see fig. 16). Of significance was the substantial increase in dismissals as a strike figure, causing 19 strikes in all (ibid.;39-41). Again this represents an increase over the figures for 1977 and can best be viewed as a further reflection of a growth in working class militancy.

Organized Labour as a Force for Political Change

Even to many representatives of management (see, for example, Godson in Bissell & Crocker, 1979; 51) it had already become apparent that the potential existed for black workers to act as a major force for securing political change. Indeed, it was conceded that it was possible independent unions could serve as a force for democracy within society (ibid.; 51). There appears to be no little truth in this assertion. Many black workers had received their sole exposure to democratic decision making within the independent unions. Thus, the potential existed for the independent trade unions to serve as torchbearers for democracy and train their members for a broader degree of decision making in the future, in both workplace and wider society. This adds credence to Greenberg's (1983; 216) assertion that "any institutions of workers' democracy" may serve as forerunners of a broader democracy. By 1979, it had become increasingly apparent that the independent unions were going to play a permanent role in the South Africa of the future. During this year, the TUACC unions, some former TUCSA and CCOBTU unions plus several unaffiliated unions merged to form FOSATU. FOSATU had basically a "workerist" orientation - that is committed to building organization under worker control, independent of community-based political bodies. The new federation had a total membership of 35 000 (MacShane et al, 1984; 58). Meanwhile, the Black Consciousness-orientated BAWU had split, with its Eastern Cape branches forming SAAWU (South African Allied Workers' Union). The new

union was committed to playing a role in struggles in both township and factory, and experienced rapid growth in the year following its inception (Maree,1982;34).

Strike Statistics in 1979

All in all, 102 strikes occurred during this year, which represents a slight decrease from 1978 (please refer to fig.1). Approximately 224 workers were involved in the average strike during this year (NMC,1979;46). However, the number of workdays lost owing to strike action greatly increased. According to the NMC (1979;46) 67 099 workdays were lost, a more than six-fold increase over 1978. However, the independently arrived-at figure supplied by the Anglo-American manpower department for the year was 75 000 (Anglo-American,1979;n.p.). Generally, as can be seen in subsequent chapters, the most comprehensive figures on strike action tend to be those supplied by the Department of Manpower(DOM). However, the fact that it was possible for an independently-sourced figure to be substantially higher, indicates limitations on the DOM figures(see appendix). Thus, a considerable number of strikes could be taking place which are not recorded officially. Sadly, in subsequent years the figures supplied by the Anglo-American corporation seem to be those supplied by the DOM rounded off to the nearest 1000.

During 1979, inflation increased substantially, with the rate of

increase in the CPI now reaching approximately 13.5% (SA Reserve Bank, 1981;11). This increase is reflected in figs. 2 & 3 (introduction). Whilst this did not have the effect of increasing the total number of strikes, it may in part explain wages becoming once again the major strike trigger(see fig.7). In total, 40 strikes were caused by wages during this year (CSIR/NIPR,1983;39-41). Although wages can be seen as a primarily economic demand, they are also a demand employers would be extremely reluctant to accede to during a recession. Thus, workers would only consistently express such a demand if they felt capable of embarking on sustained strike action. This would only be the case if there was a relatively high degree of working class militancy, which itself can be seen as both a cause and effect of the independent unions. Once again black real wages in the industrial sectors depicted in fig. 16 increased slightly.

Mining strikes remained comparatively rare in these years, but by 1980 the number of strikes in the construction industry had increased dramatically (see fig. 17). Real wages in this industry had dropped slightly in 1979 (see fig. 16). This could have provided some extra stimulus for workers to resort to strike action.

Twelve strikes resulted in 1979 owing to dissatisfaction with working conditions and fourteen to dismissals (CSIR/NIPR,1983;39-41). According to the CSIR/NIPR survey (1983;39-41), a compilation of DOM returns, no recognition strikes took place during this year. However, at least one

recognition strike did take place, at the Cape Town docks in December. Here the WPGWU (Western Province General Workers Union) struck for recognition of its stevedores' committee. After striking for only one day, employers acceded to this demand.

Possible Effects of Further Rises in Unemployment

During 1979 unemployment increased to 20.6% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee, 1984;12). Conventional wisdom holds that increases in unemployment serve to deter workers from collective action. However, it seems that the threat of dismissal (particularly as it appears that in previous years relatively few strikers were fired for resorting to collective action) appears to have become less and less of an effective deterrent. This is borne out by the trends shown in figs. 11 & 12. It is important to note that South Africa lacks a comprehensive social welfare program and unemployment has the effect of increasing the number of dependants per worker. Wages which were already minimal thus declined even further in real terms. This would force workers to resort to collective action in order to gain a subsistence wage, even if it could result in unemployment for themselves. Bonner (1987;56) argues that government initiatives aimed at entrenching inequality (such as influx control and the bantustan policy) had the effect of increasing inherent contradictions. The collapse of the rural economies of the homelands placed immense pressures on workers to improve their material conditions of employment

(ibid.;56).

Although, according to official sources (CSIR/NIPR,1983; 37), only approximately 1.5 % of strikes ended in the dismissal of strikers, Cooper (1980b;16) argues that increasingly employers were resorting to the tactic of mass dismissals of striking workers, followed by selective rehiring. No black workers struck legally during this year, but there appears to be no evidence of prosecutions for resorting to illegal strike action. Thus black workers had won a de facto right to strike. However, it appears that frequently strikers were prosecuted under the Riotous Assemblies and General Laws Amendment Acts. Out of a total of 33 strikes studied by Cooper (1979;13) during this year, 12 (more than a third) were marked by some form of police interference.

Strikes and a Consumer Boycott

A significant instance of industrial conflict took place in Hammersdale (Natal), when over 600 workers struck at Rainbow Chickens, after the introduction of a new system of shifts (Hosken,1979;51). TUACC had established the TUACC Workers' Project (TWP) to provide services for non-unionised workers (Maree,1986;290). One of the first plants where the TWP tried to establish a presence was Rainbow Chickens. Workers seemed very militant at this plant and wanted to go on strike at once (Maree,1986;291). The TWP attempted to go through the lengthy

procedures of instituting legal strike action, only to find out that officially speaking, Rainbow was an "agricultural" factory and thus excluded from the Industrial Conciliation Act (ibid.;292). An "illegal" sit-down strike was attempted, but workers were simply dismissed and a protest march was met by riot police (ibid.;292), showing a continued willingness of the state to intervene in industrial disputes. Workers had put forward a range of demands (Hosken,1979;51-4), demonstrating the difficulty of ascribing strike action to a single cause. In the end the dispute was resolved by management granting limited wage increases. Workers interviewed generally believed that the strike had been a success (ibid.;54). Although the tasks performed by workers were classified as unskilled, Hosken argues that the work required a sufficient degree of dexterity to make management think twice about permanently dismissing the workforce (1979;55). This could be also the case with many other production line-based companies, demonstrating that the potential existed for collective action even in a period of high unemployment.

At Fattis & Monis a dispute surrounding the dismissal of a number of workers actively involved in trade union organization led to a strike in April 1979 (McGregor,1979;123). Management refused to negotiate with the independent unions active in the plant, namely the FCWU and AFCWU. This led to a highly successful (albeit protracted) consumer boycott lasting no less than seven months, with a settlement being reached in November 1979 (ibid.;126).

McGregor argues that the success of the boycott, which proved highly efficacious in both "coloured" and black communities provided evidence of the high degree of working class militancy present in the country (ibid.;127). The success of the boycott provides further evidence of the close ties between the workplace and community, and the legitimacy the two Food and Canning Unions seem to have enjoyed in the eyes of society at large.

The Wiehahn Reforms

On the first of May 1979, the Wiehahn report was released. The report called for the state recognition of black trade unions and their inclusion into the established bargaining structures. The nature and repercussions of this report are fully discussed in the introduction and subsequent chapters. The report was greeted with a considerable degree of scepticism by FOSATU, who predicted that the more progressive elements of the report would not be implemented by the government (SALDRU,1979;91). TUCSA accepted the report in its entirety and CCOBTU with reservations (ibid.92-3). Meanwhile, BAWU welcomed the report, but (like almost all the other independent unions)criticized the exclusion of migrants from the provisions of the 1979 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, which implemented the Wiehahn Commission (ibid.;92). This provision was soon relaxed, sparking off a bitter debate within the independent union movement over the issue of registration in

terms of the Act. This debate will be fully discussed in Chapter 5.

The White Miners' Strike

Even before Wiehahn the report was released, rumours of its contents resulted in the white Mine Workers' Union striking at the O'Okiep Copper Mine in March, ostensibly to protest the hiring of additional "coloured" labour (see Cooper, 1979;4). Striking miners were fired and then rehired on a selective basis (ibid.;8). This led to a solidarity strike being called by the MWU. This call was observed by 6 500 miners on 70 mines, mostly in the Transvaal (but with the notable exception of the East Rand mines) (ibid.;10). This strike soon crumbled (ibid.;10) resulting in a major setback for the MWU in that it showed the extremely weak position in which white labour found itself. White separatist unionism had in this case proved powerless when forced to embark on collective action.

Workplace Activism and Community Organizations.

Another significant instance of industrial conflict was the series of strikes that followed the Botha incident at the Ford Cortina plant in Port Elizabeth. Sparked off by the firing of Thomazile Botha, a PEBCO leader, a series of disputes followed in reaction to an allegedly racist foreman. Indications are that

PEBCO used these incidents to mobilize workers at Ford (Maree, 1980;13). The FOSATU-affiliated United Auto Workers (UAW) made a series of errors of judgement during these disputes, most notably when a UAW leader offered to translate statements by management (ibid.;14). Reluctant to challenge PEBCO, the UAW conceded leadership at the Cortina plant to this organization(ibid.;19). Maree argues that the UAW made the fundamental mistake of trying to draw a line between workplace struggles and the rising socio-political conflict at a time when it was becoming clear that the two were inexorably interwoven (ibid.;26). A PEBCO-dominated Ford Workers' Committee was soon formed. This body began to negotiate directly with Ford management and formed the basis of a new motor workers' union, MACWUSA (ibid.;26). MACWUSA adopted a more overtly-political stance and chose to place more emphasis on community struggles. The Ford strikes should be viewed in the context of broader resistance in the community, and represent the direct effect of political variables on the nature of strike action.

Indeed, a significant increase in strike action occurred in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage district (to seven in all [CSIR/NIPR, 1983;45-7]). This can be seen as a result of the growing strength of working class militancy in this region, also reflected in a growing politicization of the community at large.

Overall Trends in the 1977-9 Period

Limited reform of state policy became apparent in the gradual acceptance of some form of representation for black workers. This was to take place through the Wiehahn reforms, after the failure of the ineffectual Liaison Committee system. This heralded the birth of the current "reform"/Repression policy, where all but the basic underlying structures of power are subject to some or other form of adjustment. These "reforms" were embarked on in the hope of reducing mounting pressure from both domestic quarters and abroad, of which strikes only represented one aspect.

Unemployment appears to have represented a less major deterrent to strike action than was the case in the mid 1970s when, in several notable instances, fluctuations in the unemployment rate resulted in changes in the number of strikes taking place. As noted above, it appears evident that many workers had become increasingly militant and willing to strike despite fears of unemployment. Fear of state repression resulted in unions adopting an extremely low profile in many recorded instances of industrial conflict. However, behind the scenes, union organization continued to strengthen, representing the foundation for the challenge of the 1980's.

The emergence of the reform/repression policy in the sphere of

labour relations demonstrates the role of the state in casting a political shadow on almost all aspects of life for the average South African. As Webster (1984;96) notes, repression need not be inconsistent with reform. Indeed, the former may be necessary for the latter to succeed. As Bonner (1987;56) notes, the apartheid system placed immense pressures on the urban black workforce to improve their material conditions. This would result in large numbers of wage strikes, further evidence of the linkage between worker struggles and wider society is provided by the need for unions to co-operate closely with the community. Where they did so, such as during the Fattis and Monis boycott, community action strengthened the hand of workers where strike action had failed. Where unions did not take note of the political aspirations of the community, they were subject to immense pressures that could even result in divisions within the unions. A good example of this would be the formation of the breakaway union, MACWUSA, following the Botha incident at Ford.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHALLENGE RENEWED

1980-4

The 1980-4 period was marked by substantial increases in strike action countrywide. Probably the most significant development during this period was the East Rand strike wave, a "rolling strike" of a scale unprecedented since 1973. However, unlike the 1973 strike wave, this did not represent a spontaneous occurrence and should be seen against a backdrop of growing union organization and rising working class militancy. Meanwhile, important changes were made in existing industrial relations legislation, rounding off the 1979 reforms. All these developments serve to make this period one of crucial import in evaluating the role of industrial conflict within the broader socio-political reality. In an editorial written in 1980, the SA Labour Bulletin (1980;2) noted that the rising numbers of strikes taking place formed only a part of a growing popular challenge to the status quo. It was becoming clear that blacks had rejected all aspects of the arbitrary power the apartheid state exercised in their lives (ibid.;2).

Increasing Strikes and Changing Demands

During 1980 a total of 222 strikes occurred according to the DOM (NMC,1986;107)(see fig.1). For the same year, the IIR list four strikes as occurring (IIR,1980; n.p.). However, the IIR relied on press reports for its information and this would result in only the more newsworthy strikes being recorded (please refer to

appendix). Conversely, smaller strikes which never made it to the press would go unrecorded. A total of 278 workers were involved per strike (NMC, 1986; 87). Thus, not only did the number of strikes increase, but also the average size thereof. During this year the rate of increase of the CPI now reached 13.8 % (SA Reserve Bank, 1981; 11), a definite rise from the previous year, as borne out by figs. 2-3. Black real wages increased in this year with definite increases in the mining, manufacturing, and construction industries (see fig. 16). Although the struggle for better wages could partly explain the rise in strike action, the effect of generally rising working class militancy must also be considered. Black unemployment increased to 20.9% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee, 1984; 12). This adds credence to the thesis that beyond a certain point unemployment will no longer discourage strike action (refer to figs. 11-12). Major strike triggers during 1980 are reflected in fig. 8. Ninety-six strikes were caused by wages during this year (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 39-41), a substantial increase over the figure for the previous year. Interestingly, the number of strikes sparked off by dismissals increased to 33 and, for the first time in several years, sympathy strikes (10 in all) took place (ibid.; 39-41). These provide a further illustration of the general rise in working class militancy. Hiring and firing had been regarded by many South African managers as their prerogative. Thus, strikes demanding a say in these areas represented a concerted bid to push back the frontier of control.

Four strikes took place over the issue of union recognition (ibid.;39-41). No strikes had occurred over this issue in the preceding two years. Twelve strikes were sparked off by the pensions issue during this year (ibid.;39-41). This can be seen as the first response of workers to proposed changes by the government in the legislation governing pensions schemes (see FOSATU,1982;113)B.

Stronger Organization, Boycotts, and Police Action

By 1980 it was clear that the independent unions were playing an increasingly important role at the workplace. Unions may have one of two possible effects on the number of strikes taking place - opening channels of communication and thus reducing the number of strikes taking place, or giving workers the ability to mount more effective collective action and increasing the incidence thereof. Whatever the effect they might have one point became increasingly clear - the growth of the independent unions, as was the case with the growth of community organizations, were the product of rising working class combativity, a combativity furthermore which could no longer be readily broken by state repression.

A major schools boycott had broken out in the Western Cape "coloured" schools. Demands by scholars ranged from calls for a reduction in school fees to an end to an autocratic system of control (Molteno,1980;26). The impact of the boycott was manifold. On the one hand many dropped out of school never to complete their education, but on the other, the boycott increased popular awareness of the prevailing socio-political inequality (ibid.;11). A further development was the rise of "multi-class" local organizations (Hudson,1984;210). Following the formation of PEBCO in Port Elizabeth in 1979 many township based community organizations were founded (ibid.;210).

The Meat Boycott

Once again, in 1980 the weapon of a consumer boycott was used by workers fired after resorting to strike action. At Table Bay Cold Storage workers had gone on strike following management's refusal to recognize a WP General Workers' Union factory committee (WPGWU,1980a;78). All striking workers were summarily dismissed (ibid.;79). Meanwhile, disputes had broken out at two other meat companies, National Meat Suppliers and Braams, both over the issue of union recognition (ibid.;80). These developments led to 750 Cape Town meat workers striking on an industry-wide basis on Monday, 19th May, in a gesture of solidarity and general protest (ibid.;81). Returning to work the next day, workers were confronted by riot police and informed that they were dismissed

(ibid.;81). At a mass meeting on the 21st May, it was resolved to implement a red meat boycott, a call that was observed by several community organizations, as well as many traders and the majority of township butchers in Cape Town (ibid.; 81-2).

The boycott was most successful in the African townships, where strong support was received from community organizations (WPGWU,1980b;67), demonstrating that many saw the importance of linking worker with township struggles. However, the boycott was in the end unsuccessful owing to a combination of factors - confusion over organization (when it seemed the boycott was going to be taken up nationally it was suspended in the Western Cape); the difficulty in keeping the protest focussed on meat workers and not wider social issues; state repression (union leaders were detained and striking workers arrested under the pass laws) (ibid.;69-71). The dispute was characterized by a high degree of state involvement, arguably owing to concern about the increasing ties between factory and community struggles (ibid.;72). The degree of support the boycott received in the township during its early stages provides further evidence of the close ties between workers and the community at large. Perhaps there is no little merit in March's (1977;56) assertion that both forms of protest, strike and boycott, represented attempts by disenfranchised groupings to gain effective representation at all levels of government and society.

Major Strikes in Durban and Uitenhage

This dispute was followed by one at FRAME in Durban, called by the NUTW (National Union of Textile Workers). Mawbey (1980;4) argues that Frame workers faced an extremely repressive work environment, with low wages, constant pressure to increase productivity, and arbitrary disciplinary action by management, including repressive measures against worker organization. There were indications of continued dissatisfaction by workers stretching back many years and culminating in the brief strike of 1979 (ibid.;5). In May 1980 a few larger strike broke out over the wage issue. It is interesting to note that the independent union which had established a presence at Frame, the NUTW rather lagged behind its grass roots membership, in the degree of militancy manifest (see Mawbey, 1980;4-5). The strike began at the Consolidated Frame Cotton Corporation. Workers from this plant then went to other factories to mobilize workers there (ibid.;7). This led to a series of confrontations with police, and groups of workers stopping busses bound for the industrial areas in order to prevent strike breakers from journeying to work (ibid.;11). This was followed by a series of demonstrations, culminating in severe "unrest" in the neighbouring township of Cleremont. A conservative reaction then occurred (allegedly aided and incited by police) with groups of armed strike breakers attacking striking workers (ibid.;14). All further meetings by strikers were banned and the announcement of a limited wage increase

resulted in a limited return to work (ibid.;15). However, Frame refused to re-employ 123 strikers identified as "troublemakers"(ibid.). Even if the basic demands expressed by Frame strikers were non-political, the hard line response by the state cast a political shadow over the dispute.

A major strike took place at Volkswagen in Uitenhage, involving 3 500 "coloured" and black workers (Friedman,1987;210). Once again, police intervention led to widespread unrest in the townships. This strike may have had a concertina effect, encouraging workers to resort to strike action elsewhere in the district. This would help to explain why instances of strike action in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage district increased substantially, with 34 being recorded in all (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37). It is important to view this regional increase in strike action against a growing politicization, reflected by the rise of PEBCO during this period. While the FOSATU unions had no formal ties with PEBCO, and tended to favour concentrating on workplace issues, they did have good ties with the Uitenhage Black Civic Organization, and it was becoming clear that increased militancy in the townships would have effects on the degree of militancy manifesting itself at the workplace and vice-versa. Indeed, it seemed that political factors may not only serve as a trigger(direct or indirect) of industrial disputes, but that police interference in non-political disputes may cause a greater politicization of the community at large.

The Rise of SAAWU

Several strikes took place in the East London district over recognition of SAAWU liaison committees. SAAWU had experienced substantial growth in the 1979-80 period. In 1980 its membership topped 15 000 workers (Maree,1982;34). However, these gains and its overtly-political stance attracted the wrath of three groupings - the more conservative employers, the SAP and the Ciskeian Police (most of East London's townships are located in the Ciskei). The hardest line of all was adopted by the latter, with Charles Sebe (then head of the Ciskeian Central Intelligence Services) claiming that "unions were redundant in the Ciskei, as the Ciskeian government looked into the problems of each worker" (quoted in Maree,1982;35). Meanwhile, the SAP tried to persuade employers to "present a united front" and to "hold out against SAAWU" (ibid.;35). Chloride (known for its enlightened industrial relations policies) broke ranks and recognized SAAWU. However, SAAWU continued to face the onslaught by both South African and Ciskeian police, severely damaging organization. This did not reduce industrial conflict, and 28 strikes took place in this region during 1980 (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37), an increase from the previous year (see figs.7&8). Thus, it appears evident that repression on its own was unsuccessful in curbing working class combativity.

Although, according to official sources, only 1.5% of strikes in 1980 ended in the dismissal of strikers (CSIR/NIPR, 1983; 37), these strikes were often among the largest (e.g. the Durban Frame strike). Unions still only enjoyed limited legal protection and were thus most vulnerable to arbitrary actions by management, as can be seen by SAAWU's subsequent decline.

The Johannesburg Municipal Workers Strike

A further major instance of industrial conflict was to take place in Johannesburg. The Johannesburg municipality had aided the formation of an in-house union, the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (Keenan, 1981; 5). In reaction to this, the independent Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU) was founded. The municipality refused to negotiate with the new union and this led to a strike at Orlando Power Station (ibid.; 28). The striking workers were then fired and "locked out" of the compound, with a heavy police presence in the background (ibid.; 29). This led to almost 10 000 municipal workers in Johannesburg coming out on strike in sympathy with the power station workers' demands (ibid.; 4). However, the strike was soon broken by police action. Workers were refused access to the compounds and many were questioned individually by police, while many were subsequently bussed back to the bantustans (ibid.; 44). The result of the strike demonstrates both the vulnerability of workers to

the politically powerful Afrikaans pensions industry, the state was forced to first modify and then scrap the proposed scheme (FOSATU, 1982;113). Although it was clear that the state would not have so readily given way on a more political issue, the scrapping of the proposed changes demonstrated the growing power of the independent unions and collective worker action. Friedman(1987;263) points out that it demonstrated that black workers had the power to halt the passage of legislation. As such, it represented a significant shift in political power from white to black South Africans (ibid.;263), adding credence to Rex's (1981;36) assertion that protracted industrial conflict will lead to a relocation of the basic centres of power.

The Rising Tide of Unionization

Approximately 6.2% of strikes ended in the dismissal of striking workers (CSIR/NIPR, 1983;37). This represented a increase over the figure for the preceding year. It seems that many employers, particularly in the Eastern Cape, were seeking to reverse the growing tide of worker militancy.

Unemployment increased slightly to 21% (Simkins, quoted in Bell & Padyachee, 1984;12). This slight rise seems only to have had the effect of encouraging workers to resort to strike action for reasons outlined in previous chapters (see figs. 10 & 11). When compared to the percentage of workers unionized in Europe, the

number of trade unionists in South Africa remained small, and there were always significant numbers of unemployed ready to take the place of hired strikers. Still vulnerable to state repression, detentions of union activists were to prove extremely damaging to union organization. This was particularly so in the Border region where detentions of SAAWU leaders severely weakened that union.

The Registration Debate

As noted earlier, the Wiehahn Report resulted in the introduction of new legislation, which implemented most of the recommendations, and allowed black trade unions access to statutory collective bargaining structures. The legislation resulted in an intense debate within trade union circles. CUSA and TUCSA welcomed the reforms without serious reservations (Fine et al, 1981;40). In contrast, FOSATU adopted a more sophisticated stance. FOSATU argued that although the legislation incorporated repressive provisions, it also embodied genuine reforms, which had been forced on the state through workers' struggles (ibid.;41). Thus, registration in terms of the act and participation in the established bargaining structures could be used as a means of furthering the long term aims of the independent unions (ibid.;41). Others (such as the Western Cape Unions) argued that the independent unions should have nothing to do with the system.

For example, the GWU argued that the fundamental principle of the unions should be that of worker control (GWU,1981;18). As registration entailed surrendering some of this control to the state, it should be rejected out of hand (ibid.;18).

Webster (1987;217) points out that the long term effect of the reforms was fundamentally contradictory. In the years following their implementation, the unions were to make increasing use of the established structures. Cases heard by the Industrial Court increased from a modest 20 at its inception to 2042 in 1986 (ibid.;216). Management was to lose many of its former prerogatives, including the power to dismiss workers unilaterally (ibid.;216). In addition to the disputes resolved through the established bargaining structures, increasing numbers of disputes in the 1980s were resolved by informal mediation, by bodies such as the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA). Despite this rise in negotiation and mediation, industrial conflict, be it in the form of conventional strikes or stayaways also rapidly increased in the 1980's. Webster suggests that this is most probably due to the fact that the state, while succeeding in drawing many unions into the official structures, has manifestly failed to incorporate them politically (1987;217). In the political arena blacks are still totally excluded, directly affecting the nature of conflict at the workplace (ibid.;217).

The state continued to reject calls for universal franchise,

instead maintaining its commitment to racially segregated structures of government and to white domination (ibid.;217). While Wiehahn foresaw the need for political rights (ibid.;217), significant changes were confined to the sphere of directly factory related issues, with little attempt to redress wider inequalities. This ultimately led to the 1984 insurrection and the unions adopting an increasingly political stance (see Webster,1987;217). Already by 1980 "rank and file workers on the the East Rand took the initiative" following rising political pressures and "formed shop steward councils in an attempt to respond to township problems" (Lambert,1987;237). The successful use of the Industrial Court in its arbitration of a growing number of disputes and yet its failure to prevent the unions from becoming more politically active (and thus not be co-opted into the system) will be more fully assessed in subsequent sections.

The East Rand Strike Wave

A major strike at Colgate-Palmolive had ended in a call by CWIU for a general boycott of Colgate products. The strike followed a persistent struggle waged by CWIU for recognition (CWIU,1981;18). Despite its enlightened image, Colgate adopted a "hard line" approach and attempted to hold out against any recognition (ibid.;18). The boycott call received widespread community support and ended with management giving way. Friedman (1987;250) argues that the successful conclusion of the Colgate-Palmolive

dispute gave workers in the East Rand a greater degree of confidence in collective action. This was to result in the strike at Salcast, Benoni. From there, strikes spread right across the East Rand, affecting mostly the metal industry. Between July and November over 25 000 workers resorted to strike action in this region (Baskin, 1982; 21), the largest approximation of a mass strike since 1973. However, the East Rand strikes differed from the Durban strikes in that the former did not occur spontaneously. Unlike the Durban strikes, the East Rand strikes involved mostly unionized workers. Rapid unionization had occurred in the metal industry, simultaneous to a rising political consciousness amongst blacks. However, despite differences, both strike waves were symptomatic of a wider militancy. Baskin (1982; 24) argues that 1981 "was a year of heightened militancy"- this led to the rise of "a progressive political" ideology complementing the growth of the independent unions. Perhaps there is merit in Lenin's assertion that the revolutionary potential of strike action (although only feasible if occurring in combination with unprecedented broader resistance) should not be overlooked, and indeed that such action represents the "dress rehearsal for the big one" (quoted in Knowles, 1952; 7).

Roughly half the East Rand stoppages involved MAWU, with other FOSATU affiliates, CCAWUSA, African Food and Canning Workers, and CUSA affiliates being involved in the remainder (Baskin,

1982;21). Sitas (1983;452) argues that MAWU "had a powerful stratum of grass-roots level leadership", leading to it becoming "wittingly or unwittingly, a social movement with unfathomable implications. This would result in the union being directly affected by an rise in combativity in the townships. Baskin (1982;22) notes that a major factor behind the strike wave was the continued pressure of inflation resulting in massive increases in the costs of basic foodstuffs (e.g. the bread price rose by 30-40% in August). In addition a political complexion was cast on the origins of the strikes in that the East Rand Administration Board had begun to step up action against "illegals" in the period leading up to the strikes. As Baskin (1982;22) notes, the East Rand Administration Board had cut down on the number of jobs available to contract workers, resulting in migrants adopting a very militant stance during the strike wave.

Baskin (1982;25) argues that a further cause was the growing reluctance of workers to let racist insults (or other racist actions) at the workplace pass them by. This was the result of the intrusion of a rising political awareness in the community to the shop floor (ibid.;25) providing further proof of the growing links between worker struggles and the wider political reality. Most strikes in the East Rand in 1981 were of comparatively short duration (Webster,1985;245), with the basic demands expressed by workers being for increased wages and union recognition. The

demands for pay increases were strongly resisted by SEIFSA (the employer association in the metal industry). In early 1982 a series of longer strikes took place (ibid.;245). During April 1982 a "trial of strength" took place at Scaw Metals (Webster,1985;245). Management adopted a very hard line and all striking workers were dismissed and then selectively rehired (ibid.;246). The strike was effectively broken when police forcibly prevented dismissed workers from re-entering the company compound (ibid.;246). This defeat was followed by a series of other setbacks at plants such as Transvaal Malleable Foundries and National Springs (ibid.;246).

Swilling (1983;159) argues that one of the major reasons for the 1981 strike wave spreading was the "multiplier effect" - that workers in specific companies were encouraged by the successful example of other workers to resort to collective action. Trade unions often only became involved in disputes after they had begun, but then used the strike wave as an opportunity to establish strong organizational presences (ibid.;142). The conflict in the East Rand foundries resulted in increased working class leadership skills being developed. This was then reflected in the important role that worker participation played in community struggles (ibid.;159). Swilling's research thus provides further evidence of the linkage between struggles on the shop floor and the wider political conflict.

The Eastern Cape Community Unions: Struggles and Repression

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Cape MACWUSA had reached the peak of its support in May 1981. A sympathy strike was called by that union at Ford, in solidarity with striking Firestone workers. Unionists claimed that the Firestone strike was a "community strike", deserving the support of all members thereof (Friedman,1987;253). MACWUSA, like SAAWU continued to argue that a strong linkage existed between workplace and community (generally political) issues. Thus, they argued that grievances in the community should be taken up by workers and vice versa. Consequently strong ties should exist between trade unions and political organizations. The Firestone strike was resolved when that company agreed to a reinstatement package. However, a week later MACWUSA's organization received a severe blow when a number of its key officials were detained.

In the East London district SAAWU had made rapid gains despite state repression. By 1981, at least 10 companies had given SAAWU at least de facto recognition (Maree,1982;37). However, as Ciskeian "independence" neared, the Sebe brothers spearheaded a counter-offensive. Charles Sebe claimed that he had discovered SAAWU was a Communist Party front (ibid.;39). Ciskeian security police played a prominent role in the Wilson Rowntree dispute. SAAWU had attempted to gain recognition at this plant, but had been rebuffed. Three workers were dismissed in February 1981 over

a dispute with a foreman (Morris,1982;26). This led to a solidarity strike by 502 workers (ibid.;26). However, the strikers only represented one third of the workforce (ibid.;26). They were consequently in an extremely vulnerable position and were soon dismissed. This led to a consumer boycott, that was ultimately unsuccessful. Ciskeian police played a prominent role in attempting to screen those workers which were re-employed (Maree,1982;39).

This was only the start of a major attack by the Ciskeian authorities on SAAWU. According to an interview with its president, S Njikelana, SAAWU saw itself as "part and parcel of the community" (WIP,1983;38) and thus became a target of the Sebe brothers paranoia of any form of resistance. The mother of a SAAWU leader, Mrs. Gqweta, died when her house was mysteriously set alight (Maree,1982;39). At her funeral police opened fire on mourners (ibid.;39). SAAWU attracted further state repression following its role in the Mdantsane bus boycott. The failure of the Wilson Rowntree boycott, state repression and a number of other setbacks resulted, according to Bonner(1983;27) "in the erosion of much of its support." Indeed, in the period following Ciskeian independence, SAAWU never recovered its former strength and will probably eventually merge with industrial unions, following COSATU's policy of "one industry, one union".

Nonetheless, once again state action failed to curb underlying working class militancy. Major increases took place in strike action in the Eastern Cape - to 30 in East London and 71 in Port Elizabeth (NMC,1986;101) - as can be seen on fig.10. Despite possible state action, workers appeared increasingly willing to employ the strike weapon. It seems evident that the incidence of strike action could not be reduced through repression and the closing of other avenues of protest could well have served to increase it.

Neil Aggett's Death and the Consequent Stayaway

The death of trade unionist Neil Aggett in detention on the 5th February 1982 was to have far reaching repercussions for union organization in South Africa. In late 1981, a number of trade unionists on the Rand had been detained. Indeed, the police (both riot and security) had played a conspicuous role in the East Rand strikes of 1981. As Bonner (1983;5) notes, there was no evidence that Aggett had been involved in any illegal political work. All Aggett had done was to work for a democratic and worker controlled trade union movement (ibid.;5). The fact that he was detained, and subsequently died in detention, provides further evidence of the definite political colour the state was responsible for casting on the most normal aspects of industrial relations. Two days after his death, the Food and Canning Workers unions called a half hour stoppage for Thursday the 11th February

in commemoration of his death. This call was supported by the FOSATU and Western Cape unions. This stoppage was particularly well-observed in the Western Cape. Approximately 12 400 workers observed the stoppage at FCWU plants (SALB, 1982;7). Only one of the employers approached beforehand refused to agree to the stoppage taking place, and another employer joined workers at the commemoration service (ibid.;6). In the Eastern Cape 25 000 workers observed the stoppage after a successful demonstration; 6500 in the East London district and 30 000 in the PWV region (ibid.;9-16). The action appeared to have been directly aimed against the state. Indeed, workers made it clear that they perceived the state "had gone too far" and that they were not taking action against employers (ibid.;6). Although this only represented a small fraction of the total workforce, it demonstrated the growing power of the independent unions. The joint action provided further impetus towards moves for union unity, and, indeed, demonstrated the potential for unified strike action. Meanwhile, the fact that the FOSATU unions were most successful in getting workers to observe the stayaway (see SALB,1982 ;7-16) showed that there was no substitute for strong workplace organization. However, it also demonstrated the import of grassroots militancy, adding credence to Luxembourg's comments in this regard, who sees worker militancy as being all-important (see Luxembourg,1971;225).

At the Aggett funeral political activists and their organizations

played a conspicuous role. However, despite the occasional tensions between political organizations and unions, the increased politicization in the townships had gradually forced the unions to adopt a more political stance. At the 1982 FOSATU congress, Joe Foster argued that "FOSATU should be involved in community issues, but maintain its worker identity" (SALB,1982a;89). However, Foster opposed the forming of direct alliances with political organizations(ibid.;89). The predominant sentiments expressed seemed more in favour of the unions becoming an independent political actor. It was only when COSATU was formed did many of the former FOSATU unions seek to identify themselves with broader "Charterist" political movement.

Overall Characteristics of Strike Action in 1982

All in all, 394 strikes took place in 1982 (NMC,1986;99), as is reflected in fig.1. Of these, 207 took place in the PWV/Southern Transvaal region (NMC,1986; 101)(see fig.10). This can be seen as a reflection of the continued restiveness in the East Rand metal industry. In comparison to the previous year, employers adopted a far harder line towards striking workers. In fact a massive 27.5% of strikes countrywide ended in the dismissal of strikers (CSIR/NIPR,1983;37). Prominent in this regard was the dismissal of strikers at Scaw Metals (East Rand), which badly damaged MAWU's organization at that plant. During this year, a new economic recession began, resulting in massive retrenchments in

the metal industry. Whilst this led to further instances of strike action (Cooper,1982;7), it became increasingly clear that workers should temporarily seek to consolidate their gains, instead of embarking on further action immediately.

Despite the mounting recession, the rate of increase of the CPI slowed, and now stood at approximately 13.9 % (SA Reserve Bank,1983;11). This does not seem to have had any effect in discouraging workers from striking, as is clear from figs.5 & 6. Real wages for blacks increased in most sectors of industry (NMC,1986;99) - see fig 16. The major causes of strikes during 1982 are depicted in fig.8. The major cause of strikes was once again wages, causing 186 strikes in all (NMC,1986; 101). Sixty strikes were caused by disciplinary factors(ibid.;101), and can be seen as a reflection of the reaction of workers to the East Rand retrenchments. There were far fewer recognition strikes during this year, with only 21 occurring in all (ibid.;101). It seems that after gaining recognition in a number of key plants during 1981, unions now shifted their demands to their area, such the increasingly common demand for a living wage. Whilst fewer sympathy strikes took place in 1982, their continued manifestation is indicative of rising working class solidarity. The Aggett memorial stoppage provides further evidence, as does the substantial increase in the number of workers involved per strike. An average of 192 workers participated in the average strike in 1982 (NMC,1986; 100).

Clearly, by 1983, organized labour in South Africa had made significant gains. Union membership had experienced rapid growth, but mostly not at the expense of effective organization. From 1979-1983 the signed-up membership of the independent unions had increased from 70 000 to almost 300 000 (Maree,1987;7). An even more dramatic indicator of the unions' growth was the number of recognition agreements signed over the same time period - from a modest 5 to over 406 (ibid.;7). Meanwhile, important changes had been made in legislation governing industrial relations. However, the number of unionized workers expressed as a percentage of the overall workforce remained small.

An Impending Political Storm

Meanwhile, there were indications of an impending political storm. The East Rand strike wave and the Eastern Cape disputes provided evidence in renewed upsurge in working class militancy. Much dissatisfaction seemed to transcend workplace issues and many unions faced growing internal problems when they failed to take cognizance of this fact. This was particularly so in the highly-charged political climate of the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape - based NAAWU had already split, resulting in the formation of the breakaway MACWUSA, which enjoyed close ties to political organizations. Clearly, it would prove increasingly difficult to separate rising political tensions from dissatisfaction at the workplace, and most especially the ultimate expression of the

latter, the withdrawal of the worker from the labour process, from the former. Swilling (1988;8) argues that the government's "total strategy" of reforms in a wide range of areas from labour to local government was met by unprecedented resistance from workers and unions. In the end the state could only re-establish its authority through a fresh wave of repression.

As Karis (1983-4;393) notes, the six years since the 1977 crackdown had been marked not only by the rise of the independent unions, but also of popular political organizations. The parallel rise of these two expressions of working class militancy would pose the state with an unprecedented challenge. However, as events of subsequent years were to show, they both remained extremely vulnerable to repressive action by employers or the state. As Webster (1983;22) notes, strikes still tended to be fairly short lived single-factory affairs. Unions remained in a fairly weak position, exacerbated by rising unemployment. They tended to avoid protracted trials of strength for fear of jeopardizing newly-won gains.

The Changing Nature of Industrial Conflict: Legal Strikes

Despite this, a number of important instances of collective action took place in 1983. In June of that year, an overtime ban

at Natal Threads organized by the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), represented one of the first legal instances of collective action since the Wiehahn reforms. When the reforms were first announced, there appeared to be but little benefit accruing to legal strike action. Workers could still be fired for striking legally, whilst the complex procedure to be followed before striking could result in the reasons for the dispute being forgotten by the average worker. However, as Friedman (1987; 332-3) notes, it was becoming increasingly clear that there were some advantages from striking legally. Some employers, such as Carlton on the East Rand and Natal Thread, had promised that they would not employ the tactic of selective dismissals if workers struck legally (ibid.;332-3). As it would prove most costly to recruit and train an entire new workforce, this represented a significant saving for management. Increasingly, many employers believed that workers should receive some reward for employing legal or negotiated channels when striking, in the form of restrained action against strikers. Although this viewpoint was not general, and illegal strikers could still (and often did) strike without the entire workforce necessarily being dismissed, it did represent the start of a gradual shift in opinion. In addition, not only did the police appear reluctant to intervene in legal disputes in urban areas, but also the strike ballot (part of the process to be followed when embarking on legal strike action) proved to be a useful mechanism in rallying workers to the union cause (ibid.;332-3).

The Industrial Court and IMSSA

Towards the end of this period, increasing use was made of the Industrial Court (see fig. 15). A landmark decision had been made at the Fodens case (1983), where the court found that employers were obliged to engage in collective bargaining in good faith with the trade union which represented the majority of employees (Thompson, 1989; 620q). Thus, it was not only the increased use of the court, but also the content of decisions made that was important.

Although the Industrial Councils remained the major route to the Industrial Court and thus a potentially attractive negotiating forum (with unions such as MAWU participating therein), a significant development was the establishment of the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA). Initially services offered included mediation (being defined as where a mediator is appointed with the aim of resolving a dispute that had deadlocked), but this was later extended to include arbitration (where both parties agree to accept the verdict of an impartial judge of their choosing) (IMSSA, NDb; n.p.). From May 1983 to June 1984 IMSSA mediated in 25 disputes (IMSSA, 1984; n.p.). From July to October 1984 IMSSA mediated in a further 25 (IMSSA, 1985a; n.p.)

The Continued Importance of Wage Demands

All in all, 336 strikes were to take place in 1983 (NMC,1986). Of these 112 were triggered by wage demands (NMC,1986;101). Although wages as a demand may appear strictly economic, as noted earlier, they may well represent the articulation of a wide range of grievances. In addition, in a time of recession, demands for significant increases in pay are those demands employers would find hardest to meet. Thus, in such circumstances, workers would only resort to wage strikes if they felt they had the organizational ability to sustain a protracted dispute. Real wages for blacks had only increased very modestly during 1983 (see fig. 16), partially accounting for the continued importance of wage strikes

Strikes in Natal

Nine strikes occurred in the Pietermaritzburg region of Natal (NMC,1986; 101) (see fig.10). It is interesting to note that instances of collective action continued to occur in the latter region and in Durban (where a massive 60 strikes took place {NMC,1986;101}), despite the growing estrangement between Buthelezi and the independent unions. Whilst clearly many workers remained members of Inkhata, it appeared that by resorting to frequent collective action, their primary loyalty in the workplace was to the independent unions. Even as early as 1975 a survey of black workers in the Durban region had indicated that only a tiny

percentage (1%) of those interviewed saw increased ties with the KwaZulu government as of any importance (Webster,1979;24). This would have severe consequences in weakening Buthelezi's apparent dominance of black politics in rural and peri-urban Natal.

Shorter and Smaller Strikes

An average of 192 workers were involved in the average strike in 1983 (NMC, 1986; 99-100). Following the hard line followed by many employers in 1982, a cautious approach seemed in order. Unemployment continued to rise, but, as noted in previous chapters, increases in unemployment seem no longer to have served to discourage workers from striking. The continued rise in both strike action and unemployment during the mid-to-late 1980s serves to back up this assertion. Inflation increased in 1983 (the rate of increase of the CPI now was 11 % {SA Reserve Bank,1985;9},as reflected in figs. 2,5 & 6). However, this can only be seen as a further contributor to a basic rise in strike action as a response to wider socio-political forces.

Advances in Worker Organization on the Mines

Meanwhile, major advances were being made in worker organization on the mines. The Chamber of Mines had reviewed its opposition to the recognition of black trade unions (Duff,1983;9). CUSA had

formed a National Union of Mineworkers (the NUM), which was soon recognized by the Chamber. As Duff (1983;9) notes, CUSA unions generally exhibited a lower propensity to strike than many of the other independent unions. It seems that the Chamber seriously underestimated the NUM, which it hoped would not prove overly militant (Duff,1983;9), but turned out to be a strong opponent. Throughout the 1970's there were indications of an underlying militancy amongst miners, manifest in actions such as spontaneous strikes, "faction fights", and seemingly irrational destruction of property (see Chapter 3). Thus, although isolated from political developments in the townships, the potential existed for the mines to become a major site of resistance.

Formation of the UDF and National Forum

The general increase in the number of unionized workers in 1983 was to be overshadowed by broader events. In 1983 the government introduced the Black Local Authorities Act. It was hoped that the resultant community councils established would not only relieve the growing political dissatisfaction within the townships, but also prove self-financing through increased rents and levies (see Grest & Hughes,1984;51-3). However, the resultant system lacked any vestige of legitimacy and town councillors soon became ostracized by the community (ibid.;53). The need for the established town councils to raise rents led to widespread resistance (ibid.;54). This resistance ranged from death threats

to court action and was compounded by the insensitivity on the side of some of the local councils. In addition to the Black Local Authorities Act, further legislation included the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill and the Black Community Development Bill, all the above legislation soon becoming known as the "Koornhof Bills" (Barrell,1984;18). The "Settlement Bill" basically represented a shift in official thinking that would allow recognition for "permanent" urban blacks, but in effect restricted further blacks from gaining such status.

In response to the Local Authorities Act and the 1983 Constitutional proposals, both the United Democratic Front (UDF) and National Forum(NF) were formed (Barrell,1984;6). These political developments placed growing pressure on the independent unions to assume a more political stance. The UDF represented a broad coalition of a range of organizations, ranging from youth clubs to civic associations (ibid.;6). The Front attacked both the Koornhof Bills and the 1983 Constitution "as an attempt to modernise apartheid" (ibid.;6).Some unions such as SAAWU and the Media Workers' Association of South Africa affiliated, whilst others, such the GWU did not, arguing the need for independent worker organization (ibid.;14-5). Interestingly, the affiliation debate did not so much revolve around the necessity for adopting a political stance, but rather the need to ensure working class representation (ibid.;14-5). The launch of the UDF led to the formation of the AZAPO-sponsored National Forum, dedicated to Black Consciousness(ibid.;10). The AZAPO had rejected the UDF on

the grounds that it encouraged "ethnic fragmentation"(ibid.;10). In the sphere of industrial relations, the new wave of political activism was to result in the stayaways of 1984.

Revolt in the Townships

Despite problems revolving around state repression and logistical limitations, the UDF successfully mounted a number of campaigns. These ranged from a "people's weekend", with protest rallies to successful boycotts of local Community Council elections (Barrell,1984;14). By December, the UDF (via its affiliates) had a membership of 1.5 million people (ibid.;17). The growing resistance in the townships presented the unions with a fresh challenge - they had a choice of confining their activities to independent organization (and risking becoming irrelevant in the eyes of their constituency) or openly embark on joint action with the UDF (and risk a fresh wave of state repression). In the end, the strategy adopted by most of the independent unions was to support stayaway action, whilst continuing to represent workers on day-to-day issues on the shop floor. On the national level, the unions busied themselves with the formation of a new union federation (Barrell,1984;14).

The 1984 Stayaways

The first of these stayaways took place on September the 3rd. This was a one day stayaway to protest against rent increases. It was called by student, political, and civic organizations in the Vaal Triangle townships. This stayaway ended in repressive police action, and an equally violent reaction by the community (LMG,1985a; 75). The police seem to have acted in a particularly heavy-handed manner, which led to an increase in violence and resistance, not only on the Vaal Triangle, but subsequently also the East Rand (ibid.;75). Two weeks later the Release Mandela Committee called a stayaway in Soweto in solidarity with the Vaal townships. Once again, the stayaway ended in "unrest" (ibid.). One month later, a highly successful stayaway took place in Springs. This stayaway was well organized, with FOSATU members giving their assistance(ibid.). It demonstrated that if trade unions participated in stayaways, a far greater degree of success would be achieved. The Labour Monitoring Group (1985; 79) suggested that the growing success of stayaways could be ascribed to a resurgence of working class militancy in the 1980s.

A far larger stayaway was then called by COSAS to take place on the 5-6th November in the Transvaal. This stayaway enjoyed widespread support by worker organisations, owing to the deepening ties between them and community organisations (LMG,1985a;79-84). Demands expressed reflected both workplace and community concerns, calling for a reinstatement of fired striking workers at Simba Quix, reforms in the education system, no

further increases in bus fares or municipal charges, as well as an end to detention without trial and a withdrawal of troops from the townships (LMG,1985a;84). This stayaway was 70% successful in 80% of unionized plants (LMG,1985a;85). There was 80% overall participation in the Vaal and far East Rand, with 60% of the near East Rand and 91% of the Kempton Park/Isando also showing 80%+ participation(LMG,1985a;85). It has been argued (see LMG,1985a;85) that the success of the stayaway could be ascribed to close co-operation for the first time between the unions and political organizations, with democratic structures within the unions enabling unified action despite pressure from the state. The state's response to the stayaway was the usual one- further detentions of CUSA and FOSATU members. SASOL workers who had supported the stayaway were dismissed. Although on the day after the stayaway they had attempted to return to work, they were turned back by the police and army, with substitute labour being employed (Ntaopane, 1985;36). The fact that SASOL workers observed the stayaway call despite the prior warnings of management provides further evidence of the reduced effect unemployment had as a deterrent against resorting to collective action at the workplace, and showed the rise in political consciousness and militancy amongst workers. Union activists believed the stayaway was but an excuse to get rid of the independent union (the CWIU), which had been organizing at that plant(ibid.;36). Once again, the links between workplace and township struggles were clearly shown after a protracted nationwide campaign and threats of co-ordinated action by a range of

unions, SASOL agreed to reinstate 70% of the dismissed workers (Hudson,1987;217).

Further Legal Strikes and Consumer Boycotts

In January 1984, the new tactic of resorting to legal strike action manifested itself when CUSA's S A Chemical Workers Union took part in a nationwide legal strike at AECI. This strike involved over 8 500 workers (Friedman,1987; 334). However, legal strikers still enjoyed no legal protection. The striking chemical workers were fired, resulting in a significant setback for union organization. Few unions in 1984 had the capacity to mount protracted "trials of strength." A notable exception was the 1984 Dunlop strike. This strike was caused by workers being fired for "unlawful industrial action", being stoppages as a result of disputes over pay and overtime (Sitas,1987;101). A secret ballot was held for a legal strike, but shortly thereafter the workers were fired (ibid.;102). The strike soon spread to all but Dunlop's Eastern Province plants (ibid.;102). The strike lasted four weeks until management agreed to reinstate unconditionally all dismissed workers (ibid.;100). The strike was significant not only for it's "trial of strength nature", but also the fact that it took place country-wide, demonstrating a certain degree of working class solidarity that had never been manifested hitherto.

During 1984, two further consumer boycotts took place - at Simba Quix and Dairy Maid. Both these boycotts were the result of hard line responses by management to strikes/^{(CUSA, 1985; 68-72).} The success of these boycotts demonstrated the potential of this form of protest (especially where goods for which there are ready substitutes are concerned), and the high degree of working class militancy manifested during this period (ibid. 68-72).

The 1984 Miner's Strikes

By June 1984, the growing dispute between the Chamber of Mines and workers over pay levels, led to a series of short strikes taking place on both the gold and coal fields (WIP, 1984b; 38). Most notable were the strikes at Coronation Colliery and Goedehoop mine. The former involved 1 700 workers, and was met by a violent response by white miners, mine officials, and police (WIP, 1984b; 38). The latter dispute was resolved after a day-long stoppage through further negotiation. In September the NUM called a legal strike, following the breakdown of talks with the Chamber of Mines. This was the first legal strike by black miners. It has been argued that the dispute served to highlight the contradictions inherent in the system (Van Niekerk, 1984; 11). Although legal, the strike was met with a heavy handed response by the state. The worst violence centered around JCI's Waterpan Mine, where 8 workers were shot dead and hundreds wounded

(ibid.). The dismissal of 17 000 workers at Vaal Reefs and Hartebeesfontein showed the determination of management and led to the NUM losing some of its most active members on these mines (Leger & Van Niekerk,1986;76). All in all, the strike proved a damaging affair to union organization, with many being killed, injured or dismissed (Cobbett & Lewis,1985;15). This led to much bitterness over the legislation governing state action. Many felt that if such was the result of striking legally, there was little benefit in using the official collective bargaining system (ibid.;15). State action (and most notably police action) had once again cast a political shadow over what normally would have been an economic dispute. Nonetheless, the rise in black real wages on the mines to R1490 (NMC,1986;99), showed that some gains had been made by worker resistance.

Rising Strike Totals

All in all, 469 strikes took place during 1984 (NMC,1983;101), reflected in fig.1. This can be seen as further evidence of rising working class combativity. Disputes had generally become larger, with 388 workers being involved in the average strike, a product of strengthening solidarity and union organization. The chemical workers' strike demonstrated the ability of the unions to mount sustained action country-wide. This would have obvious repercussions on the nature of subsequent political stayaways.

The major cause of strike action remained wages, triggering some 164 disputes in all (NMC,1986;101),and is reflected in fig.8. This can be seen as partially the result of increased inflation, with the rate of increase of the CPI now reaching 11.7% (SA Reserve Bank,1985;9)(see figs.2, 5 & 6). However, they may have represented the articulation of wider, more far-reaching demands, such as appears to have been the case with the Durban Strikes of 1973 (see Institute for Industrial Education, 1974). In addition, as noted earlier, heavy handed police action, both by the riot police and in the form of the detention of trade unionists would soon politicize a primarily economic dispute. As Knowles (1952;6) notes, the cause of strike action may be far more all-encompassing than demands expressed might suggest.

Overall Trends in Strike Action 1980-4

Over the period 1980-4 a number of trends become readily apparent. The first is the growing strength not only of the independent trade union movement, but also of popular political organizations. It appears that this was but a reflection of a rising politicization and militancy amongst blacks country-wide. Whilst the direct causes of most strikes remained strictly economic, subsequent state action (most commonly by the riot and security police) cast an unmistakably political pallor over subsequent collective action. This police action, when combined with the 1981 Labour Relations Act provides further evidence of

the states gradual (since 1977) adoption of the now well-known reform and repression policy.

Secondly, the 1980-2 period saw further rises in working class combativity, as demonstrated by the success of the half-hour Aggett memorial stoppage. Whilst a new recession began during this period, it failed to curb the propensity of workers to resort to strike action and may well have contributed to increased political discontent.

The massive increase in strike action in the 1983-4 period should best be viewed against the backdrop of growing political resistance. The unions were finding it increasingly difficult to separate workplace from community struggles. It is interesting to note that those areas where political resistance was at its greatest, proportionately high numbers of strikes took place. Whilst demands expressed by these strikes remained ostensibly economic, they provided a further reflection of a growing dissatisfaction with all aspects of the status quo.

CHAPTER 6

Revolt and Reaction

1985-7

The 1985-7 period saw not only the formation of two major union federations, but also the ushering in of a new era of unprecedented state repression. The latter became especially severe following the declaration of two successive States of Emergency. It was during these years that the "unrest" which had begun in the East Rand townships reached its peak. Meanwhile, by 1985, there was considerable optimism amongst trade unions and popular political organizations over the potential for successful collective action be it against state or capital. To many, rapid change seemed inevitable and indeed imminent. This optimism culminated in the formation of South Africa's biggest union federation ever, COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). Despite sweeping state action following the proclamation of three successive States of Emergency, large scale organized resistance to the status quo continued to manifest itself, most notably in the form of stayaways.

Formation of the "Super-Federations"

After protracted (and sometimes highly acrimonious) unity talks, the "Western Cape unions" (e.g. the General Workers' Union), the UDF-affiliated unions, the FOSATU unions and other independent unions agreed to merge to form COSATU. At the launch the Nationalist government's policies and recent actions came under heavy fire. The new federation adopted a far more politically-outspoken stance than FOSATU had. In essence, it represented the

merging of two traditions of trade unionism. These were "populism" (as espoused by community based unions such as MACWUSA and SAAWU) and "workerism" (which was favoured by the GWU and the FOSATU unions). It has been suggested that economic recession and rising state repression had both the effect of forcing the former to place more emphasis on shop floor organization, and the latter to adopt a more overtly-political stance (WIP,1986a;19). Indeed, the "workerist" unions had faced growing pressures from membership to articulate political issues in a far more outspoken manner than a vague commitment to "working class politics"(ibid.;19). This resulted in the "populists" and "workerists" having much in common in their opposition to, on the one hand, an increasingly oppressive state, and on the other, the very different type of unionism espoused by the CUSA and AZACTU unions.

As COSATU Secretary-General Jay Naidoo pointed out in a speech made at Natal University, it was neither possible nor desirable for a trade union in South Africa to be non-political (Naidoo,1986a;34). Naidoo went on to argue that although not a political party, COSATU must of necessity voice the political aspirations of its working class membership (ibid.;34). Despite the need for a working class orientation, there was also a need "for unity in the struggle for all non-racists"(ibid.;36). After the launch of COSATU, CUSA agreed to merge with AZACTU (a relatively small Black-Consciousness-orientated federation). The

new federation, initially known as CUSA/AZACTU, soon adopted the abbreviation NACTU. This new federation adopted a policy line committed to black leadership (as opposed to the leadership of white officials). Its general ideological orientation was more-or-less Black Consciousness.

Advances by Miners

Another major industrial dispute on the mines took place in September 1985, following the breakdown of talks between the Chamber of Mines and the NUM (LMG,1985b;11). Faced with the prospect of widespread strike action, several major employers, including Anglo American, JCI and Rand Mines broke ranks and reached a separate settlement with the miners. All in all, 23-30 000 workers were involved in strike action at Glenvaal, Goldfields and Anglovaal (ibid.;11). All but 10 500 returned to work following repressive actions by employers and police, and when a general dismissal of strikers was threatened, the strike was called off (ibid.;11). Although not a major "trial of strength", the strike was symptomatic of the growing challenge on the mines. The failure of the Chamber of Mines companies to present a united front represented a major new development - one of the most cohesive of employer federations had broken ranks when faced with a growing challenge from the workplace (Leger and Van Niekerk,1986;75). Thus, the strike "would have a far more

all-encompassing effect" (Knowles,1952;7) than would appear to be the case at first glance.

The Rise of Political Stayaways

The theme of politically-motivated stayaways continued in 1985. From the 16th to the 18th of March, over 120 000 workers from Port Elizabeth's black townships observed a stayaway called by several "Charterist" political organizations, most notably PEBCO (LMG,1985c;87). The stayaway was called in protest against food price hikes and related economic issues, including the Ford/Amcar merger (LMG,1985c;87). These were seen by the callers of the stayaway as the direct result of the government's maladministration. A few weeks before the stayaway was due to take place, the FOSATU unions, the General Workers' Union, as well as several Black Consciousness organizations, issued a joint statement disassociating themselves from the stayaway. It was argued that workers were not properly consulted and that it "did not express workers interests" (Pillay, 1985;4). Furthermore, it was suggested that workers did not favour the stayaway (LMG,1985c;105). As Pillay (1985;4) notes, this represented a definite step backwards from the Vaal Triangle stayaway of 1984, which was characterized by a high degree of co-operation between trade unions and political organizations. Indeed, trade unions were asked to participate in the organization of the 1985 Port Elizabeth stayaway, but refused on the grounds that it was not

favoured by their membership (Pillay, 1985;6). Meanwhile, the community organizations claimed that they had the support of most workers(ibid.);6. However, it is clear that the unemployed militant youth active in political organizations would be far more likely to favour a stayaway than those with jobs to lose, in an area of high (and rising) unemployment.

At first, the success of the stayaway would seem to represent a setback for worker organizations. Pillay argues that the trade unions failed to appreciate the even greater effect united action would have had (1985;14). However, at no time were workers as a group fully consulted by those organizations calling the stayaway. Indeed the demands expressed by the stayaway were unrealistic and failed to take account of the immense repressive powers the state had at its disposal. One can draw two conclusions from the stayaway. Firstly, its success demonstrates that community organizations on their own clearly had sufficient means to ensure an effective stayaway, even if it was without union support.

Secondly, whilst the stayaway's success might seem to represent a setback for the unions, unified action would have resulted in it having an even greater effect (Pillay,1985;14). Despite their increased willingness to take up political issues, the independent trade unions remained committed to retaining their autonomy.

The Political Stance of the Independent unions

On the East Rand, the FOSATU unions had demonstrated a far greater willingness to take up political issues in response to pressures from members (Friedman,1987; 453). In Natal the political pressures placed on the independent unions were far less (for example, see Von Holdt [1988;17] on union organization in the Pietermaritzburg region). Indeed, the first major community-based boycott action of the 1980's in the latter province was called in support of fired striking workers from BTR Sarmcol, and not in response to any political issue. In August 1985 a legal strike took place at this company over the issue of the recognition of MAWU (MAWU,1985;32). Despite the strikes legality, management soon resorted to "scab" labour(ibid.;32). This led to a bus boycott, which proved unsuccessful owing to the continued custom of strike breakers who cushioned the impact thereof (ibid.;32). The dispute was characterized by a high level of police interference, with a worker meeting being broken up by riot police (ibid.;32). However, in all provinces, state actions continued to cast a directly political shadow on all aspects of trade union activity. In May 1985, Raditsela, an East Rand CWIU leader died shortly after being released from detention, resulting in a stayaway call by union leaders (Friedman,1987;453).

Strikes and Social Protest

Simultaneously with rising political protest, a relatively high number of strikes took place in South Africa in 1985. This can be seen to be a direct reflection of growing working-class combativity in both the workplace and wider society. A total number of 389 strikes took place in this year (see fig.1), involving 239 816 workers, resulting in an average of 616 workers per strike (NMC, 1987a; 427-429). The major strike triggers in 1985 are depicted in fig.8. As can be seen, significant numbers of strikes were caused by disputes over disciplinary matters (ibid.;427-9), indicative of the continued challenge to managerial prerogatives. Clearly, South African workers increasingly demanded not only a say in the wider political processes, but also in matters affecting them on a day-to-day basis. Trade union related factors caused 28 strikes(ibid.;427-9).

Inflation increased in 1985, with the rate of increase of the CPI now reaching 16.2% (SA Reserve Bank, 1986;7-8), and is reflected in figs.2,5 & 6. Indeed, real wages dropped during 1985 (see fig 16). The decline in real wages could have provided one of the reasons for the rapid rise in strikes in the 1986-7 period. However, the picture is rather a complex one - in 1985 strikes in the mining industry increased disproportionately to 40, up from

25 in 1984 (NMC,1986;99). This took place despite the fact that real wages in this sector had more-or-less reached parity with other sectors of industry by 1981 (see fig. 16). Thus other factors, such as improved worker organization and increased militancy must have been partially responsible for the rise in the number of strikes in this sector.

Mediation and Arbitration

During this period, it seemed that the far-reaching nature of many worker demands could no longer be resolved by negotiation while existing relations of power were maintained. Although increased use had been made of the Industrial Court in 1986 (see introduction, DOM [1987;148]) and IMSSA (over 70 disputes mediated in the first six months of 1985 [IMSSA,1985b;n.p.]), the total number of strikes taking place continued to rise. IMSSA have suggested that wider political issues began directly to affect the nature of dispute mediation (ibid.;n.p.). A M Erasmus had adopted a contrary stance in many of his Industrial Court decisions, reversing the earlier stance which forced employers to bargain in good faith (Thompson,1989;620R). On a more positive note, the Sentrachem case (not adjudicated by Erasmus) led to a decision that it was legitimate for employees to strike if their demands were not met through negotiation (ibid.;642U). It has been argued that this gave employees an effective right to strike

(ibid.;642U).

The Role of Inkhata in Natal

A high number of strikes took place in the Durban region, as is reflected in fig.10. Relatively-speaking, less political conflict had taken place in this region than was the case for either the Eastern Cape urban centres of Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage and East London despite the latter's lower instance of strike action. However, this need not imply a lack of militancy.

By 1986 it was becoming increasingly clear that the growing strength of the independent trade union movement and its more overtly-political stance was serving to dilute Inkhata's formerly absolute hold on power in the Natal region. As noted in previous chapters, the break with Inkhata and the independent trade unions had taken place in the late 1970's. In 1986 this break became formalised when Inkhata established UWUSA (United Workers Union of South Africa). Although in the first two months of its existence it claimed to have recruited between 4000 and 5000 members, it supplied little evidence to back up its claims(see SALB interview with the KwaZulu Minister of Labour [Conco, 1986;51]). Critics of UWUSA claimed that the new union would serve the sole function of dividing the working class by increasing tribalism (Tvl. May Day Committee,1986;1). Dominated

by Inkhata leaders, mostly businessmen (Weekly Mail, May 9, 1986) the new labour organization proved only capable of establishing a presence in the Inkhata stronghold of Northern Natal. Its inability to pose a serious threat outside this region and its reputation as a "sweetheart union" posed serious limitations (Van Niekerk, 1986; 12). Nonetheless, UWUSA's formation and the increasingly politically outspoken stance of COSATU has forced many Inkhata members in Northern Natal to make a choice between the continued support for it or the independent unions (WIP, 1986; 5-6).

Continued Rises in Strike Totals

Despite the worsening recession, an unusually high number of strikes took place in 1986 - 793 in all (SA Labour Statistics, 1987; 429), and is reflected in fig. 1. This represents an increase of over 100% from 1985, a clear reflection of increased worker militancy. The unrest can be seen to have reached its zenith during this year. This culminated in a new era of unprecedented repression, with two consecutive States of Emergency being declared in this year.

The average number of workers per strike in 1986 was 535 (SA Labour Statistics, 1987; 428), a slight decrease from the figure for the previous year, but nonetheless far larger than was the case in the 1970's. Nonetheless, the average strike in 1986 still

was far larger than was the case for many years in the 1970's. This can be seen as a product of the growing strength of worker organization. All in all, 424 390 South African workers took part in strike action in 1986 (ibid.;428). Once again, inflation increased. The rate of increase of the CPI now was 18.6% (SA Reserve Bank, 1988;9), a symptom of the worsening economic situation, that would serve to increase the already-high levels of dissatisfaction amongst the working class. This was exacerbated by a decline in real wages in many sectors of industry (see fig.16).

Wages as a Determinant of Industrial Conflict in 1986

The predominant cause of strike action in 1986 remained wages, as is clear from fig.8. This seems to be not only a response to the ravages of inflation, but also an attempt by workers to better their overall position in society. While economic factors clearly did contribute to the relatively high numbers of wage strikes, it is important to see increasing industrial conflict as occurring as a parallel development to escalating political unrest. The fact that the unions had become more politicized demonstrates the linkage between workplace issues and wider society. As appears to have been the case with the 1973 strike wave (see previous chapters), wage demands may represent the articulation of more far-reaching grievances, such as a dissatisfaction with existing

relations of power within society. The struggle for improved material conditions can, in itself, be the product of the wider socio-political environment (see Bonner, 1987; 56). Twenty-seven strikes were caused by union related matters (NMC, 1986; 99). Approximately 102 strikes were caused by disciplinary matters (ibid.), proportionately a roughly similar figure to 1985.

Escalating Resistance in both Workplace and Wider Society

Probably the most significant development in the arena of industrial relations in the 1985-6 period was the more than two-fold increase in strike action in the latter year. It is important to view this in the context of rising political resistance. In 1986 two States of Emergency were declared. It seems probable that one of the consequences of the subsequent wave of state directed repression was that much latent militancy and subsequent resistance was channelled into the workplace on a country-wide basis. Hyman's (1981; 53) assertion that latent working class militancy is transferable would indeed seem relevant to South Africa of 1985. No longer able to safely articulate their grievances in the political arena, increasing numbers resorted to strike action. Even the fairly conservative Human Relations school of industrial relations acknowledges that the closure of channels of communication will have far-reaching consequences (see Hyman, 1981; 53). The closure of all channels through which peaceful protest in the community

could be expressed could well have had far reaching consequences for all aspects of South African industrial relations.

Indeed, even if demands expressed by strikes appeared on the surface to be economistic, they should be seen as a symptom of wider dissatisfaction with the status-quo. Increased combativity at the workplace may simply be the product of a far broader underlying resistance. As one of the few channels left open for legal collective action, the workplace was becoming increasingly a place of conflict.

The emergence of the two "super federations" can likewise be seen as a sign of increased militancy, as well as the product of over a decade of unprecedented growth on a nation-wide basis. Owing to their democratic structures and strong organization, these two union federations seem likely to escape the co-option or direct suppression that was the lot of many of their South African predecessors. A product of the heady years of the early-to-mid 1980's and of over a decade of dedicated union organization, COSATU and NACTU not only united more workers than was ever the case in the past, but also (this appeared especially the case with COSATU) more willing to take up political issues than many of their founder unions and federations. By its sheer size, COSATU instantly became a major South African socio-political actor. However, it still remained vulnerable to repression, as was to be shown by events of subsequent years.

COSATU and the Freedom Charter, NACTU and Africanism

To many, the launch of COSATU in late 1985 seemed to usher in a new era of political involvement by the independent unions. It has been suggested that the successive States of Emergency, which were marked by a clampdown on popular political organizations, created a vacuum, which could only be filled by the independent trade unions adopting a more overtly-political stance (Markham and Matiko, 1987b; 115). COSATU and its member unions were by no means immune to either state repression or action by mysterious death squads. Many unionists were detained and in 1987 COSATU house was burnt down under suspicious circumstances (Markham and Matiko, 1987a;3). However, despite setbacks, COSATU was able to continue functioning owing to the strong organization of many of its member unions. As Jay Naidoo remarked, COSATU was "not just a building" (quoted in Markham and Matiko, 1987a;4). The restrictions on popular political organizations had done nothing to reduce the ever-rising extent of working-class militancy. Instead, it was to have the effect of channelling this militancy into the work place. This would result not only in increased manifestations of conflict in the workplace (most notably in record numbers of strikes taking place), but also in workers pressuring unions to adopt a more overtly political standpoint. Markham and Matiko (1987b; 115) suggest that state action resulted in unions seeking to increase their ties with popular political organizations. At COSATU's Second National Congress, the Freedom Charter was adopted as policy. Although the immediate

adoption of a more overtly-socialist "workers' charter" was ruled out, it was decided to continue discussion on the issue of transition to socialism (SALB,1987d;3). This created concrete links between the COSATU unions and "Charterist" popular political organizations. Clearly, much water had passed under the bridge since the clashes between unions and community organizations in the Eastern Cape of the early 1980s. However, it is important to note that closer co-operation did not mean that unions had abandoned their primary role of representing workers on shop floor issues, as is evidenced by the numerous strikes over wages. It was only because they had strongly democratic internal organizational structures, with much power being devolved to factory level, that they were in a position to adopt a more overtly political stance without risking being immediately silenced through arbitrary state action.

As a parallel development to COSATU's growing ties with "Charterist" popular political organizations, NACTU had much in common with the Black Consciousness movement. The major obstacle to reconciliation with the COSATU unions remained NACTU's insistence on black leadership (see Weekly Mail, October 9,1986). However, NACTU also has common ground with Pan Africanism. At its launch it was stressed that the entire country belonged to the "indigenous people" (CUSA/AZACTU,1986;50). However, it is still uncertain as to whether the final stance NACTU adopts will be more Black Consciousness or Africanist in orientation.

Important differences remain between these two standpoints. These largely revolve around questions such as who is an "African", who is "amongst the oppressed" and are all blacks working class, and all working class blacks? Perhaps NACTU's ties with both streams of thought may provide momentum for what would seem the most logical - a total reconciliation between Black Consciousness and Africanism.

The Effects of the Emergency Regulations on Trade Unions

The Second State of Emergency resulted in increased numbers of detentions. Six hundred and fourteen trade unionists were detained, 80% of which had ties to COSATU (Markham and Matiko, 1987b;116). In addition to detentions, COSATU's organization was disrupted through security police raids and bannings of publications and meetings (Naidoo,1986b;2). COSATU leadership viewed this as a directly political attack on the union movement, warranting a political response (ibid.;5). The actions of the state seem to have led to a series of "wildcat" strikes, most prominent being those involving CCAWUSA members (Innes,1986;47). Thus, once again, the incidence of industrial conflict was directly increased through state action. These protest strikes were met with a degree of success in that some trade unionists were released from detention(ibid.;47). However, a protest stayaway called by COSATU on June 14th proved to be a failure(ibid.;48). Innes argues that this demonstrated the need

for caution and consultation, before adopting such strategies (ibid.;49). Fine (1987;221) argues that COSATU underestimated the damages wrought through detentions. Furthermore, the lack of an alliance with popular political organizations made it harder to initiate politically-orientated protests (ibid.;221). Meanwhile, conventional instances of strike action were marked by police interference. Indeed, Markham and Matiko (1987b;118) suggest that all major instances of strike action at this time were characterized by "brutal intervention" by either representatives of management or police.

UWUSA in the Emergency Era

The mass detentions of trade unionists has created a gap which UWUSA has attempted to fill as part of its challenge (and that of Inkhata generally) to the independent unions. Indeed, it has been argued that there was a definite pattern to state repression in the northern Natal region (Green,1986b;78). In this region key COSATU members were detained, giving UWUSA a free hand to organize (ibid.;78). UWUSA has been most successful in establishing a presence at companies such as BTR Sarmcol, where the independent unions had earlier fought (and lost) a bitter struggle for recognition (see SALB,1985;3). Following a strike in May 1985 virtually the entire Sarmcol workforce was dismissed. By 1987 Sarmcol had recognized UWUSA (Leeb & Radford,1988;1-3). Bennett (1988;4) points out that the bulk of Inkhata's support

seems to lie within the KwaZulu bantustan. Nonetheless, Buthelezi does have some (albeit diminishing) support amongst urban blacks in Natal, probably mostly amongst recently urbanised "migrants" who seek to retain some or other link with their "homeland" (ibid.;4). This situation has been exacerbated by the apartheid ideology, which has attempted to ensure that urban blacks only remain on a temporary basis (ibid.;4). Indeed, probably the most serious challenge facing the independent unions from this quarter will probably occur in the townships and not at the workplace. A mere month after UWUSA's launch, COSATU released a dossier detailing instances of alleged harassment of its members by Inkhata functionaries (Bennett,1988;22). There has been increasing instances of conflict taking place between the UDF and Inkhata in Natal, the latter receiving the backing of the security forces (De Villiers,1985;34). Critics of Inkhata have argued that that organization has shown an increasing willingness to become identified with the repressive mechanisms of the state (Mare & Hamilton,1987;121). The conflict between progressive organizations and Inkhata has become most pronounced in the Pietermaritzburg region, where Inkhata saw the growing presence of the unions and the UDF as a direct threat (Von Holdt,1988;17). The first series of clashes had taken place during the stayaway following the BTR Sarmcol strike (ibid.;17). The conflict was exacerbated by the formation of independent committees who claimed allegiance to COSATU or the UDF, but resorted to unauthorised attacks on Inkhata members (ibid.;19).

The situation further worsened when evidence emerged of co-operation between Inkhata members and the security forces (ibid.;23).

The Railway Strike

One of the most significant instances of strike action in 1987 the three month long S.A. Transport Services (SATS) dispute. This strike involved a large sector of South Africa's "forgotten workforce" - the black workers employed in parastatals or the public sector who were denied the protection of the Labour Relations Act. Despite this lack of protection, the protracted SATS strike resulted in a significant gain for workers. SATS agreed to reinstate all the 16 000 fired strikers, and acceded to a wide range of demands, from job protection for detained SATS employees, to the upgrading of two hostels for railway workers (Singh, 1987; 38). A major reason for the success of the strike was that many black SATS workers possessed some or other skill (SALB 1987b;37). This meant that unskilled strike breakers (mostly drawn from the white working class) were not able to perform their jobs in a totally satisfactory manner (ibid.;37).

The strike began at the City Deep SATS yards and then spread across the Reef area. Interestingly, the major issues of the strike were demands for an end to racist practices by SATS and demonstrations of solidarity and not simple demands for more pay

(Matiko,1987b;9-10). By the first week of April over 2 000 SATS workers were on strike (ibid.;10).

The union involved in the dispute was the South African Railways and Harbours Workers Union (SARHWU), supported by the National Union of Railway Workers (NURW). The strike was characterized by unusually high levels of violence. This included the police raid on COSATU House on the 28th of May when a meeting of railway workers was broken up. On the 22nd of April a SARHWU meeting in Germiston was attacked by police. The police then turned their attentions once more to COSATU House, which was the target of a bloody siege. Sadly, it seems that prior the raids either SARHWU, or over-zealous members thereof did "execute" some strikebreakers. During late November/early December 1987 several leading SARHWU members appeared in court (several were later convicted of murder) (Finance Week 17/9/87 - 23/12/87). This bleak page in the history of the independent unions gave the authorities some justification for their actions. It is clear that the state regarded strikes in the public sector in an extremely serious light and was prepared to use the full measure of its emergency powers to counter such action. During the dispute SATS adopted a very hardline policy, accusing SARHWU of attempting to overthrow the status quo not only at SATS, but also in other sectors of industry (Matiko,1987b;4). However, as can be seen by the above, state action failed to preclude SARHWU from making some significant gains. Indeed, the major result of police

action seems to have been that of adding fuel to a highly charged political situation, which would have the effect of further increasing working class combativity.

The Post Office Dispute

The railway strike was followed by a strike of postal workers. On the 8th April, a dispute at the Power Plant depot triggered off a Reef wide strike involving 8 000 members of the officially-recognized Post Office and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA) (Singh,1987; 38). Matiko ascribes a major cause of the strike to an intransigent management, who had refused to discuss worker grievances (1987a;16). This dispute was to last over five weeks before a settlement was finally reached. The Post Office agreed both to reinstate 13 dismissed workers and end race segregation in its staff facilities (ibid.;16). This included continuing paying the full salary of a Post Office worker jailed on a charge of intimidation (SALB,1987a;26). Shortly after the main dispute, a second Post Office workers strike broke out in East London, which was also successful in gaining most of the demands expressed by workers (ibid.;26). As noted earlier, public sector employees do not enjoy the protection of the Labour Relations Act, and thus the ability to extract concessions in this area through collective action represented a major advance for organized labour. Singh (1987;40) argues that it was inevitable that advances made

by trade unions in the private sector would spill over into the public sector. The emergence of representative independent unions in the public sector serves to demonstrate the continued vitality of the independent trade union movement as a whole despite emergency restrictions. Indeed, as noted earlier, repressive state action seems to have had the direct effect of increasing working class militancy and combativity and the willingness of workers to challenge the state directly.

The 1987 Mineworkers' Strike

A further major "trial of strength" took place on the mines. This was to prove the biggest and costliest dispute in South Africa's history, mobilizing 340 000 workers in all (Markham & Mothikeli, 1987; 58). The strike followed the breakdown of protracted wage negotiations between the NUM and all the major mining houses (unlike previous years, where at least some houses reached a settlement with the union before a strike was resorted to). Statements by management indicated that they saw the possibility of proving to the NUM that they would not necessarily be moved by the threat of strike action (ibid.; 62). The strike would have political effects if only because of the history of co-operation between the Chamber of Mines and the government in constructing the system of labour control. The dispute was marked by high levels of violence, with frequent intervention by mine

security and police, and the detention of a number of key NUM officials and shaft stewards (ibid.;63). After almost three weeks of striking negotiations resumed, but soon broke down again. This led to mass firings (an estimated ^{60 000} workers were dismissed) and then a settlement based on an offer the NUM had previously rejected (ibid.;69). The actions by the state during the dispute demonstrates the degree of political seriousness it ascribed to any form of major resistance on the mines. While the dispute had only mixed results for workers (some concessions, but disruptions to union organization), it demonstrated that organized labour in the mining sector had become a major force to be reckoned with in the socio-political arena. As Rex (1977;36) notes the results of the strikes could have far-reaching effects from shifts in the basic balance of power at the workplace to wider political repercussions.

Rising Strikes and a Breakdown of Orthodox Channels of Protest

An unusually high number of strikes took place in 1987 - 1148 in all (DOM, 1987) - reflected in fig.1. Furthermore, strikes during 1987 tended to be far larger - 110 strikes involved more than 1000 workers in 1987, compared to 80 in 1986 (ibid.). South African strikes still tended to be fairly short by European standards - 653, representing some 56.9% of all strikes in 1987, were of less than a day's length in duration. However, as can be seen by the above, several protracted disputes did take place,

most notably the SAR&H and Post Office strikes. It can be argued that expression as a result of repression will result in a widespread protest (see Hyman,1981;53). The year 1987 seems to have represented the peak of worker militancy following the widespread resistance and repression of the 1985-6 period. Only in 1988 would state and capital succeed in a concerted counter-attack which would result in a dramatic decline in strike totals.

Major Stayaways

The 5-6 May 1987 stayaway appears to have been the most extensive instance of such action in South Africa's history to that date (LMG,1987a; 49). Held in protest against the all-white election, it was observed by 500 000 workers on the 5th and 600 000 on the 6th (ibid.;49). It was the first stayaway in protest against an all-white election since the heyday of the legal ANC in the late 1950s. The success of this stayaway demonstrated the high degree of political consciousness amongst workers and their willingness once more to use the weapon of collective action in the workplace in order to voice more far reaching overtly-political demands. The stayaway was most widely observed in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage region where 98-99% of black workers did not go to work (LMG, 1987a; 501). As evident in previous chapters, the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area has been characterized by an unusually high degree of political consciousness in the 1980s. Although

earlier events had showed that community organizations were strong enough to successfully hold a stayaway on their own, the apparently high levels of solidarity shown in the May 1988 stayaway clearly represented the product of close co-operation between trade unions and community organizations. This serves to demonstrate the increased co-operation between these two manifestations of working class militancy that was the direct product of successive waves of Emergency repression.

The very length of the mines, Post Office, and railway strikes, and the general success of the stayaway despite repressive action by the state raises, once again, the possibility of a mass strike. Luxembourgh (1971), citing the example of the 1905 strikes in Czarist Russia, argues that militancy is of greater import than organization. In contrast Engels (quoted in Luxembourgh, 1971) sees effective organization being of great value. The combination of these two assets, organization and militancy, could well prove devastatingly effective in the future.

A second stayaway took place on June 16, Soweto Day. Emergency restrictions resulted in no major political organizations overtly supporting it (LMG, 1987b; 52). The Labour Monitoring Group has suggested that June 16 already had become a de facto public holiday that would be observed regardless of the standpoints (or, rather, lack of) assumed by organizations (ibid.). Its success demonstrates the limits of state repression. As borne out by the

Durban strikes of 1973, and the unrest on the mines in the early 1970's, state action simply result in protest assuming a more faceless and seemingly spontaneous form.

NUMSA: A Major Development in Working Class Politics

COSATU's strategy of a single unified union per industry received a major boost in May, when the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) was launched. At its first congress, the new federation recognized the Freedom Charter as policy, thus placing it firmly in the "Charterist" camp. However, the Freedom Charter was only accepted as a minimum demand, and it was argued that the interests of workers could only be fully realized under a socialist system (Obery, 1987;8). Indeed, it was argued that a socialist "workers' charter" should be drawn up (SALB,1987c;14). It was seen as essential that "the struggle for socialism should have working class leadership"(ibid.;14). Thus, whilst willing to adopt policies that were held by popular political organizations, it was clear that the independent trade unions were determined to retain their own political agenda. The timing of NUMSA's launch, when State Repression had just reached a new height (COSATU House had recently been besieged and record numbers of trade unionists were in detention) placed no little pressure on the new union to assume an overtly political stance.

NUMSA brought together a wide range of metal and motor unions, most notably MACWUSA, MAWU, MICWU, and NAAWU. The new union adopted the standpoint that the primary interest of organized workers should be the creation of a democratic socialist state controlled by workers (Obery, 1987; 8). The Freedom Charter would serve as a good base on which workers could build their own, specifically socialist political programme. While NUMSA welcomed alliances with popular political organizations, it insisted that the struggle for a more equitable system should be under the leadership of workers (Obery, 1987; 10). Obery argues that this standpoint will result in the new union having a growing influence in the arena of socialist politics (ibid.;8). Indeed, the sheer size of NUMSA's membership (over 136 000[ibid.;8]) will result in that union having considerable influence in a wide range of areas. While there is no doubt NUMSA's stance will strengthen the position of the "Charterist" popular political organizations, the new union seems determined to retain its autonomy in determining policy. NUMSA's adoption of an explicitly political program (even if rather sketchy) contrasts with the position of many of the independent unions in the 1970's, who were often wary of adopting a political stance. This further demonstrates the growing politicization of South African industrial relations in the 1980's.

Continued Wage Strikes

The major cause of strike action in 1987 was, once again, wages, causing 295 disputes in all (DOM, 1987), despite the fact that the rate of increase of the Consumer Price Index had slowed to 16.1% (S A Reserve Bank, 1988;9), as is shown on figs.1,2,5 & 6. It is clear that broader factors than simply direct inflationary pressure were responsible for the relatively high number of wage strikes. One reason could have been that black real wages remained more-or-less static, or actually declined during this year (see fig.16). However, as noted in previous chapters, wage demands may be symptomatic of a wide range of grievances, whilst at the same time being difficult to accede to in a time of recession.

An even more significant development was the dramatic increase in the duration of the average strike. As noted previously, by overseas standards South African strikes still tended to be fairly short. However, the average South African strike had more than tripled in duration - to an average length of 9.9 days, up from 3.1 days in 1986 (DOM, 1987). This was mainly due to 1987 being such an exceptional year. The Post Office, mines and railway disputes all represented protracted "trials of strength", lasting five and three weeks and three months respectively. This development represents a new chapter in the history of the independent unions and contrasts sharply with the late 1970s when unions generally sought to avoid damaging confrontations. This

could well have far-reaching repercussions, particularly when the increased numbers of stayaways are borne in mind. When large numbers of workers stay out on strike for long periods of time, the effects of such action can no longer be confined to the workplace and spill over into wider society. Apparent increases in the degree of politicization of collective action at the workplace, and the linkage between workplace issues and factors of a broader socio-political import could well have been partially responsible for increasing the willingness of workers to resort to protracted strike action in an era of political revolt. The fact that unions in several cases were capable of mounting sustained instances of strike action demonstrates their ability to survive unprecedented levels of repression.

Unprecedented Repression and Increased Conflict

As can be seen by the above, the post-1984 period is of import in that it saw unusually high levels of strike action (peaking in 1987), combined with unprecedented state repression. Indeed, these two occurrences must be seen as linked - if any means of free political expression are removed from the members of a community, the high degree of latent working class militancy will manifest itself at the workplace. State repression failed to preclude several major instances of successful strike action from taking place in 1987. Whether the decline in strike totals in 1988 and 1989 represents the start of a new trend or simply a

temporary decline remains unclear. Indeed, it can be argued that the major effect of repression seems to be that of giving collective action a more faceless form. Many disputes and disturbances in the early 1970's were characterized by such a form. In this regard, history would repeat itself, only on a doubtlessly far larger scale than before. The changed role of the unions, increased strikes and stayaways and unprecedented levels of state repression directed against both unions and political organizations all serve to demonstrate the increased import of political variables as a crucial factor in understanding the frequency, nature and intensity of strikes and stayaways.

CHAPTER 7

A General Overview of Events 1970-87

Clearly, the 1970's and 1980's have been a turbulent era for South Africa. Both these decades were marked by unprecedented levels of political discontent. The most spectacular manifestations thereof were the 1976 Soweto uprising and the mass insurrection from 1984 to 1986. These years were also of import in the sphere of industrial relations. Not only did these years see a massive resurgence of strike action, but also the rise of strong, democratic independent trade unions. The relationship between the rise of the independent unions and growing industrial conflict on the one hand, and increasing political resistance on the other will now be evaluated in a general review and broad summary of the major issues and events covered in previous chapters.

The late 1960's should best be viewed as a period of forced inaction. Most of the apartheid edifice was already in place and the government was now more concerned with increasing the repressive powers of the state. For blacks, the 1960's were an essentially frustrating period. They lack both a means to articulate demands and seek redress of grievances.

The wave of repression following Sharpeville had the effect of silencing not only most black popular political organizations, but also most black trade unions. Too often, the latter had neglected the need first to build strong and democratic organizational structures, playing a subordinate role to political organizations, and were thus very vulnerable to state

repression (see Lambert, 1980; 103-4). Some effective unions did exist, such as the Food and Canning Workers' Union, but these only succeeded in organizing limited numbers of workers. Strikes during this period tended to be comparatively short affairs, involving relatively few workers. Demands were generally a reflection of immediate concerns, with but little attempt being made to push back the frontier of control. A few major instances of strike action did occur, such as the Durban dock workers strike of 1969. However, it represented more the exception than the rule during these difficult years. A significant development was the emergence of the black consciousness movement, which was to play a major role in the 1972-6 period, yet did not seem to organise many workers (Fisher, 1977; 342). Perhaps this movement represented one vehicle for workers to voice their grievances. However, as events of subsequent years were to show, there was no substitute for democratically structured trade unions. Indeed, where political organizations have attempted to establish trade unions from above (a good example would be SASO's founding of BAWU), they have had only very limited success in the long term.

Though seemingly more peaceful than the years that followed it, the 1970-1 period is of interest in that there were already signs of a growing resistance. This is borne out by the results of surveys conducted during this period (for example, see Schlemmer, 1975; 5) as well as developments such as the PUTCO strike, the various dock workers' strikes and the wave of strikes

in Namibia. During this period the foundations of many of the independent unions were laid. This was mostly the result of the formation of a number of worker service organizations on a country-wide basis, as well as the founding of the Urban Training Project (UTP). The former were mostly founded by students and academics, with the help of practising or ex trade union officials. The latter was founded by a group of former TUCSA officials, who had been expelled from that federation for devoting their attentions to the then unpopular cause of the unionization of black workers. These embryonic union structures adopted a cautious approach, for fear of attracting the unwanted attention of the state. For example, the Durban activists shielded their activities of worker organization behind the facade of a "benefit fund", aimed at covering the funeral costs of members. Fear of state repression was to have a positive effect in that it encouraged the new unions to place much emphasis on internal democracy, with decentralized decision-making.

Most strikes by black workers during this period tended to be fairly spontaneous affairs. Indeed, they were often caused by as basic a factor as poor communication (see fig.7). However, some significant instances of strike action did occur. Most notable of these was the June 1972 PUTCO bus drivers' strike. This strike was effectively ended by direct police action. However, the dispute eventually led to the formation of the Transport and

Allied Workers Union (TAWU).

In the sphere of industrial relations, 1973 is best known as the year of the 1973 Durban strike wave. Although, as can be seen above, preceding years were by no means peaceful, 1973 ushered in a new era of industrial conflict. Starting at the Durban plant of Coronation Brick and Tile, the strike wave soon spread right across the Durban/Pinetown region. Most strikes were of comparatively short duration and exhibited little evidence of formal worker organization (Fisher, 1977; 347). Despite this, the strikes showed proof of an unusually high degree of worker solidarity. It seems that both state and capital were taken rather by surprise, for neither adopted a coherent strategy to deal with this new development. Police action was to a surprising degree restrained, whilst many employers were quick to grant concessions in the form of wage increases (see Dekker, 1975; 225).

Although the direct causes of the strike wave seemed primarily economic, it is important to view the course of events in the broader South African socio-political context. Owing to government policy, there were no effective channels for voicing grievances on a wide range of issues, from bus fare increases, to a lack of basic political rights. According to Fisher (1977; 344-5) this lack of effective channels was particularly apparent at

the workplace, where there was widespread dissatisfaction with the liaison committee system. Indeed the actions of the Nationalist government seem to have cast a political shadow on all aspects of life for the average South African. It is important, therefore, to view this new era of collective action against the South African political background. The 1973 Durban strike wave preceded the 1976 Soweto uprising by only three years, both being symptomatic of a rising challenge to all aspects of the status quo. Both the 1973 strike wave and 1976 uprising should be seen as symptomatic of an increased rising militancy and combativity amongst South Africa's black population.

In addition to the Durban strike wave, 1973 also saw the foundation of some of the first independent trade unions, including MAWU, CWIU and NUTW, who were to play a major role in years to come. In 1974 the centre of industrial conflict in South Africa shifted to the PWV region, although significant numbers of strikes took place in both the Durban and Border/Port Elizabeth regions (see fig.9). Demands seemed to have shifted to a more sophisticated level, with unusually (when compared to the late 1960's) high numbers of strikes being triggered off by the issue of dismissals.

Standing between the 1973 Durban strike wave and the tumultuous events of 1976, the course of events in 1975 have tended to be overlooked by

both those studying political developments and labour relations. Nonetheless, this period is of import, if only because of the rising conflict on the mines. Owing to the fact that black miners were bereft of any form of union representation, this conflict tended to assume a rather faceless form. Largely, it revolved around faction fights and a seemingly irrational destruction of property (see Kirkwood, 1975; 30-32). However, despite this lack of formal organization, several instances of strike action did take place. Most notable of these were the strikes at the Harmony, Lorraine, and Merriespruit mines. These strikes involved workers from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. There seems to be some evidence that the rising conflict on the mines was partially a response to changes in the broader political environment (see Kirkwood, 1975; 30-35). These political developments included factors such as the winning of independence in Mozambique and the rise of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa.

Despite the growing restiveness on the mines, the total number of strikes taking place in 1975 declined sharply. This can probably be partially ascribed to increases in unemployment (see fig.11) which would serve to discourage workers from seeking long term gains. Indeed, during this period, the organization of the independent unions continued apace. This would place workers on a far firmer footing when resorting to collective action in the future. Despite their rapid growth, the independent unions

remained vulnerable to repressive action by both employers and the authorities, as witness the defeats at both Heinemann and Armourplate. In both disputes management and state adopted a hard line response. At Heinemann workers were baton-charged by police and dismissed (see MAWU,1977;49-59). Although the Armourplate dispute represented the first legal strike by blacks in South Africa's history, workers were dismissed and faced criminal charges within hours of starting a picket line (see Glass & Allied Workers' Union,1977;61-65).

1976 is best remembered as the year of the Soweto uprising. Although sparked off by discontent over the teaching of Afrikaans at schools, it represented the culmination of growing political discontent, exacerbated by rising inflation and growing unemployment, the latter of which would directly affect school children who were faced with increasingly bleak prospects. Despite the political unrest, instances of disruptive action in factories proved rare. However, strikes did seem characterized by an unusually high degree of working class solidarity. Interestingly, the first successful stayaways in recent years took place during this year - in August and September (SAIRR,1978;86). A November stayaway proved less successful, apparently because many employers threatened to take disciplinary action (SAIRR,1978;115). The Soweto uprising was followed by a fresh wave of state repression, which definitely had the effect of weakening the newly-emerged unions.

This wave of repression, together with rising unemployment (see fig.11) resulted in the substantial decrease in strike action in 1977. Nonetheless, there was evidence of a growing militancy amongst the country's black workforce. This can be seen as the result of continued dissatisfaction with the status quo. Workers had no means of seeking redress for their grievances other than through collective action at the workplace. However, this option was not feasible to many workers, owing to the total lack of protection for striking workers, even if the strike was legal. This would seem to be a major deterrent in a time of rising unemployment. In addition, the threat of further coercive state action remained. Despite this, the independent unions succeeded in recovering from the wave of bannings and other manifestations of coercive state action which were common in the early months of this year. Important centres of industrial conflict remained the PWV region (where most South African industry is concentrated), the Durban/Pinetown area (scene of the 1973 strike wave), and East London (a district with a long history of political activism), as is reflected in fig.9).

By 1978 the total number of strikes began to increase again. This occurred despite rising unemployment. It seems that high unemployment was becoming a less effective deterrent to workers contemplating strike action. It can be argued that beyond a

certain point significant numbers of workers had become reconciled to structural unemployment and were no longer prepared to refrain from collective action on account of this (see figs. 11 - 14). The lack of any form of social welfare legislation had resulted in high unemployment having the gradual effect of increasing the number of dependants per worker. This would have the effect of decreasing net wages and adding an urgency to wage demands - effectively increasing the basic needs per worker. This would be exacerbated by a gradual slowing (or even decline) in the rise of real wages (see fig.16). As Bonner (1987;56) notes, the common demand for increased wages represented a reflection of the ongoing struggle for improved material conditions, an inevitable product of the unjust political system.

The fear of repressive state action resulted in the independent trade unions continuing to seek to play a low profile. Indeed, many were reluctant to become too openly identified with instances of strike action. However, the independent trade unions had already begun to establish sound organizational structures that would place them on a firm footing for the challenge of the 1980's.

The formation of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) represented a major advance in the sphere of trade union unity. It can be argued that this extended organization enabled workers to embark on more sustained instances of strike action.

Indeed the number of workdays lost through strike action increased dramatically, despite a slight decline in the total number of strikes taking place (see NMC,1986;107).

Significant instances of strike action included the Cape Town stevedores' strike and the Fattis and Monis strike. Both disputes involved workers unionized by the Western Cape unions. The former is of interest in that it was triggered off by the issue of recognition (of the Western Cape General Workers' Union). This demand was rapidly acceded to. The Fattis and Monis dispute is of interest in that it culminated in a consumer boycott. After seven months management agreed to a settlement. This represented a comparatively novel form of collective action in South Africa, and demonstrated the close ties that existed between the workplace and the community. The tactic of consumer boycott was later employed in the Colgate-Palmolive and Wilson-Rowntree disputes, the former being successful and the latter not.

It was during 1979 that the Wiehahn report was released. This report called for a major overhaul of the country's industrial relations system to include blacks in the statutory collective bargaining structures. An initial attempt was made to exclude migrant workers from the resultant reforms. The strong reaction against this from the independent trade unions (see SALDRU,1979;91-3), resulted in migrants eventually being

included. The effect of the Wiehahn reforms proved highly paradoxical. To paraphrase Nietzsche, they achieved everything the government had hoped for, and nothing. On the one hand, many of the independent unions registered and made full use of the newly available bargaining structures. The Industrial Court adjudicated growing numbers of disputes. However, despite the increase in negotiation and mediation taking place through the official structures (as well as at the informal level, it seems, through bodies such as IMSSA), the number of strikes taking place has only increased. The most likely explanation for this has been provided by Webster (1987;217), who points out that the state has failed to incorporate the unions at a political level. The denial of any meaningful political rights has resulted in increased levels of combativity being manifested at the workplace.

Although, as can be seen by the success of many of the consumer boycotts (e.g. Colgate-Palmolive; Fattis and Monis), this did not preclude some instances of conflict between the independent trade unions and some of the recently-emergent community organizations. This was particularly so in the highly-charged atmosphere of the Eastern Cape. Indeed, the failure of the FOSATU-affiliated United Auto Workers to assume a more overtly political stance resulted in that union splitting, with a breakaway union, MACWUSA, being formed. MACWUSA forged strong ties with PEBCO. However, critics have argued that this was at the expense of shop floor organization, and thus made that union far more vulnerable to

state repression.

Thus, the independent unions faced growing pressures from two directions - on the one hand from community organizations and the community at large to take up political issues; and from the state on the other hand, with its ever-present threat of further coercive action. Indeed, the latter directly intervened in a number of industrial disputes in 1980, most notably at the FRAME strike in Durban (where police teargassed strikers [Mawbey, 1980;9-11]), and the red meat dispute in Cape Town (where a number of prominent trade unionists were detained). Heavy-handed police intervention in the Volkswagen strike in Uitenhage resulted in widespread unrest being triggered off in neighbouring townships. Although the police intervened only in a minority of strikes overall, these were often amongst the largest strikes. Probably, the state felt that it was in these highly-visible disputes that its interests would be most threatened should workers make further gains.

By 1980 the number of recorded instances of strike action began to increase dramatically. Simultaneous with this development was the continued growth of the independent trade unions. Most notable was the rise of the militant Eastern Cape-based "populist unions", who were later to affiliate to the UDF. This development should be seen as but a product of increased working class militancy that was finally to come to a head in the post-1983

mass protest.

The rising number of union-related and disciplinary disputes reflects the growing working class militancy during 1981. Interestingly, a further major cause of strike action during this year was the government's ill-advised "Pensions Preservation Scheme" (see fig.8). In fact the scheme sparked off such a reaction that the government was forced to abandon its proposed changes in legislation. Even on its own, this development served to demonstrate that the independent unions had become a major South African socio-political actor. However, the independent unions were still extremely vulnerable to coercive state action. This was particularly apparent in the Border region, where the community-orientated SAAWU reached its peak of support, only to fall victim to the onslaught of the Sebe brothers, a blow from which it would never recover (see Maree, 1982; 37-9).

During 1981 a major strike wave was to take place on the East Rand. Whilst, like the 1973 Durban strike wave it provided symptoms of a rising militancy, the East Rand wave involved mostly unionized workers (mostly in the metal industry). Rapid unionization had occurred in that industry, a simultaneous development with the rise of the popular political organizations in the townships.

The death in detention of trade unionist Neil Aggett on the 5th of February 1982 was to have far-reaching repercussions for the independent unions. Not only did this result in a successful nation-wide stayaway, but the stayaway's organization gave rise to increased moves for unity amongst the independent trade unions. His death showed how state action yet again cast a directly political shadow over most aspects of industrial relations in South Africa. Indeed, it demonstrates that even the most basic aspects of workplace organization represents a profoundly political act.

It is important to note that after 1980 the rise of the independent trade unions was paralleled by the emergence and growth of the new popular political organizations. Both these manifestations of working class militancy were to present the state with an unprecedented challenge in the 1980's. However, both remained vulnerable to state repression, with neither being in a position to mount a successful sustained challenge to the status quo. Most disputes until 1982 were of comparatively short duration, with few recorded instances of protracted strike action (see IIR 1980-2). It seems evident that most unions sought a quick resolution of disputes and avoided protracted "trials of strength" for fear of jeopardizing recently-won organizational gains. Only a few protracted strikes took place, one of the first being the 1984 Dunlop strike.

Workers could still be dismissed for striking legally. However, it seems evident that legal strike action did afford them some degree of protection from more enlightened employers. Unions remained still vulnerable in both peri-urban and rural areas. Not only were employers liable to adopt a more hard line approach, but the police were also more likely to resort to coercive action.

A major development during these years was the rise of the National Union of Miners (see Duff, 1983;9). For the first time, many black miners enjoyed the backing of a democratically structured trade union. This resulted in struggles on the mines increasingly taking the form of strike action. Owing to the important position of the mines in the South African economy, effective organization gave black miners immense bargaining power.

The new constitution and the Black Local Authorities Act sparked off an unprecedented popular reaction, resulting in the formation of both the UDF and the National Forum. These developments were followed by a series of successful stayaways (most of which were characterized by a high degree of co-operation between workers and popular political organizations) against a backdrop of rising "unrest". The success of the stayaways demonstrated both the strength of the independent unions and the ties between workplace

and township. Indeed, the 1983-4 period should be seen as a period of growing resistance to the status quo in both the community and shop floor. In November 1984 a major overtly-political stayaway took place. Its success can be largely attributed to the widespread support of worker organizations (particularly FOSATU) and demonstrates the considerable force of joint action by unions and political organizations (see LMG,1985a;79-85). Whilst there had been involvement in political issues before on the part of FOSATU (such as its "vote no" campaign during the constitutional referendum), this was the first major instance when that federation used its organizational strength at the workplace in support of political goals. Interestingly, this stayaway also provided further evidence that workers would no longer be prepared to take the possibility of losing their jobs as a deterrent to striking. Workers at SASOL were threatened with dismissal if they observed the stayaway (see Ntaopane,1985;36). Despite this, they did not go to work on the relevant days and were summarily fired, once again providing evidence of the reduced deterrence of unemployment. The highly-charged political environment seems to have provided a major incentive in spurring on workers to strike.

By 1985 the "unrest" which had begun in the townships of the Vaal Triangle reached its peak. As can be seen by the above, this unrest formed only one facet of a growing challenge to the state,

which included also strategies such as schools boycotts and stayaways. To many the government's fall seemed imminent. However, it was to become clear that the government had yet to unveil the vast coercive powers it had at its disposal.

Meanwhile, protracted unity talks had finally led to the joining together of the FOSATU unions, the "UDF unions" and several unaffiliated unions to form COSATU in November 1985, South Africa's biggest union federation ever. The new federation indicated from the outset that it would assume a directly political stance (see Obery, 1987;9). Many workers now believed unions should get involved in the overall struggle for political change. However, there was still considerable debate as to which strategy should be adopted in order to bring this change about. This debate largely revolved around the question of alliances with political organizations and the issue of working class leadership in resistance. COSATU's adoption of the Freedom Charter as policy has shifted the focus of much of this debate into the question of a more overtly-socialist "workers' charter" to supplement the Freedom Charter (see Obery, 1987;8). Soon after the launch of COSATU, the two union federations dedicated to black leadership, CUSA and AZACTU, agreed to merge to form NACTU. Like COSATU, NACTU soon began to take up issues that were of concern to its membership, albeit from a perspective more in line with the black consciousness movement and Africanism (although recent reports suggest that the latter is gaining predominance).

Meanwhile, the independent trade unions had made a number of significant gains at a more practical level. Most notable of these were concessions gained from some mining companies, following the failure of the monolithic Chamber of Mines to reach agreement on wage levels. Significant gains were made in the metal industry, with a dramatic move towards worker unity taking place in the formation of NUMSA, being a merger of the leading motor and metal workers' unions. A major advance on a more global level was the series of Industrial Court decisions giving legal strikers job protection.

Politically motivated stayaways continued into 1985. Most notable of these was the March stayaways in Port Elizabeth. However, unlike the Reef stayaways of 1984, political organizations failed to gain the backing of many of the independent unions. The resultant conflict represented a setback from the unity manifest in the stayaways of 1984 and reflected some of the tensions that had led to the formation of MACWUSA. By 1988 stayaways had reached an unprecedented level, mobilizing record numbers of workers on a countrywide basis. It can be argued that the closure of other channels of peaceful protest will have the effect of increasing the incidence of such action (see Hyman, 1981;53). The declaration of successive States of Emergency proved severely disruptive to worker organization. Despite this, the independent

unions continued to function, not only in their representation of workers at shopfloor level, but also in voicing the political aspirations of workers at a time when key political actors were being silenced (see Naidoo;1986). Thus, state action continued to politicize the role of the independent unions.

Another major development in recent years has been the rise of major "trials of strength". The most significant instances of this in the 1980's were the 1987 Post Office, Railways and miners' strikes. Although all three disputes resulted in workers gaining valuable concessions, the miners' strike seems to have severely weakened the NUM. Clearly, worker organization has still to make further advances before "trials of strength" can be fully employed as weapon by the unions.

One of the most significant developments to take place in the 1985-6 period was the massive increase in strike action, a reflection of the continued increase in working class militancy. Even if demands expressed were strictly economic, they represented a growing willingness to challenge all aspects of the status quo. On the political sphere, the general atmosphere of revolt culminated in the declaration of two consecutive States of Emergency. However, state repression failed to reduce the recorded instances of industrial conflict. Indeed, as noted earlier, some of the first protracted "trials of strength" of modern day South Africa took place in 1987, most notably the

Railways, Post Office and miners strikes. The ongoing closure of almost all avenues of peaceful protest resulted in the greatly-increased use of the stayaway weapon, culminating in the early June 1988 stayaway. Thus, although the emergency may have suppressed political protest, it could neither eliminate it in entirety, nor preclude its manifestation in a different form. The two parallel trends, of rising working class militancy and combativity on the one hand and of increasing state repression on the other have continued to date.

CHAPTER 8

Theory and Practice: Towards a New Theory of Industrial Conflict
for South Africa

As has been noted in Chapter 1, there is a vast body of literature that attempts to explain the nature of strike action. Unfortunately most of this literature bases its conclusions on the industrial relations experiences of Europe and the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to attempt to evaluate the validity of that literature, and of recent contributions of social theory, in the light of the South African experience of industrial conflict in recent years. Unfortunately, space and the scope of this study preclude a truly comprehensive coverage of a fascinating topic. Nonetheless, it is hoped that some of the most important areas can be re-evaluated in the light of some of the conclusions reached in preceding chapters.

Causes and Characteristics of Strikes: Theory and the South African Reality

i) **Community Structures.** According to the Kerr-Siegal thesis certain industries will tend to be more strike-prone than others, most notably those industries where the workforce is drawn from small, closed communities (1954;193). As noted previously, the South African mine compound would represent the ultimate in this regard. Indeed, the South African mines have always been characterized by high levels of conflict (even prior to the formation of the NUM and the unionization of miners). The absence of effective collective organisation resulted in this conflict often assuming a faceless form, such as seemingly pointless

destruction of property and "faction fights". However, as can be seen from previous chapters, many industrial disputes in the 1970's and 1980's involved workers drawn from the major PWV townships. These townships brought together people from a wide range of origins and certainly do not represent closed communities in the conventional sense of the word. However, they may represent closed communities in the sociological sense of the word in that they bring together the politically dispossessed. This may account for unusually high levels of working class combativity and solidarity. The values, norms, and collective experience of a South African township in a major centre could have something in common with a small closed European working class community, or, indeed, an isolated rural location.

An interesting variation of this thesis has been provided by Eldridge (1968;37), who asserts that group cohesion will prove a crucial factor underlying strike action. It has furthermore been suggested that strikes are likely to take place in conditions of high employment, with really big strikes taking place when real wages decline (ibid.;37). Whilst obviously solidarity plays a crucial role in determining the degree of success of strike action anywhere, employment/unemployment and wage levels seem far more complex variables in the South African context. As noted in previous chapters, whilst rising unemployment may have served to discourage South African workers from striking in the 1970's, this appears no longer to have been the case in the 1980's.

Likewise, direct economic stimuli in the 1980's appear to have been less predominant in relation to wider socio-political forces as a determinant of industrial conflict. Although the apparent causes of strike action as per the DOM often appear economic (as noted in previous chapters) such demands often represent the product of a far broader dissatisfaction.

ii)Alienation at the Workplace. The question of Blauner's (1966;176-8) assertion that the nature of technology present in the industry will determine the level of industrial conflict present has not been fully assessed in this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that in the 1970's and 1980's significantly more strikes took place in motor manufacturing firms located in the Eastern Cape, than in their Transvaal-based competitors, although all employ similar levels of technology. Thus, it is clear that other factors (such as the long tradition of activism in the Eastern Cape) must have been of greater importance.

iii)Communications. The "Human Relations" school of industrial relations, with its stress on a basic underlying harmony at the workplace, and the need for improved communication between managers and workers, seems rather problematic in the South African context. Society is wracked with a major conflict, a conflict that seems frequently to manifested at the workplace.

Nonetheless, in the absence of any channels for voicing grievances will result in a certain number of disputes being caused by poor communication. This explains the proportionately greater number of such disputes prior to the emergence of the independent trade union movement. However, improved communication at the workplace in the 1980's has not led to a reduction in industrial disputes, which have, in fact, increased.

iv) **Strikes as a Cyclical Phenomenon.** It has been argued that strike action tends to be cyclical (a point taken up by Cronin[1979] in his study of strikes in the U.K.), whilst certain industries will be prone to disputes of a particular nature. South African strike action in recent years does indeed appear to be cyclical - from comparatively few strikes in the 1970-2 period, to a substantial rise in the 1973 to mid-1975 period, then a lull in the years leading up to 1980, followed by another rise (see fig.1). However, the resurgence of strike action in the 1980s shows no signs of abating to the "lows" of the 1976-8 period. Indeed, it seems that only far reaching change or drastic state action will succeed in achieving this. Thus, the political variable seems to have precluded South African strikes action from relapsing into a cyclical pattern. Trade union membership has likewise continued to rise instead of fluctuating, unlike that which seems to have been the case in the U.K.(Cronin,1979;17). Indeed, the continued rise in both strike action and trade union membership may be seen as the combined

product of underlying socio-political forces. In the South African context it can be argued that strike patterns have followed contours of political repression. For example, strike totals were comparatively low in the 1962-1971 period, the 1976-8 period (during and after the Soweto uprising) and during 1988 (ongoing state repression following the declaration of the State of Emergency and changes in labour relations legislation [see introduction]). Fisher goes on to suggest (1980;35) that the length of a strike will depend largely on the resources striking workers have at their disposal, both financial and in terms of militancy and commitment. In the South African context, workers have very limited financial resources at their disposal. However, in many instances this seems amply compensated for in terms of an unusual degree of underlying working class militancy.

v)The Complexity of Strike Action.

McCord has suggested that two factors are of crucial importance in understanding the nature of collective action (see McCord,1980;116). Firstly, there is the complexity of the phenomenon of strike action. Although recognizing this does not in itself provide solutions, it does emphasize the need for caution in ascribing simplistic explanations to instances of industrial conflict. Secondly, McCord argues, any worsening in the economic position of the average worker, will provide a major source of dissatisfaction at the workplace(ibid.;116). Clearly,

in South Africa in the 1970's and 1980's increased inflation, periodic recessions and rising unemployment (which increases the number of dependants per worker) have no longer been an effective deterrent against collective action. However, of far greater importance is that there has been a general increase in resistance to the existing relations of power in wider society - which has taken a variety of forms, from "unrest" to industrial conflict. Increasingly, it seems that the political variable has assumed an overriding importance in encouraging workers to resort to collective action. Whilst purely economic factors continue to play a role, they cannot be seen as the overriding determinant of strikes and stayaways in the South African context.

Meanwhile, Knowles has argued that strikes appear to be often spontaneous and unpremeditated (1952;6). The causes, whilst seemingly economic, may be the result of far wider factors. South African strikes in the early 1970's often appeared to be spontaneous outbreaks of conflict. This was particularly the case with the 1973 Durban strike wave. However, most strikes and stayaways in the 1980's appear to have been planned well in advance. This was most apparent following union strategies, including agreements with certain employers and Industrial Court decisions (see introduction) which have given a certain degree of protection to legal strikers. Thus, the nature of South Africa's industrial relations system serves to reduce the overall validity of this assertion of Knowles's. However, clearly Knowles is correct in his argument that strikes may well be the result of

far wider societal forces. In the South African context, this would be the wider political conflict endemic in society.

Hyman seems to be correct in his assertion that if workers suffer from a severe form of deprivation, they will register their protest in some or other way (1981;53). As noted in previous chapters, (for example, see Chapter 2) a high level of relative deprivation exists amongst South Africa's black population in relation to whites. This has been considerably bolstered in recent years by gradually improving standards of education concurrent with rising unemployment. Education usually has the effect of increasing people's value expectations in life, but a high level of unemployment will ensure that, for many, these expectations are never met. This can explain the reason why, for example, an unusually high level of militancy was exhibited by the unemployed in the 1985 Port Elizabeth stayaway, who helped mobilise workers despite opposition from the unions (see Pillay, 1985;4-6). Whilst the employed might tend to be somewhat less militant (e.g. the conflict between unions and popular political organisations during that stayaway), they also seem to have had a high degree of relative deprivation and have themselves demonstrated unusual levels of militancy.

It can be argued that all industrial disputes will inevitably result in the relocation of centres of power at the workplace

(see Rex, 1981;36). Definitely, some relocation of power has taken place in South Africa following the rise of the independent trade union movement. Good examples would include the conduct of the 1988 wage talks on the mines, where the emphasis has shifted from arbitrary action to negotiation, and, of course, the government's abandonment of its ill-considered pensions legislation in the 1980-1 period, in the face of a wave of pension-related disputes, as well as the second thoughts by several major employers of the 1988 Labour Relations Act amendments in the light of the June 6-8 stayaway.

It has been further suggested that if the state intervenes in industrial disputes on a repeated basis the result could well be rising social conflict escalating to dimensions approaching civil war (ibid.;36). As can be seen in previous chapters, heavy handed state interference appears to have had the effect of politicising otherwise economic disputes in numerous instances in the 1970's and 1980's (although beyond a certain stage it could succeed in repressing all forms of resistance). Indeed, arbitrary state action has resulted in political factors permeating almost all aspects of life for most South Africans.

Of equal interest is Hyman's assertion that attempts to suppress a conflict without removing the causes may result in the conflict simply manifesting itself elsewhere (1981;53). This appears to be the case in modern-day South Africa. One of the major causes of

the Durban strikes appears to be the total lack of effective channels for workers to voice their grievances on a wide range of community-based issues. Likewise, it is interesting to note the rise of strike action in the early 1980s. At this time the UDF and related organisations had yet to emerge and the governments actions meant that one of the few place where workers could voice their discontent with a relative degree of safety was on the shop floor.

A Critique of Established Frames of Reference

i) The unitarist perspective, which argues that employers and employees have essentially common interests, cannot in itself provide a satisfactory explanation for the increasing numbers of strikes taking place in the South Africa of the 1970' and 1980's. This view rests on the assertion that society is ultimately based on consensus, which, clearly, South African society is not. This reduces the value of the belief that strikes are essentially a soluble problem, without a need to restructure relations of power in wider society (see Allen,1966;153).

Nonetheless, it is clear that many South African employers broadly adhere to this frame of reference. Hyman's (1981;59) assertion that there is often widespread ignorance in society as to the underlying causes of strike action, appears very true in

the context of white South African society. There is a lamentable tendency to ascribe strikes and stayaways (along with most of the country's ills) to "communists", "the communist controlled ANC", "agitators", "a radical minority", and, of course, the mysterious and elusive "total onslaught". Often, the underlying causes, in terms of short term economic hardship and, in the long term, a near total lack of any means of peaceful political protest are ignored. Indeed, it is but a simple matter to ascribe conflict at the workplace to superficial factors should the underlying causes prove more disturbing. This has increasingly become the case in South Africa - the state, and indeed several major employers, have shown a fundamental inability to come to grips with the basic causes of conflict and to seek realistic solutions.

ii) Pluralism. Several pluralists (see Hyman 1981; 156-8) suggested that strike action represents a negative inducement, calculated to better the position of the protesting group, without automatically leading to far-reaching change. Indeed, it has been argued that if effectively managed industrial conflict can, in the end, contribute to a company's effectiveness (Kelly, quoted in Jackson, 1983; 31). However, both these assertions seem dubious in the South African context. In the absence of any proper political representation, collective action at the workplace remains one of the few forms of protest open to black South Africans. Pluralist theory can neither provide an adequate

explanation for those manifestations of industrial conflict which are the direct result of political developments, nor for heavy handed state action against those incidents of strike action (often seemingly economic) which it perceives as a direct threat to its position. Both the nature of the protest that has taken place and the very demands (and policy statements) expressed by trade unions and popular political organisations clearly indicate that far more is desired than short term betterment. Whilst many independent trade unions have participated in state created structures, this (despite dire predictions to the contrary) has not led to any reduction in militancy, and in fact the breathing space gained may have enabled the independent unions to be even more outspoken in their demands. Reforms in industrial relations legislation have failed to co-opt politically the independent unions into the ruling bloc (see Chapter 5 and Webster, 1987; 217).

iii) **Marxist Perspectives.** In his writings on industrial conflict, Lenin is both critical of role played by trade unions and optimistic about the potential of strike action as a vehicle for change (see Knowles, 1952; 7). Basically, Lenin saw trade unions as ready targets for co-optation by the ruling class. However, as noted previously, this certainly does not appear to be the case in modern South Africa. The independent trade union movement, with its emphasis on internal democracy, remains a major force in pressing for far-reaching change.

With regard to the potential of mass strike action, it is interesting to compare Engel's writings with those of Luxembourg (see Luxembourg, 1971; 224-245). Whilst the former writer argues that a radical transformation of society by means of a mass strike will only be possible should workers possess both perfect organisation and large reserves of strike pay, the latter suggests that in the end working class militancy is of far greater import. It is significant that in the South African context, successful instances of strike action, and indeed strike waves, have taken place in the absence of formal worker organisation. Stayaways have mobilized millions of workers countrywide. However, such stayaways have been of comparatively short duration, albeit that the unions have demonstrated through conventional instances of strike action the ability to mount more sustained action. The potential of a prolonged stayaway as a means of bringing about far reaching political change is, as yet, unknown. However, in view of the vast resources of coercive power the state has at its disposal, it is unlikely that such action will be attempted in the next few years. A major constraint against resorting to such drastic action is the ability of capital to recruit labour from alternative sources (Rex, 1981; 16), particularly evident in the South African context where unemployment has assumed enormous dimensions.

Recent theoretical contributions. It can be argued that a major

shortcoming of established radical theory of industrial conflict is that (unless modified) it represents an attempt to impose theoretical unity, without making sufficient allowances for the very different social situations that may occur. For example, Lenin's writings failed to predict the kind of role that has been played by the independent trade unions in South Africa. Thus, it is necessary at this stage to evaluate more recent theoretical contributions, in order that better insights might be gained of the nature of industrial conflict in South Africa.

In view of the preceding chapters, it appears evident that the independent unions fulfill many of the functions of a social movement. This appears to have been particularly the case in the mid-to-late 1980's, when the states political repression created an organizational vacuum, forcing the independent unions into the political arena. Thus, strikes and stayaways became increasingly politicized, providing evidence of the need to go beyond conventional industrial relations theory. As noted in Chapter 1, the independent unions have found much common ground with community-based organizations, with the joint objective of ending an unjust system of social relations (see Lowe, 1986; 33).

As is clear from previous chapters, the independent trade unions have succeeded in avoiding co-optation into the system, despite all the efforts of state and capital to achieve this. Whilst increased use has been made of established bargaining machinery

such as the Industrial Court (see fig.15), this has not been at the cost of worker militancy. Indeed, if anything workers seemed more willing to resort to strike action. In doing so the unions have disproved the pessimism of much of established theory. Indeed, as Edward Greenberg (1983;216) has suggested, democratic participation at the workplace has provided workers with valuable experience in democracy. In the post-1984 period, the democratic structures of the unions had the effect of forcing them to become more involved in the struggle for broader democracy in South Africa (Webster,1986b;19). Just as Lambert (1988;34) suggests was the case with SACTU, the independent trade unions seem to have transcended the conventional mould of trade union organization, becoming social movements capable of maintaining a very real and sustained challenge to all aspects of the status quo. Webster (1986b;25) argues that "the trade unions in combination with student and community groups have begun to play a leading role beyond the workplace in the struggle for democracy and political rights in society at large." The unions have responded to the needs of the working class by broadening their demands to include calls for wider political democracy (Lambert & Webster,1988;41).

Foucault's recent contributions to social theory appear to provide useful insights into the South African situation, explaining the changing nature of the state's attempts at control, which have ranged from the use of brute force to more subtle methods of domination, the former including police action, and the latter aspects of the Wiehahn reforms. The lack of

success of attempts at incorporation resulted in recourse to more overt methods of control, employing the full coercive powers of the state through successive States of Emergency. Subtle (and more modern) attempts at control had failed, resulting in recourse to overt coercion. The close ties between the independent unions and popular political organizations despite the multi-class nature of the latter provides further evidence of the importance of Foucault's notions of power.

Foucault argues that modern strategies of domination have become increasingly sophisticated, allowing an apparently greater degree of freedom as long as ultimate relations of power remain unaffected (Poster, 1984; 158-162). Reform is permissible as long as domination is unchallenged. As Maree and Budlender (1987; 122) note; the state retained (and even increased) its battery of repressive legislation, enabling it to crush any organizations which threatened its power. All is modifiable except the control of the ruling elite. The increasing use of the strike and stayaway weapon resulted in the state curtailing both forms of collective action, the former through the 1988 Labour Relations Act Amendments, and the latter through Emergency regulations.

As noted earlier, Giddens argues that whilst power is not in itself a resource, the exercise thereof depends on the amount of resources available (1979; 91). There has been a shift in the balance of power (and thus of resources) in the unions' favour

(even despite the Labour Relations Act Amendments) since 1970, and it has required the state to employ more repression to maintain its domination. Giddens seems correct in his arguments that working class resistance can remain formidable under capitalism (Giddens,1982;52). This argument seems particularly relevant to South Africa - the independent trade unions have defied conventional Marxist theory and have successfully avoided incorporation into the capitalist system. Despite participating in state structures, they have retained their militancy. Thus the state failed in its attempt to control the unions through the Wiehahn reforms. This adds credence to Giddens's critique of functionalist perspectives - structures of control do not always work (see Giddens 1982;32). Unique circumstances may preclude the various interests in society from acting in a coherent or co-ordinated manner (Giddens,1982;32).

In view of the above, it seems evident that none of the established theories of industrial conflict provide a totally satisfactory means of explaining the complex nature of strikes and stayaways in South Africa. Pluralist theory has conceptual shortcomings in that it fails to take full cognizance of political variables in its assumptions that industrial conflict can be confined to the workplace and, as such, be seen as distinct from wider political issues. Meanwhile, much of the radical orthodoxy is pessimistic about the role of the unions as a vehicle for socio-political change, discounting the possibility of their becoming social movements, pressing for social

transformation.

It seems that a more appropriate framework is required, including broader theories covering issues such as popularly based social movements and wider relations of power within society. South Africa seems one of those situations where, Foucault has argued (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982;28), one cannot explain all through "a single language of understanding." Perhaps, as Foucault (ibid.;106-7) suggests, it may be impossible to impose theoretical unity on a very complex set of circumstances. Definitely, some of the theoretical contributions evaluated above provide insights of use in analyzing the South African situation. However, none seems to provide the whole truth. Indeed, it can be argued that there is a need to develop new frameworks of understanding to explain the complex nature of the South African socio-political situation. The development of such a framework is beyond the scope of this study.

CONCLUSION

In view of the overall trends uncovered in this study, it becomes clear that the main thrust of the central hypothesis is correct - that is that the nature of strike action is affected by political factors. This relationship is both a two-way process and is evident in a wide variety of ways.

Firstly, there is the general increasing incidence of strike action in the 1980's. Since the 1970's the independent trade unions have become a force to be reckoned with in South African society. This has been paralleled by unprecedented increases in political resistance, which has included such events as the 1976 uprising and the revolt of the 1980's. It would be naive to assume that these two developments are divorced from each other. Kerr and Siegel (1954;193) have argued that the nature of the community will affect the incidence of strike action. In South Africa it is clear that community struggles are often subsequently manifest in the workplace and vice versa. There are numerous examples of the former, including such developments as the rise of directly political stayaways, expressing demands of relevance at both community and national level. In the political twilight of the Emergency, stayaways are one of the few possible avenues of protest left open, and have thus assumed an immense significance. Indeed, dramatic increases in their size and duration have made the possibility of collective action approaching a mass strike increasingly real. It is important to note that the relationship between workplace and community is a two-way process. Worker struggles have led to community action, one of the most spectacular instances of this being the consumer boycotts of the early 1980's.

Secondly, the political dynamic is reflected in the nature of worker grievances. As borne out by numerous surveys (see Chapter 3), even in the early 1970's black workers felt a high degree of relative deprivation and identified their economic plight with wider social issues. Even if specific demands expressed by workers when striking remained economic, such demands could merely represent the articulation of a plethora of grievances, many of which could have had a wider political relevance (see, for example, the 197 IIE report of the 1973 Durban strikes). As Bonner (1987;156) notes, the government's apartheid policy resulted in the collapse of the rural economies of the homelands which increased pressures on blacks to seek improved material conditions in urban employment. This would force blacks actively to seek better wages, even if this could only be achieved through strike action. Thus, the struggle for improved material conditions through wage strikes is inherently linked to the wider political reality (see Bonner,1987;56).

Thirdly, there is the changing role of worker organization. The early worker service organizations avoided political issues for fear of attracting state repression. This position has substantially changed, and today the independent unions have assumed an increasingly political stance. From modest beginnings the independent trade unions have grown rapidly, especially since 1979. From 1979 to 1985 the claimed membership of these unions

grew from 144 000 to 717 000 (Maree,1987b;8). This would make the political stance of the unions of even greater importance, as would the consolidation of the presence of many unions on the shopfloor, with the number of recognition agreements having increased to +/- 450 by 1985 (ibid.;9). This would result in many employers having an interest in good relations with the unions, and thus becoming more sensitive to any political demands the unions might choose to express.

Interestingly, South African strikes have tended to follow Cronin's (1979;17) theory that strikes tend to come in waves (see fig.1). It is interesting to note the linkage of these waves to the incidence of state repression. While such repression is not the only reason for such phenomena, it is significant to note the drop in strike totals in the 1977-8 period (the effects of the post-Soweto wave of repression), the pre-1973 period (generally characterised by low levels of resistance following the banning of the ANC and PAC and the crushing of SACTU after Sharpville) and the drop in strike totals after 1987 (increased Emergency repression and restrictive legislation such as the 1988 Labour Relations Act amendments).

COSATU's launch ushered in a new era of working class politics, with the federation soon adopting the Freedom Charter as policy and calling for a more overtly-socialistic "Worker's Charter". In

several respects the independent unions have increasingly fallen into the role of social movements in the Castellian sense of the word. Castells (see Lowe, 1986; 16) saw such movements as becoming of growing importance owing to political parties being increasingly incapable of securing far-reaching political change. The state's banning of the UDF and other popular political organizations has resulted in the independent unions assuming a more political stance as one of the few popularly based organizations left.

Even if demands expressed by strikers were totally apolitical, with no linkage between worker and community struggles, the South African state's response would still have had the effect of making almost all collective action at the workplace an intensely political act. The South African state differs from the European totalitarian mould in one important aspect- as it seeks to exclude a substantial proportion of the country's population from all political participation on solely racial grounds, it cannot resort to the traditional methods of mass political mobilization into a narrow orthodoxy (see Arendt on totalitarianism in O'Sullivan, 1975; 241-242). There can be no Stakhanovites for black South Africans. Any form of action which might mobilize significant numbers of blacks into any direction which could possibly threaten the status quo is thus viewed with extreme suspicion. Even in totally economic strikes, heavy handed police action has often taken place. Although the state

only intervenes in a minority of disputes, these are often among the largest. It appears that while the authorities are prepared to let a minor dispute take its course, they will not hesitate to intervene should they perceive their interests to be threatened. This would obviously serve to link workplace struggles with wider political injustices in the eyes of workers.

Indeed, the sphere of labour relations has served as a testing ground for future state strategies, most notably in the introduction of the reform/repression policy in the late 1970's, a policy that became particularly pronounced by the mid 1980's. Foucault (Poster, 1984; 160-4) has argued that ultimately social relations are about dominance by a ruling elite (or class segment if a Poulantzian analysis is preferred). As society progresses, methods of domination become increasingly subtle, as witness the attempted co-optation of the independent unions via the Wiehahn reforms. These reforms succeeded in bringing many of the independent unions into the statutory established collective bargaining structures, with increasing numbers of disputes being resolved through the mediation of the Industrial Court. However, this strategy failed to reduce either worker militancy or the number of strikes taking place. Most probably this was due to the state's failure to incorporate politically the independent unions (Webster, 1987; 217). The state cannot achieve this unless it abandons the cornerstone of its policies - the exclusion of blacks from any meaningful political participation at the

political centre. This necessitated a retrogressive step to more direct manifestations of power, in the form of bannings, riot police action, the detention of trade unionists and similar measures. Despite the fact that state policy has become increasingly removed from the apartheid blueprint, one point is clear - that domination by the ruling elite is one point that is non-negotiable. Interestingly, the new Labour Relations Act amendments seem very typical of a new state strategy - of deregulated repression. Employers are in essence encouraged to take civil action against unions. Just as with measures to get employers to deduct rent arrears from worker's salaries, this represents an attempt to shift the blame for what is in the end coercive state action onto the shoulders of groupings which may be temporarily allied, but in the end are sacrificable to preserve the dominance of the ruling elite.

This brings us on to the second facet of the thesis - that the linkage between political factors and industrial conflict is not only real but increasing. Research done seems to prove this point also correct. Cronin's (1979;17) argument that strikes are cyclical and are paralleled by waves of unionization, appears correct in the South Africa of the mid-to-late 1970's and 1980's. As noted earlier, the rise of the South African independent unions was also paralleled by the rise of popular political organizations and increased political resistance. There does seem to be a common origin of the two in an unprecedented resurgence

of working class militancy. This linkage appears increasingly apparent in the 1980's, the two "super-federations" having adopted overtly political policies, allied to either Charterism or Black Consciousness. The rise of stayaway action in the 1980's has been the most spectacular manifestation of the increased politicization of collective action at the workplace, opening up a new avenue of popular protest that may lead to unforeseen possibilities for bringing about political change.

As Dahl (1978;10) notes "the distinction between politics and economics is not perfectly sharp." this seem particularly so in South Africa where, as noted earlier, worker struggles for improved material conditions through wage strikes may be the result of economic pressures placed upon them by the government's apartheid policy (see also Bonner,1987;56). Both politics and economics are inherently concerned with the issue of resources and this may be another reason for political forces affecting wage struggles. The limited options for political protest may have had the effect of focussing renewed emphasis on the shopfloor as a site of struggle, where strategies available range from overtly-political stayaways to strikes with political undercurrents (e.g. see Fisher's [1977] writings on the 1973 Durban strikes), all increasingly attractive options in the period studied in the dissertation. This differs sharply from the experience of the white working class which in the end used its politically priviledged position as the main means of expressing

its principal demands.

Further evidence of the increased politicization of collective action is the declining influence of unemployment as a deterrent to striking. As noted in previous chapters, fluctuations in the unemployment rate in the 1970's did seem to have some effect on the propensity of workers to strike, a view commonly held in conventional wisdom. However, by the 1980's the total rate of unemployment and the number of strikes both rose substantially (see figs 11-14). Thus, it is clear that this factor no longer served as a deterrent to striking. While inflationary pressure clearly has remained an important strike trigger, it seems that wider socio-political factors also played a key role. Interestingly, Hyman (1981;53) argues that the suppression of specific manifestations of conflict without removing the root causes thereof, may simply result in the conflict being diverted elsewhere. This would explain the massive increase in strike action in the pre-1988 Emergency era, when political repression reached an unprecedented high. On the other hand, once worker organization began to be directly affected by state repression, the reverse could hold true (see earlier comments on the cyclical nature of strikes)- the threat of state action could then make it increasingly difficult for workers to strike.

Increasingly the unions have adopted many of the facets of a social movement. As Lambert & Webster (1988;31) note, the

formation of COSATU represented a shift in basic union philosophy towards a broader concern with non-factory issues. However, several unions (such as the NUTW) remained committed to independent working class politics, as distinct from those (such as SAAWU) who adopted an "alliance stance" which favoured close ties to popular political organizations (such as the UDF) (Lambert, 1986; 15-16). To an extent there has been a growing convergence between these two positions, particularly as a result of state repression. COSATU has become increasingly identified with the "Charterist" movement. Nonetheless, unlike previously politically concerned federations such as SACTU, the COSATU unions built up their power on shopfloor organization (see Maree, 1987b; 4).

The nature of South African industrial conflict seems in many respects unique, fitting none of the established theoretical paradigms of strike action in its entirety. As Hyman (1979; 323) notes, there are important differences between first and third world strikes. Thus, theory conceived in the first world may have little relevance to the third (see *ibid.*; 333). However, it seems evident that specific aspects of theory are of relevance, be they Luxembourg on the mass strike, Cronin on the cyclical nature of strikes, Knowles on the spontaneity of strike action, and, on a more general note, Castells on social movements, and Foucault and Giddens on the wider structuring of society. From this, a synthesis of theory and the South African social reality has been

put forward. Hopefully, new light has been shed on the nature of South African strikes and their place in the wider socio-political reality.

APPENDIX: The Interpretation and Validity of Strike Statistics

During the 1970's and 1980's three methods have been employed to gain overall statistical information on the incidence and nature of strikes and stayaways.

i) Employers are legally obliged to report any "discontinuance of work" owing to a dispute to the Department of Manpower on the prescribed form L.R.33. This data is then summarized and is available from a range of sources. These include Department of Manpower (DOM) Annual Reports, reports by the NIPR/CSIR and National Manpower Commission (NMC), as well as in computer print-out form from the DOM. Figures from the NMC and print-outs supplied by the DOM seem sometimes to vary (usually a difference of one or two units) from DOM Annual Reports. Doubtlessly this is due to the inclusion of returns from employers that were received too late for publication in the DOM Annual Reports.

The limitations of this source largely revolve around the fact that it fails to take account of those instances where an employer disputes that a strike has actually taken place (according to the form, a strike is only defined as such where workers express identifiable demands). In addition, problems emerge in those cases where workers put forward a range of demands, and it is left to the employer's discretion as to which of these he/she records as the underlying cause of the dispute (see Fisher, 1977; 335). Thus, some of the detailed nature of

workers' demands may be lost.

The writer has summarized the DOM data from the sources listed above, as none include all the data that is available. For example, the NIPR/CSIR report (1983) is more detailed than the DOM Reports of the 1970's. Conversely, the DOM and NMC reports of the late 1980's provide a far more comprehensive and accessible source of information than the relevant NIPR/CSIR report. Incidentally, the DOM Annual Reports (as well as the SA Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletins) generally tend to supply data only on an annual or biennial basis.

The situation is even less satisfactory in evaluating the level of black unemployment. No accurate official data was available in the most of the 1970's (official data only becoming available in 1978) and thus an alternate source (Simkins) was employed. Simkins's data is based on the number of full time jobs available (Simkins, 1982;10). Thus unemployment (net totals) will thus be higher than official estimates. In looking at the regional distribution of strike action, the researcher has (in the interests of clarity) only included major centres (where the vast majority of strikes have taken place). The various categories of strike triggers employed by the DOM are fairly self-explanatory, the exception being "wage related" or "payment" disputes (these terms appear to be used interchangeably). The official definition is

a demand that relates to pay but "excluding demands related to specific wage levels" (NIPR/CSIR,1983;6). The researcher visited the Department of Manpower in Pretoria to obtain further clarity on issues pertaining to the DOM statistics.

ii) A second method for gathering strike statistics is via reports employers may have sent to their relevant employer association (such as ASSOCOM). This has been only presented in summary form twice (in 1979 and 1982), and this was published by the Anglo-American Corporation's(AAC) Manpower Department (refer to Chapter 4). In subsequent years the AAC appear to have employed only the official statistics of the DOM, thus having the same inherent limitations.

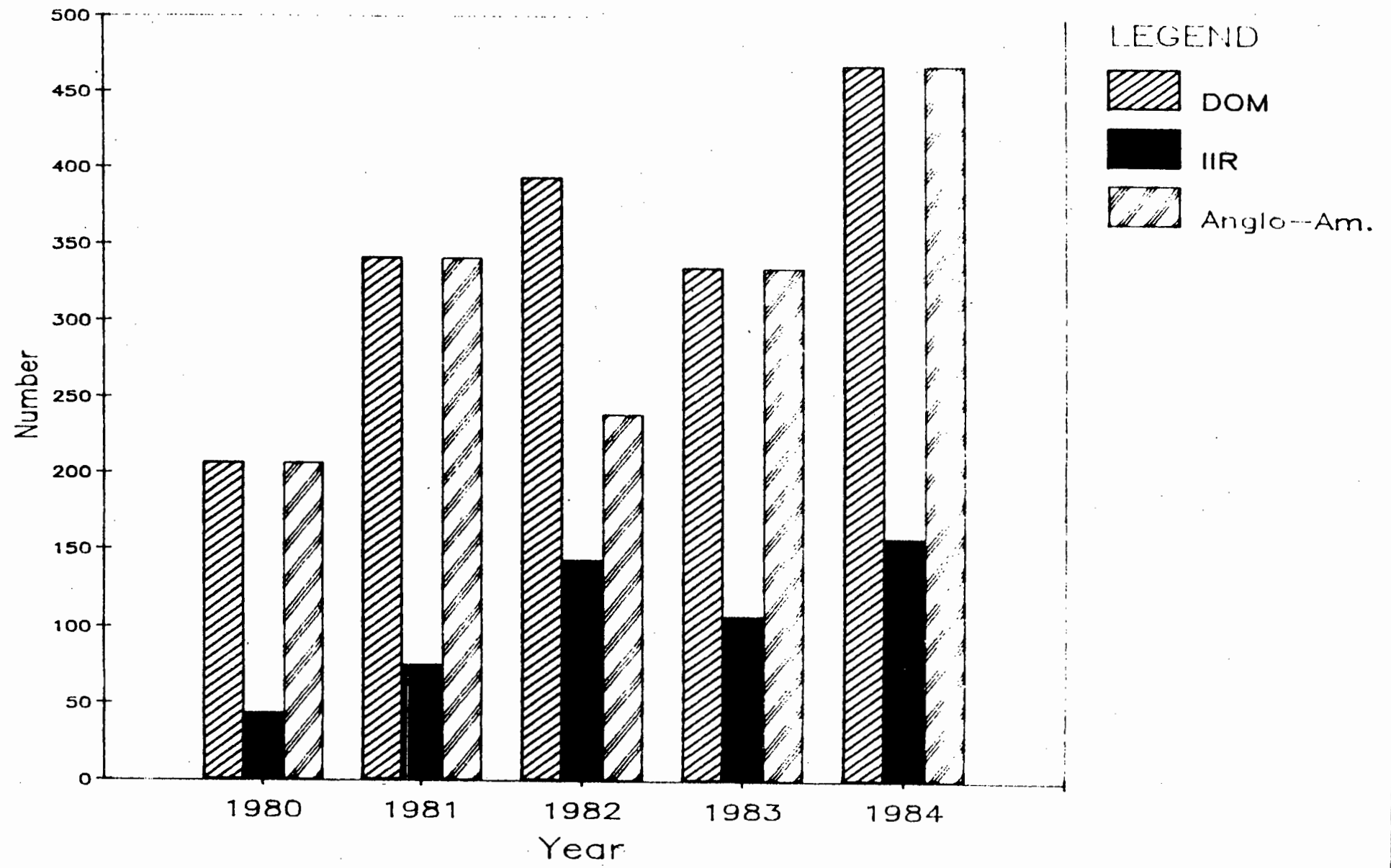
iii) An alternative method of gaining data on strike action is from press reports. A problem with this method is that only the more newsworthy strikes will be recorded, and thus totals will tend to be substantially lower than those supplied by the DOM. This source is employed by the Institute of Industrial Relations (IIR) and is included in their "Information Sheets."

It is clear that none of the above sources can be totally accurate. However, what is significant is that generally speaking the overall trends that emerge are similar. In fig.18 strike totals from three different sources in the 1980-4 period are

depicted. As can be seen, fluctuations in the strike total are similarly reflected by all three (the one exception being the Anglo-American figure for 1982). If more detailed information from these sources dealing with the size, causes and regional distribution of strike action is scrutinised, it is once again evident that although totals may vary, similar trends tend to be reflected by all three. Thus, although not too much importance should be attached to minor details (such as small fluctuations in causes or overall totals), it seems that the general trends (as depicted in the graphs in the introduction) are accurate.

A final note: Owing to the fact that it has often been necessary to summarize data from several annual (or in the case of the SA Reserve Bank, quarterly) reports, it has not (for reasons of space) always been possible to include individual page references for data that may, for example, have been gleaned from all the DOM or NMC Annual Reports over a ten-year period. Incidentally, the DOM Computer print-outs employed did not have any page numbering.

Comparison of Indicators 1980--84 Number of Strikes



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