

Anarchism and Syndicalism in Southern Africa

Lucien van der Walt

2009

Contents

Capitalism and Imperialism	3
The Working Class, Anarchism, and Syndicalism	3
Early Anarchists in South Africa	4
The New Radicals	5
National Liberation and Class Struggle	6
White Workers and Works Committees	7
Syndicalism and Workers Of Color	7
Syndicalism in the Cape	9
The Case of Mozambique	10
The 1920s and 1930s	10
In Conclusion	11
References And Suggested Readings	12

Anarchism, and particularly its syndicalist variant, played an important role in early labor and socialist politics in Southern Africa. Emerging in South Africa in the 1880s, and in Mozambique in the early twentieth century, it reached its apogee in the 1910s. Movements influenced by syndicalism continued in the 1920s, and spread to Southwest Africa (now Namibia), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) by the 1930s. The history of anarchism and syndicalism in Southern Africa, largely confined to a minority of the working class, provides a case of how this internationalist movement developed in the context of British and Portuguese colonialism and a racially divided working class.

Capitalism and Imperialism

The region that became South Africa was marginal to the world economy before the 1860s, mainly significant for the port at the Cape of Good Hope and agricultural exports from Western Cape farms. Port Elizabeth emerged in the east, mainly an export point. Both were part of Britain's Cape Colony, the farms worked by Colored workers (descended from slaves and servants), and Africans. The neighboring Natal Colony had an important port, Durban, whose hinterland had sugar plantations, worked largely by indentured Indians. The interior was a patchwork of agrarian African kingdoms and Afrikaner republics (notably the Orange Free State and Transvaal).

Diamond discoveries at Kimberley in 1867 saw an economic boom, with Cape Town, linked by rail, a particular beneficiary. This was followed by the discovery of underground gold deposits at the Witwatersrand in the Transvaal in 1886. As at Kimberley, gold mining was rapidly centralized in powerful companies: the Wernher-Beit and Eckstein conglomerate dominated diamonds, gold mining, and landownership, and soon employed more people than the railways and harbors of British colonies and Afrikaner republics combined. Towns grew along the Witwatersrand, notably Johannesburg, which quickly overtook Cape Town (and Pretoria, the Transvaal capital) in population and economic importance. The mining revolution was accompanied by the expansion of Cape Town and Durban (Port Elizabeth was marginalized), as well as some secondary industry and capitalist farming. By 1913 Johannesburg had grown to a city of 250,000, and South Africa produced 40 percent of the world's gold.

Growing imperial interest saw a wave of British wars on Africans and Afrikaners from the 1870s onwards, culminating in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the creation of the Union of South Africa, a self-governing white dominion, in 1910, surrounded by British protectorates like Swaziland, and colonies like Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi). Germany's Southwest Africa was placed under South African mandate in 1920. In Mozambique, controlled by Portugal, the port of Lourenço Marques expanded rapidly through South African investment and trade, with a railway link to the Witwatersrand from 1895, growing to around 25,000 people in 1915 (Cappela 1981). A large part of the territory's African population became migrant laborers in South Africa.

The Working Class, Anarchism, and Syndicalism

Africans supplied the bulk of mine labor, providing migrant male workers who returned to the countryside after their contracts: they were segregated, subject to coercive labor laws and

an internal passport system, and drawn from conquered peoples across Southern Africa. In 1920, David Yudelman and Alan Jeeves (1986) noted, 49 percent of African miners on the Witwatersrand came from other countries, 36 percent from Mozambique alone. White workers immigrated from across the British empire, dominating skilled work. In 1913, according to Hobart-Houghton (1964), there were 195,000 Africans on the Witwatersrand mines, a further 37,000 domestic workers, and 6,000 employed elsewhere, and 38,500 white workers, 22,000 in mining. Besides the division between free skilled white workers and unfree, nominally unskilled Africans, the working class included intermediate layers of impoverished, unskilled Afrikaners, Coloreds and Indians, and urbanized Africans. In Cape Town, Coloreds were the majority, and Africans marginal, and in Durban, Indians were a large and important group.

Initially based amongst white immigrants, anarchism and syndicalism developed a base amongst Jews, Africans, Coloreds, and Indians in the 1910s. The movement was always faced with a divided working class, fractured by racial as well as ethnic divisions. White workers, afraid of replacement by cheaper workers of color, typically demanded segregation, and formed unions and the South African Labor Party (SALP) on this platform, while unions amongst workers of color developed independently.

Early Anarchists in South Africa

Port Elizabeth's Henry Glasse (1847–unknown), an Indian-born anarchist linked to the *Freedom* group in London founded by Peter Kropotkin in 1886, pioneered local anarchism. He distributed Freedom Press materials and formed a Socialist Club at the turn of the century. The anarchist Wilfred H. Harrison formed the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in Cape Town in 1904 and the Pretoria Socialist Society in 1911. Both groups included socialists with a wide variety of views. Born in England in 1871, Harrison was part of the SDF's substantial anarchist section, a famed orator who expounded Kropotkin to Colored and white audiences, launched an interracial General Workers' Union in 1906, and organized interracial demonstrations of the city's unemployed. Riots broke out during the demonstrations, and two SDF members – one an anarchist, Levinson – were arrested in the first prosecution of socialists in the country.

Henry Glasse and Harrison opposed armed propaganda by the deed, unlike John Sepoul and Henry Larsen, two workers deported from the Transvaal in 1904 for an alleged plot to assassinate the British governor, Lord Milner. Insurrectionism was never an important local current. It was syndicalism that took center stage. The radical weekly *Voice of Labour* was founded in Johannesburg in 1908 by the Scottish fitter Archie Crawford and Mary Fitzgerald from Ireland; both were basically radical state socialists, but the paper nonetheless provided an open platform for other radical correspondents, including Henry Glasse and Harrison. The network that developed around the paper stressed interracial working-class unity, Henry Glasse writing that “For a white worker in this South Africa to pretend he can successfully fight his battle independent of the coloured wage slaves – the vast majority – is, to my mind, simply idiocy” (*Voice of Labour*, January 26, 1912).

By 1910, a syndicalist current had coalesced around the paper, which was further boosted by the tour of British syndicalist Tom Mann in February. Crawford was replaced as editor by “Proletarian,” an unidentified supporter of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), based in Cape Town. “Proletarian” advocated One Big Union in the *Voice of Labour*, with “a universal

general strike preparatory to seizing and running the interests of South Africa” (*Voice of Labour*, October 27, 1911).

In June 1910, a South African IWW was formed in Johannesburg, which organized spectacular strikes by white tramway workers in 1911, formed groups in Durban and Pretoria, and linked up with the IWW in Chicago. Its key figures were Andrew Dunbar, a blacksmith and strike leader from Scotland, and Tom Glynn of Ireland, a former policeman and now tramway worker. A Socialist Labor Party was also formed in Johannesburg that year, advocating Daniel De Leon’s syndicalism. Including in its membership the Afrikaner Philip R. Roux, the Jewish radical Israel Israelstam, and the Scotsman J. M. Gibson, it was mainly a propaganda group and held meetings on the Johannesburg Market Square, as did the IWW.

Despite disagreements on many issues, both groups concurred on the need for an interracial, revolutionary One Big Union, so breaking with the traditions of mainstream white labor. While the local IWW does not seem to have had much success organizing across the color line, it was the only union at the time in South Africa with no racial restrictions on membership, and probably the first such in Britain’s African empire. Both the local IWW and Socialist Labor Party represented a strand in local anarchism and syndicalism that, while notable for its principled internationalism, tended to ignore the specific problems, the civil and political disabilities of workers of color: this helps explain their lack of success in organizing on interracial lines.

There were, however, even at this early stage, developments that pointed to the emergence of a more sophisticated approach that aimed to combine the struggles against national oppression and class domination. Henry Glasse was acutely sensitive to Africans’ situation, Harrison made strides toward interracial unity with his union work, and “Proletarian” argued in the *Voice of Labour* that a “native rising,” which would be a “wholly justified” response to “the cruel exploitation of South African natives by farmers, mining magnates and factory owners,” and should receive the “sympathy and support of every white wage-slave” (*Voice of Labour*, December 1, 1911).

The New Radicals

From 1912 onwards, syndicalist activism ebbed. Glynn left South Africa, later becoming a key figure in the Australian IWW; Crawford took control of the IWW, expelling Dunbar; the SDF, Socialist Labor Party, and other groups united at Crawford’s urging into a United Socialist Party, which soon collapsed into its constituent parts; and the *Voice of Labour* ceased publication in early 1913.

That year a general strike broke out amongst white workers on the Witwatersrand, a militant episode controlled by unofficial strike committees, with gun battles and riots resulting in many deaths and strikers in control of much of Johannesburg. There were syndicalist sentiments amongst a section of strikers, with Crawford and Fitzgerald shifting their views somewhat, as did more white unionists like J. T. Bain, however briefly, but there was no organized syndicalist nucleus. The government nonetheless insisted the strike was due to a “Syndicalist Conspiracy,” and crushed a second general strike in early 1914 with martial law. Crawford and eight others were deported to Britain, and Mann again toured South Africa. On his return Crawford was a changed man, becoming the moderate secretary of the conservative South African Industrial Federation (SAIF).

The 1913 strike had radicalized a layer of trade unionists like British-born George W. Mason of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, and J. Forrester Brown of the South African Mineworkers' Union (SAMWU), who hailed from Australia, as well as a section of the SALP, most notably S. P. Bunting, W. H. Andrews, and David Ivon Jones. Bunting, born in London to an upper-class family, was an SALP representative in the Transvaal Provincial Council, Andrews, born in Suffolk, was a leading trade unionist and head of the SALP's parliamentary caucus, and Ivon Jones, born in Wales, was SALP general secretary. The outbreak of World War I polarized the SALP, and the SALP radicals, joined by veterans of the IWW and Socialist Labor Party like Dunbar, Gibson, and Roux, formed a War-on-War League. The SALP split in August 1915, the anti-war group forming the International Socialist League, which published the weekly *International*.

The International Socialist League quickly moved toward syndicalism, with the ideas of De Leon and the IWW central. Its first annual conference in January (*International*, January 7, 1916) stated "That we encourage the organization of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, colour or creed, as the most effective means of providing the necessary force for the emancipation of the workers." The *International* called for One Big Union "organized on the broad lines of no colour bar" to "inaugurate the Co-operative Commonwealth" (February 23, 1916).

Branches were established on the Witwatersrand in Benoni, Germiston, Krugersdorp, and Johannesburg, and also in Durban, Kimberley, Pietermaritzburg (the Natal capital), and Pretoria. Initially mainly based amongst radical British immigrants, it soon attracted many immigrant Jews, concentrated in the multiracial slums of Johannesburg, who formed a Yiddish-speaking branch. From 1916 onwards, it also recruited a growing number of African, Colored, and Indian members. One of the first recruits was T. W. Thibedi, a brilliant African schoolteacher from Johannesburg. In Cape Town, close ties were formed with Harrison and the SDF, which (after a fierce internal struggle) had also adopted a radical anti-militarist position.

National Liberation and Class Struggle

The International Socialist League was probably never larger than several hundred members at any one time, but this should not detract from its importance. It was the International Socialist League that played the key role in developing the view that One Big Union was the means of both fighting national oppression and overthrowing capitalism and the state machinery. It adopted a specific "Native programme" that called for the removal of the civil and political disabilities imposed upon Africans, argued for the unity of workers across the lines of craft, color, and creed, and opposed segregation and color bars.

The *International* argued that "Socialism can only be brought about by all the workers coming together on the industrial field to take the machinery of production into their own hands and working it for the good of all" (June 16, 1916). National oppression divided the working class and increased profits, for "cheap, helpless and unorganized" African labor provided "employers generally and particularly industrial employers, that most coveted plum of modern Imperialism, plentiful cheap labour" (*International*, February 18, 1916). White workers had to choose between becoming a "closed guild," doomed to defeat, or joining the revolutionary movement for the "control and administration of industry" (*International*, February 16, 1917; March 2, 1917). As for discriminatory laws, the *International* called for direct industrial action: "Organize industrially, they become worth no more than the paper rags they are written on" (October 19, 1917).

White Workers and Works Committees

The militancy of all sections of workers rose throughout 1917, with a strike wave building that would last into 1922, and times seemed ideal for the project of uniting all workers into One Big Union. The International Socialist League made ongoing attempts to organize a bloc within the white unions, organizing a short-lived (and interracial) Solidarity Committee in 1917 to work within the SAIF. The Building Workers' Industrial Union, formed in 1916 and headed by the International Socialist League's C. B. "Charlie" Tyler, joined by Mason, was one of the few successes.

Andrews, sent abroad in 1917 to attend the abortive socialist peace conference in Stockholm, visited Britain, where he was deeply impressed by the Socialist Labour Party and Workers' Committee and Shop Stewards' movement. On returning to South Africa, he was employed by the International Socialist League as a full-time organizer, the League hoping to form a Witwatersrand Shop Stewards' Council as a step toward the One Big Union.

While Andrews helped establish independent shop stewards' organizations in engineering, on the mines (known as works committees), and on the railways, most had no links to syndicalists, with one very important exception. A section of the mine works committees was deeply influenced by syndicalism. This group, largely independent of the International Socialist League, was centered on Percy Fisher, a miner born in England in 1891. Fisher and his associate, Harry Spendiff, were involved in organizing a series of unofficial strikes, unsanctioned by SAMWU or the SAIF.

Despite opposition from Crawford and others, Fisher was elected secretary of SAMWU in 1920, but later forced to resign. An unofficial strike in January 1921 led to Fisher, Spendiff, and others being suspended from SAMWU and fined. Rejecting the rulings, the dissidents established the Council of Action in July 1921, issuing a manifesto, reprinted in the *Workers' Dreadnought*, calling for "rank and file control" of the unions and "Industrial Unionism" with "the avowed object of wresting the economic power out of the hands of the capitalist class" (February 18, 1922).

Syndicalism and Workers Of Color

At the same time as these initiatives were taking place, the International Socialist League took steps to organize Africans, Coloreds, and Indians into syndicalist unions. In March 1917, Gordon Lee of the International Socialist League's Durban branch helped launch the Indian Workers' Industrial Union, an umbrella body organizing in catering, the docks, laundries, printing, and the growing tobacco industry. One of the very first unions amongst Indians, its size is unclear, but it was probably several hundred strong.

The International Socialist League encouraged the Indian workers to take charge of the union and several Indian activists became prominent militants, such as Bernard L. E. Sigamoney and R. K. Moodley. Born in Durban to Indian immigrants, Sigamoney was a schoolteacher and cricket enthusiast who moved to the left in World War I. Along with other Indian union members, Sigamoney joined the International Socialist League. The union held several strikes, during which the Indian Workers' Choir entertained workers with the *Red Flag*, the *Internationale*, and IWW songs. It also held study classes, emphasizing the works of De Leon. In 1920 and 1921, indepen-

dent Indian unions in tobacco and furniture workers struck in Durban, and Andrews, Ivon Jones, Sigamoney, and others were actively involved in solidarity work.

In the meantime, the International Socialist League established a night school for Africans at its Johannesburg headquarters. Starting in July 1917, the school mainly recruited urbanized Africans from the downtown slums and townships of Johannesburg, although a few mineworkers, mainly from nearby mines, also joined. After months of classes run by Bunting, Dunbar, and others, the school launched a syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of Africa, at the end of September.

Modeled on the IWW, the Industrial Workers of Africa was the first union for African workers in South Africa and (in all likelihood) Britain's African empire. It was a general union, rather than an industrial union, the forerunner of the number of African general unions that sprang up in the next few years, and was headed by an all-African committee, with Reuben (Alfred) Cetiwe and Hamilton Kraai the key figures. Born and educated at Qumbu in the Eastern Cape, Cetiwe worked in Johannesburg as a picture framer's assistant. His views, recorded in police reports, were uncompromising: "We are here for Organization, so that as soon as all of your fellow workers are organized, then we can see what we can do to abolish the Capitalist-System." Kraai, also from the Eastern Cape, worked as a foreman and deliveryman in Johannesburg. Both men joined the International Socialist League.

From 1915, the International Socialist League was also developing connections with sections of the emerging, and rather mild, nationalist movements amongst Africans and Coloreds, like the African Political Organization and the Transvaal Native Congress, which was the provincial section of the South African Native National Congress. The formation of the Industrial Workers of Africa increased nationalist sympathy for syndicalists, and Cetiwe, Kraai, and Thibedi also participated in the Transvaal Native Congress. In 1918 the International Socialist League organized South Africa's first May Day rally directed at Africans and Coloreds in Johannesburg. R. Talbot-Williams of the African Political Organization, and Thibedi, were amongst the speakers.

Developments in June 1918 gave the Industrial Workers of Africa national prominence. That month saw 152 African municipal workers in Johannesburg jailed for striking, a sentence condemned by the *International*, and evoking a wave of anger amongst the city's African population. A protest rally, called by the Transvaal Native Congress, saw the crowd take its lead from Industrial Workers of Africa activists, who called for a general strike. A joint planning committee of left-leaning nationalists and syndicalists was established. The strike was called off at the last minute, although several thousand African mine-workers struck nonetheless, and eight people (six members of syndicalist bodies, and two sympathetic Congress activists) were arrested for incitement to public violence, the first time Africans and whites in South Africa were jointly prosecuted in a common cause.

By this stage a syndicalist bloc had developed in the Transvaal Native Congress, centered on Cetiwe and Kraai. Dubbed the "black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg" by Solomon Plaatje, a leading African conservative from Kimberley, it was aided by sympathetic nationalists. The syndicalists and left-leaning nationalists tried, unsuccessfully, to get the South African Native National Congress at its August 1918 congress to focus on labor, and were prominent in the Witwatersrand campaign against the pass controls that started in March 1919. Congress moderates and conservatives then managed to wrest control of the Transvaal Native Congress, and called off the campaign. There had been over 700 arrests by May 1919, however, and Bunting acted as counsel for many of the accused, during which he was assaulted by a group of white workers outside the courthouse.

Syndicalism in the Cape

In the meantime, there had been important developments in the Cape Province. The International Socialist League's Kimberley section established two syndicalist unions in that declining town in 1919. These were the Clothing Workers' Industrial Union (which later spread to Durban and Johannesburg) and the Horse Drivers' Union, both of which held successful strikes. The unions were based amongst Colored workers, and 27 enrolled in the International Socialist League, most notably Johnny Gomas, an apprentice tailor from Cape Town.

Radical members of the SDF, frustrated with its loose politics, broke away in 1918 to form the Industrial Socialist League in Cape Town. Like the International Socialist League, the Cape group was deeply influenced by the IWW. It was initially based amongst white immigrants, such as the Portuguese brothers Manuel and F. Lopes, Jews like A. Z. Berman, a teacher educated in Russia and Germany, and British workers like C. Frank Glass, born in Birmingham in 1901. The elderly Henry Glasse also corresponded with the group.

Like the International Socialist League, the Industrial Socialist League was active in the mainstream unions, but with rather more success. Berman was elected treasurer of the Cape Federation of Labor (formed in 1913), F. Lopes was president of the Tramway Workers' Union, and Frank Glass was active in the Tailors' Union. At the second conference of the Cape Federation of Labor, held in 1920, the Cape syndicalists successfully passed resolutions for the socialization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the restructuring of the Federation into industrial unions. At the third conference of the Cape Federation of Trade Unions in 1921, Berman had the Federation resolve to join the Communist International and abstain from parliamentary action. These resolutions were not, however, carried out.

The group made strenuous efforts to organize amongst African and Colored workers. It established a hall in the predominantly Colored District Six area, recruited a number of Colored activists to its work, and established a syndicalist Sweet and Jam Workers' Industrial Union amongst Colored factory workers. Cetiwe and Kraai arrived in Cape Town in 1919 to form a branch of the Industrial Workers of Africa, and were supported by the Industrial Socialist League. The Industrial Workers of Africa branch, based amongst African dockworkers, claimed 800 members (Hirson 2005). Living in Ndabeni Township, Cetiwe and Kraai also became active in the Cape Native Congress, and reappeared at the May 1920 conference of the South African Native National Congress where they tried, again unsuccessfully, to commit the larger body to a general strike policy. Thibedi, meanwhile, had taken over the Industrial Workers of Africa in Johannesburg.

In December 1919 the Industrial Workers of Africa organized a joint strike with another union on the docks, the recently formed Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), headed by the charismatic Clements Kadalie, a highly educated immigrant from Nyasaland. The strike was not a success, and the two unions had a falling out. In June 1920, however, both attended a labor conference at Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, which aimed to unite the African and Colored general unions that had emerged in Bloemfontein, Cape Town, and Port Elizabeth. There were some syndicalist influences at the Bloemfontein meeting, which described its goal, Peter Wickens (1973) notes, as "one great union of skilled and unskilled workers of South Africa, south of the Zambesi." The unions, including the Cape section of the Industrial Workers of Africa, merged into the ICU, which came under the control of Kadalie and showed some syndicalist influences in the succeeding years.

The Case of Mozambique

A small anarchist and syndicalist current emerged in Lourenço Marques from the early twentieth century. It was largely isolated from the South African movement, but developed in a similar context: a racially divided working class, with unequal civil and political rights. It started among Portuguese immigrants and political prisoners deported under anti-anarchist laws passed in the 1890s, and was influenced by the rapid growth of anarchist and syndicalist currents in Portugal's National Labor Union and its successor, the General Confederation of Labor. The Mozambican movement was a minority current, as the local unions generally did not admit people of color.

Local anarchists and syndicalists attracted a series of hostile articles in *O Progresso*, a republican paper printed in Lourenço Marques from 1905. In 1910, the anarchist printer José Estevam, released from prison after the Republic was established, formed the Revolutionary League in Lourenço Marques. Groups like the Revolutionary League and the Libertarian Group Francisco Ferrer promoted anarchist ideas, were noticeable at May Day demonstrations, and wrote in the republican and labor press.

O Incondicional, which appeared from November 1910, had an editorial board of anarchists and republicans. Anarchists and syndicalists similarly wrote for *O Emancipador*, newspaper of the Port and Railway Employees' Association (the city's main union), published from 1920, and also distributed *A Batalha*, published by Portugal's General Confederation of Labor. In 1919, Ivon Jones was prosecuted in Pietermaritzburg for distributing seditious literature: he subsequently stayed for a while in Mozambique, where he encountered the *O Emancipador* group, and organized for the *Internacional* to be sold by a local newsagent.

There was a lively cosmopolitan café culture in Lourenço Marques, which drew in a number of Africans, including members of the *assimilado* elite (Africans exempted from the discriminatory legal code applied to people of color), and anarchosyndicalist ideas also circulated in this milieu. João Dos Santos Albasini, the city's most prominent intellectual and *assimilado*, and editor of *O Africano* (distributed in South Africa as well as Mozambique), was somewhat influenced by syndicalism. His articles criticized the racial policies of the Mozambican unions, and periodically echoed the radical pieces in *O Emancipador*. From 1917 to 1921, the Port and Railway Employees' Association led a strike wave at Lourenço Marques and on the railways, in which individual anarchists and syndicalists were prominent, but the strikes were crushed with martial law.

The 1920s and 1930s

The South African syndicalists initially regarded the Russian Revolution as a confirmation of their most deeply held syndicalist views: indeed, the monthly paper of the Industrial Socialist League was called the *Bolshevik*. From 1920 to 1921 there were moves to form a local Communist Party, and real Bolshevik ideas became better known. After a series of splits, including the formation of a syndicalist Communist Party by Dunbar and others in 1920, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), affiliate of the Communist International, was launched in July 1921. It incorporated most existing left-wing groups, with the notable exception of the syndicalist unions amongst workers of color. Battered by the onset of recession, and alienated by the CPSA's focus from 1921 to 1924 on affiliating to the SALP, few activists from these unions joined the CPSA before 1925. A significant number of CPSA members remained influenced by syndicalism, and

Dunbar headed an organized syndicalist faction linked to the *Workers' Dreadnought* group in Britain.

The 1922 Rand Revolt, a general strike over the replacement of white miners by Africans that developed into an armed insurrection, was supported by the CPSA, which condemned the racial violence that developed during the struggle. The Council of Action (now joined by Andrews) played a more important role. It was, above all, Fisher who pushed the strike into an insurrection. The revolt was crushed with the use of airplanes and troops, with hundreds killed or arrested: Fisher and Spendiff committed suicide at the insurrection's headquarters in Fordsburg, Johannesburg.

The ICU, joined in 1920 by Cetiwe and Kraai, and subsequently by Gomas and Thibedi, grew rapidly in the 1920s, and syndicalist influences became quite pronounced, the union adopting a constitution based on that of the IWW in 1925. However, ICU ideology was a complex and unstable mixture, where the ideas of the IWW jostled alongside those of Marcus Garvey, as well as liberalism, Marxism, and moderate unionism. Other than a failed attempt to call a general strike in 1926, the ICU did not undertake much in the way of industrial organization or action. Unlike the syndicalists of the 1910s, it found its greatest strength not with the workers of the cities, but amongst African and Colored farm workers and tenant farmers, also recruiting heavily amongst the African elite, and claimed 100,000 members by 1927 (Wickens 1973).

Just as white immigration had helped bring syndicalism to South Africa, African and Colored migrancy spread the ICU across Southern Africa, with sections established in Southwest Africa in 1920, Southern Rhodesia in 1927, and into Northern Rhodesia in 1931. However, corruption, infighting, weak structures, the lack of a clear strategy, members' frustration, and repression saw the ICU fragment rapidly after 1927. The movement virtually collapsed everywhere in the early 1930s, although it was revived in Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s.

The end of the Council of Action and the ICU provided two nails in the coffin of local anarchism and syndicalism in Southern Africa. More followed. In Mozambique, martial law inflicted a massive defeat on the unions during a railway strike in 1925–6, and the Portuguese dictatorships of 1926 and 1932 suppressed the radical press, independent unions, and the café culture of Lourenço Marques.

A final nail was provided by changes in the CPSA. In 1928, the CPSA adopted the "Native Republic" thesis on the instructions of the Communist International, which stipulated that capitalist democracy must be attained before socialism could be considered. This break with the older tradition of combining class struggle with national liberation was coupled to the onset of the "New Line" period, designed to Bolshevize the communist parties. The great majority of veterans of the pre-CPSA period, including Andrews, Bunting, Frank Glass, Harrison, and Thibedi, were expelled. Some later rejoined the CPSA as orthodox members, like Andrews, others moved to Trotskyism, like Frank Glass and Thibedi, and some left politics entirely, like Harrison.

In Conclusion

Anarchism and syndicalism played an important role in Southern Africa from the 1880s onwards, a role often obscured by the ongoing influence of a substantial communist historiography. Migration was a key factor in spreading these ideas into South Africa and Mozambique, and subsequently into Southwest Africa and the Rhodesias. An important minority current, anarchism

and syndicalism always battled against the segregationist politics of white labor and the influence of African nationalism, but nonetheless had an important influence on sectors of the wider working class. This history shows that the international rise of anarchism and syndicalism from the 1880s to the 1920s also took place in Southern Africa, and that Bakunin's heirs developed a strategy that saw the One Big Union as the vehicle of both class struggle and national liberation, and the nucleus of a libertarian socialist society.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism ; Bain, J. T. (1860–1919) ; Bolsheviks ; Communist Party of South Africa, 1921–1950 ; Dunbar, Andrew (1879–1964) ; Garvey, Marcus (1887–1940) and Garveyism ; Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) ; Kropotkin, Peter (1842–1921) ; Marx, Karl (1818–1883) ; Sigamoney, Bernard L. E. (1888–1963) ; South Africa, African Nationalism and the ANC ; South Africa, Labor Movement ; South African Communist Party, 1953–Present

References And Suggested Readings

- Cappela, J. (1981) *O Movimento Operário em Lourenço Marques, 1898–1927*. Porto: Edic es Afrontamento.
- Cope, R. K. (n.d. [?1943]) *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W. H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town: Stewart Printing.
- Department of Justice (2001) *The ISL and Coloured Workers*. Pretoria: National Archives.
- Freire, J. (2001) *Freedom Fighters: Anarchist Intellectuals, Workers, and Soldiers in Portugal's History*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Harrison, W. H. (n.d. [?1947]) *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903–47*. Cape Town: Stewart Printing.
- Hirson, B. (2005) *The History of the Left in South Africa: Writings of Baruch Hirson*. Ed. Y. Hirson. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Hobart-Houghton, D. (1964) *The South African Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyslop, J. (2004) *The Notorious Syndicalist: J. T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.
- Krikler, J. (2005) *Rand Revolt: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killings in South Africa*. Cape Town: Jonathon Ball.
- Mantzaris, E. A. (1995) *Labour Struggles in South Africa: The Forgotten Pages, 1903–1921*. Namibia: Collective Resources.
- Pate, F. W. & McDermid, A. (1922) Manifesto of the Mineworkers. *Workers' Dreadnought*, February 18.
- Penvenne, J. M. (1996) João Dos Santos Albasini (1876–1922): The Contradictions of Politics and Identity in Colonial Mozambique. *Journal of African History* 37: 419–464.
- Raftopolous, B. & Phimister, I. (Eds.) (1997) *Keep on Knocking: A History of the Labour Movement in Zimbabwe, 1900–97*. Harare: Baobab Books for the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Van der Walt, L. (1999) "The Industrial Union is the Embryo of the Socialist Commonwealth": The International Socialist League and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa, 1915–1920. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 19: 1.

- Van der Walt, L. (2001) Revolutionärer Syndikalismus, Rasse und Klasse in Südafrika: Die "International Socialist League" und die "Industrial Workers of Africa" 1915 bis 1920. *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* 16.
- Van der Walt, L. (2004) Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa: Race and Revolutionary Syndicalism from the IWW to the International Socialist League, 1910–21. *Politikon* 31 (1).
- Van der Walt, L. (2006) Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904–1921: Rethinking the History of Labour and the Left. PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Wickens, P. L. (1973) The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Willan, B. (Ed.) (1996) *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Yudelman, D. & Jeeves, A. (1986) New Labour Frontiers for Old: Black Migrants to the South African Gold Mines, 1920–85. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13 (1).

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Lucien van der Walt
Anarchism and Syndicalism in Southern Africa
2009

Walt, Lucien Van Der. "Anarchism and Syndicalism, Southern Africa." In *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, edited by Immanuel Ness, 147–155. Vol. 1. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. *Gale eBooks* (accessed June 22, 2021).

theanarchistlibrary.org