

**COMPREHENDING STRIKE ACTION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE
C.1950-1990 AND THE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS THEREOF**

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Regular strike action has become a central characteristic of the South African industrial relations system. Whilst in the 1950s strikes were mostly isolated outbursts of relatively short duration, strikes in the 1980s were challenges of unprecedented duration and intensity. It is argued that despite this dramatic change, reflecting a series of discontinuities in both the political and economic arenas, strike action in South Africa does follow distinct patterns, and can be ascribed to a combination of identifiable causes.

Principal causal factors include wage aspirations, past experiences and the subjective interpretation thereof, and the role of the union movement. Contingent factors include the prevailing political climate, industrial relations legislation, the amount of information opposing sides possess of their adversaries' intentions as well as spatial issues, such as the internal dynamics of individual communities. Partially as a result of South Africa's political transformation, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw further changes in the industrial relations environment. Reflecting these developments, it is argued that a new type of trade unionism has developed, "coterminous unionism". This will have far-reaching implications for the nature of industrial conflict. However, it falls fully within the theoretical parameters outlined in this thesis.

Despite significant developments in social theory in the 1980s and 1990s, there have been few attempts accordingly to

update theories of strike action. One of the objectives of this thesis has been to attempt such an update. It is hoped that the constructs developed will shed light on a widely prevalent form of social conflict, assist in the analysis of future outbreaks, and enable the identification of those situations where a high propensity to engage in strike action may exist.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	Anglo-American Corporation
ANC	African National Congress
BWPA	Black Wages and Productivity Association
CRIC	Community Research and Information Service
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
DOM	Department of Manpower
EAC	Economic Advisory Council
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund
GWU	General Workers Union
IIE	Institute for Industrial Education
NMC	National Manpower Commission
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor Assembly and Allied Workers of South Africa
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SALDRU	South African Labour and Development Research Unit
SARB	South African Reserve Bank
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SFAWU	Sweet, Food & Allied Workers Union
TUACC	Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWIU	Textile Workers Industrial Union
WIP	Work in Progress
WPGWU	Western Province General Workers Union

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INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the causes and internal dynamics of strikes in South Africa, 1950-1990, an assessment of the limitations and potential of existing models for understanding strikes within this context, and an attempt, using the South African experience as a basis, to develop an alternative theoretical understanding of this key manifestation of social conflict.

Thus, this research covers two key areas. Firstly, it seeks to provide a potentially broad-based explanation for both the incidence of strikes, and why individual disputes assume particular forms. Building on previous attempts to understand strikes within both economics and sociology, it is based on a pragmatic trans-disciplinary approach, drawing on contemporary developments in social theory (see Lash and Friedman 1992:2-8). Secondly, this theoretical explanation will be founded on a detailed empirical analysis of the causes of strikes within the South African context, and the particular form that such strikes assume.

The past two decades have seen a major resurgence in the incidence of strike action in South Africa. From a relatively rare occurrence in the 1950s and 1960s, strikes have become an important feature of South African social life in the 1970s and 1980s (see figure 1). Whilst there are important fluctuations in the incidence of strikes prior to 1973, it was during that year that the numbers of strikes taking place soared (albeit that strikes remained geographically concentrated). Although the incidence of strikes dropped somewhat during the 1975-1977 period, it began to rise again in the late 1970s. Record numbers of strikes took place in the 1980s, as well as large numbers of

overtly political "stayaways". Indeed, at certain times, such as during 1987, they became the principal form of resistance against the prevailing political and economic order.

Not only has the incidence of strike action increased, but strikes have also tended to become larger and of a longer average duration, as reflected in the rise in strike volume in the 1970s and 1980s (see figure 1). Thus, as a social phenomenon, strikes have had an increasingly significant impact in relation to both the South African economy and society. Understanding the nature and origins of strikes may thus have a considerably broader relevance than simply in terms of the dynamics within the workplace environment.

The rise of strikes in the 1970s and 1980s was paralleled by the rise of the independent trade unions. From the first worker service organizations, the independent trade unions experienced rapid growth, yet, unlike most previous attempts at unionization in South Africa, were generally successful in retaining a strong shop floor base, and an inherent dynamism and militancy. The altered political climate in the early 1990s, it is suggested, has led to a special type of unionism, what is referred to as "coterminous unionism". It can be argued that through a detailed assessment of the causes and nature of strikes, new light may be shed on the South African trade union movement, and the relationship between organizational growth and conflict at the workplace.

It was during the 1980s that South Africa experienced unprecedented levels of inflation and unemployment, whilst the incidence and size of strikes also rose. Strike action became

widespread even in economically depressed regions with high levels of unemployment. Understanding the causes of high levels of industrial conflict in these circumstances is of particular importance in view of the current moves towards economic reconstruction, and attempts to seek solutions to regional inequalities and related development problems.

Also during the 1980s, unprecedented community-based resistance took place against the prevailing political order. An analysis of the nature of strikes during this period may reveal something of the relationship between community struggles and conflict at the workplace. This is again of great relevance owing to the rapid political changes currently taking place within South Africa, with considerable uncertainty surrounding the role of a still-assertive labour movement within the new dispensation.

Thus it is essential that a comprehensive analysis of the causes and nature of strikes within the South African context be undertaken. However, there is also a need to develop an extended theoretical understanding of strikes. This is important both in terms of providing a means for analyzing future strikes in the South African context, and to provide an update of existing theories of industrial conflict, an update that takes account of recent advances in broader social and economic theory.

Drawing on the traditions of both social and economic theory, the possible effects on strikes of factors ranging from material conditions to questions of culture and ideology will be critically assessed, as a basis for developing a more broadly based theoretical understanding. Such an understanding would

take cognizance of recent arguments that rationality may indeed be variable and that individuals may have imperfect knowledge and differing interpretations (Arrow and Hankopolija 1985:24-25) of, inter alia, situations where strike action occurs. Variable rationality would imply that there may be some difference in response to the same broad forces. In other words, as Giddens (1981:1-10) notes, individuals may retain the capacity to "act otherwise". This does not negate the possibility of modelling industrial conflict, but rather necessitates a more detailed and more strongly empirically-based understanding, taking account not only of directly causal, but also potential contingent factors.

The nature of industrial conflict may be constantly changing, with strikes existing at a range of levels from small-scale stoppages to "trials of strength". This, again, may make the theorizing process more complex, but potentially more broadly based, more self-sustaining, and, ultimately, more useful. This does not necessarily rule out the validity of a quantitative analysis of long-term trends in strike action, but rather suggests that essential substantiative and illustrative detail may be provided through recourse to both qualitative and subjective factors.

As Jameson (1991:416) notes, an important variation may exist between individual circumstances and reactions and broader social and economic trends. Furthermore, there may be considerable counter-forces, regional variations and new tendencies (Jameson 1991:406) all impacting on the nature of strikes. A more broadly-based theoretical paradigm for understanding strikes could encompass these possibilities.

It is hoped that the theoretical framework constructed in this study will not only provide a more appropriate mechanism for analyzing and explaining strikes in the South African context, but also provide insights useful for assessing similar forms of collective action elsewhere. In particular, this study represents an attempt to reach beyond conventional models which analyze strikes solely in terms of sets of causal variables and broad social trends, and seeks to assess strikes in terms of both subjective and objective factors (Frisby 1989:38), as well as in terms of the play between local circumstances and broader socio-economic forces. "Objective factors" denote broad social and economic trends, not necessarily quantifiable, ranging from changes in the inflation rate to the relative strength of the trade union movement. "Subjective factors" include the differing perceptions of individual workers and managers of previous industrial disputes.

This thesis consists of six distinct components. Firstly, existing theories of strike causality are critically reassessed in terms of their basic assumptions, limits and possibilities. This is followed by a review of existing studies of strikes in the South African context.

Secondly, the validity and utility of existing theories of strike causality are tested in terms of the South African case, over the years 1950-1990. It is argued that, whilst aspects of existing theory provide valuable insights into understanding strike causality, there are considerable variations and discontinuities in the South African case that suggest the need for a more comprehensive understanding. This is followed

by a look at theories on the micro dynamics of strikes, and, again, their validity in the South African context. It is argued that there is a need for an integrated approach which provides insights into both the external causes and internal or micro dynamics of strikes. However, limits in official indices of broad trends in strikes, trade union strength and material conditions necessitate further empirical substantiation.

Thirdly, the relationship between strikes and material conditions is explored in detail, drawing on independent studies on material conditions and local variations thereof, the incidence of strikes and the causes of rises in wage levels. It is intended that this section will provide further substantiation and additional insights into the relationship between economic circumstances and strikes. This section is divided into two subsections, dealing with the pre- and post-1973 period. It is argued that the relationship between material conditions and strikes seems to be constituted more in terms of expectations than actual material circumstances, but that this relationship alone cannot explain regional variations nor take full cognizance of changes in the size, incidence and nature of strikes.

Fourthly, the relationship between trade union strength and the incidence of strike action is further explored. This chapter is largely based on trade union archival sources, but also draws on relevant secondary and official source material. Again, there are definite links between trade union power and strike action. However, trade union membership totals cannot provide a full explanation. Also of importance is the type of union, its own experiences, and, once again, regional dynamics and local

factors, all of which are explored in this section.

Fifthly, other potential causal variables are evaluated. These would include political conflict, changes in labour legislation, and seasonal and cyclical factors. In understanding the causes of strikes, it is necessary to go beyond analyzing overall trends and to focus also on key selected instances of strike action. Accordingly, chapter seven not only seeks to provide further substantiation on the causes of strikes, but also on which factors determine their internal dynamics, and whether the two are interconnected. This is followed by an assessment of the situation in the 1990s and of the continued relevance of constructs developed, with particular emphasis on current worker perceptions, and the relationship between such perceptions and the incidence of strikes.

Finally, a concluding chapter provides a general discussion of the nature of strikes in terms of the theoretical arguments developed. This is followed by an assessment of the limits and possibilities of such a theoretical understanding, and the relationship between this understanding and possible areas for future research.

A generally accepted definition of a strike is any "temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand" (Hyman 1981:17). In other words, it is a planned collective action (as opposed to actions such as absenteeism) concerning a demand or series of demands that consists of an intentionally temporary withdrawal from the labour process. A distinction should be made between limited strikes which can rapidly de-escalate and be defused by

compromise on the part of one or both parties, and "trials of strength" where the objectives are to seek victory without compromise, and thus seriously to weaken one's opponent, be it capital or labour.

In South Africa, an additional dimension is introduced by the major role played by stayaways. The latter can be defined as a withdrawal from the process of production for a previously decided on time period on a regional or national, but not industrial basis, for political or political-economic demand(s) that have a broader significance. Officially, stayaways are not classed as strikes, a strike being where workers put forward a demand at factory/industry level (NMC 1986:9). Thus also certain lockouts (i.e. where management unilaterally halts production for a temporary period) are also excluded from the definition of strike action. A further term which requires some clarification is "independent trade union", a term coined by the South African Labour Bulletin, which is used to denote the new category of unionism which emerged in South Africa in the early 1970s, predominantly African and independent of the white-dominated established union movement (Maree 1987a:viii).

There a number of different methods by which strike intensity may be measured: in terms of total strikes; man-days lost; workers per strike; and volume. The latter represents a composite measure.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Strike Volume} &= \frac{\text{Strikes}}{1000 \text{ Workers}} \times \frac{\text{Man-Days Lost}}{\text{Strikers}} \times \frac{\text{Strikers}}{\text{Strikes}} \\ &= \frac{\text{Man-Days Lost}}{1000 \text{ Workers}}\end{aligned}$$

Strike volume has the advantage of revealing something of the

force of strike action. However, a major disadvantage of this measure is that in periods of very low strike action (for example, the 1960s), strike volume was even lower, making any analysis of changing patterns extremely difficult.

A limitation of strike volume as a measure of industrial conflict is that it makes no distinction between few strikes involving many workers and many strikes involving few workers.

In the 1950s and 1960s, strikes by white workers were few, but relatively large, a good example being the 1965-6 white miners' strikes over the "labour experiment", which involved a partial relaxation of the colour bar. In contrast, strikes by Africans in this period were somewhat more frequent, yet generally small. By the 1970s, this distinction began to become less relevant, as increasingly the overwhelming majority of strikes were by black workers, with industrial action by whites having only a negligible effect on total strike volume. Thus, for the purposes of this research, two indicators of strike activity were employed: strike totals (which are directly comparable for the entire period under review) and strike volume.

As can be seen from figure 1, a modest upsurge in total strikes took place in the years 1955-7 and far greater upsurges in the 1973-4 period and the 1980s. These increases were marked also by increases in strike volume. However, this measure also reflects the white miners' strikes of 1965-6, the 1980 East Rand strike wave, and the "trials of strength" of 1987. In view of the limits of strike volume as a measure, the primary measure of strike action employed is strike totals, although regular comparisons are made with strike volume.

Ultimately, the objectives of this study are thus two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to identify and explain the causes of strikes in South Africa between the years 1950 and 1990, and their internal dynamics. It thus endeavours to shed new light on the nature of an increasingly prevalent form of social protest, a form that has immense political, social and economic implications. Secondly, it attempts to provide a broader theoretical understanding of strike action, building on recent advances in social and economic theory, so as to furnish a broadly based contemporary understanding of collective action at the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The causes of strikes have been mainly analyzed in terms of three distinct theoretical traditions, two of which have been employed in the South African case. Firstly, there are those approaches which employ models orientated towards identifying key causes (or sets of causes) through a primarily quantitative approach, often based on the theoretical assumptions of laissez-faire economics that markets are self-regulating (see Martinelli and Smelser 1990:239-241), and that wider society is made up of free agents making their decisions on the basis of sufficient information in a consistently rational fashion (Arrow and Hankopoliija 1985:24).

A second theoretical orientation encompasses the broad tradition of political economy, including questions of (primarily class) domination, power and inequality. Thirdly, there are those approaches which focus on the immediate social and/or technological environment. The first tradition has been primarily employed by economists and the latter two, inter alia, by sociologists. Meanwhile, theories on the duration of strikes are generally based on the tradition of Hicks (1932:141-2), who first formulated a model based on the premise that the length of strikes is a product of a rational cost-benefit analysis by the various actors.

1.0 Rational Action and Strike Causality

Most of the models in the first tradition focus on potential economic causes, for example, those of Hibbs (1976:1043) and Penceval (Santomero and Seater 1976:513). The most important variables identified are real wages, unemployment and inflation.

Later models assessed the impact of political variables, including the representativeness of governments (Hibbs 1978:165), and trade union strength (Burkitt 1975:344 and Cronin 1979:17).

The relationship between these variables and the incidence of strike action in the South African case from 1950-1990 will be more fully assessed in the subsequent chapter.

In the South African case, existing studies of strikes based on these quantitative models include Douwes Dekker (1982:3) and Galin (1981). Both these studies are over the short term and include political variables, such as the size of the ruling party's parliamentary caucus, cabinet size and changes in Prime Minister. The applicability of these variables is, again, more fully explored in subsequent chapters. However, the inherent limitations of these studies include an over-reliance on official sources, as well as the possibility that not all variables may be relevant in the South African case. For example, Douwes Dekker (1982:3) acknowledges that cabinet size may not be a relevant factor in those situations where there is not a coalition government.

This study does not seek to reject the possibilities of modelling strike action. Rather, it is argued that the applicability of such modelling is potentially considerably constrained by the limited nature of consistent factual data, discontinuities between particular time periods and the above-mentioned variation between broader economic and political forces and local circumstances.

Consequently, models may contribute some overall insight, but particularly in the South African context, they need

substantiation and broadening through sociological tools of critical analysis. Ultimately, most models are based on the aggregation of individual actions, whilst conflict can potentially assume a variety of forms (Martinelli and Smelser 1990:45) - the type of strike, in terms of both cause and outcome, can vary tremendously.

Other quantitative studies of strike action include the CSIR's (CSIR/NIPR 1983:1-10) Special Report on South African Strike Data, and the National Manpower Commission's (1986: 1-5) study of "certain aspects" of strikes. Both are based on official statistics, and consist mainly of graphs depicting long term trends in strike action, as well as (in the case of the CSIR report) some potential causes.

All the above studies are based on assumptions of a fairly consistent underlying rationality, when, as noted elsewhere, it can be argued that rationality may be variable and tempered by only limited information being available to some or all parties to a dispute (Thompson & McHugh 1990:139). In other words, people may respond differently when subject to the same forces. As Arrow and Hankopolija (1985:24) note, there is a serious tendency to assume that agents have adequate information to guide their behaviour. This does not necessitate a review of past debates concerning rationality, but rather highlights the need to accept that rationality may be "a variable feature of social life" and that the ultimate objective of research is to attempt to explain this variation (Martinelli and Smelser 1990:31). Decisions to strike, or otherwise engage in collective action, may be the product of a complex process of conflict, dialogue and

political compromise between differing views of what constitutes rational action in a specific context (see Martinelli & Smelser 1990:31).

In contrast to the fixed yardstick approach to rationality, which underlies these models for understanding strikes, a pragmatic alternative is possible. Sometimes described as "low modernism", this approach stands between orthodox rational action models and postmodernism with its rejection of rationalism (Lash and Friedman 1992:2). Essentially, this entails the pragmatic use of a wide range of analytical tools to understand not only general trends, but also the specific details which underlie them.

2.0 The Political Economy Tradition

Secondly, there are those studies in the political economic tradition, based on underlying assumptions of power and, often, class dominance affecting and/or regulating conflict, with individuals having limited autonomy (Martinelli & Smelser 1990: 239-241). The broad political economy tradition encompasses thinkers such as Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. However, political-economic theories of strikes have been most developed by writers within the Marxist framework, including Engels, Lenin and Luxembourgh. All these authors are primarily concerned with the possibilities of strike action as a method of radical social transformation.

Engels and Luxembourgh accord particular attention to the possibilities and impact of mass strikes. Engels asserted that

strikes could not serve as a vehicle for revolutionary change, as workers were unlikely to have either "perfect organization" or adequate reserves of strike pay (quoted in Luxembourg 1971:224). Luxembourg herself believed that they represented one of the most effective means for bringing about social change. This was probably as a result of the conclusions reached in "The Accumulation of Capital" that the capitalist mode of production was not automatically destined to collapse, as long as it could expand, capture pre-capitalist sectors and bring them into itself (Arendt 1973:45). In other words, expropriating and "feeding on pre-capitalist lands" provided the necessary energy to keep the system in motion (ibid.:45). Consequently, Luxembourg believed that revolutionary change should be actively brought about. "The most perfect weapon for this was the mass strike" (Luxembourg 1971:227).

Luxembourg rejected Engels' stress on organization, asserting that "good organization does not precede revolutionary action, but must be a product of it" (quoted in Arendt 1973:58). In contrast, Lenin remained somewhat more pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of strikes. On the one hand, he argued that "every strike is a school of war" engendering revolutionary consciousness, yet on the other, he argued that the working class could not confine the struggle to strikes alone (Lenin 1977:61-62).

As noted above, Engels, Luxembourg and Lenin remained primarily concerned with the macro-level revolutionary potential of strikes. Later studies within the broad political economy tradition have tended to accord greater attention to

understanding strikes in terms of specific issues internal to the capitalist system, taking cognizance of regional variations. For example, Shorter and Tilly (1974:337) assert that strikes may be the product of a number of (not necessarily quantifiable) factors, all inherently bound up with the wider political order and the balance of power within the relevant society. These factors include a desire to place pressure on the authorities, and social and economic inequality and the resultant frustration and aggression (Shorter and Tilly 1974:337). Many of these studies remain in the broad Marxian framework.

Studies in the political economic tradition in South Africa include Sitas (1988), Webster (1986a), McNamara (1985), Maree (1986) and Lambert (1988). These studies concern changes in the metal and mining industries (Sitas, McNamara and Webster) and the trade union movement (Maree and Lambert). While these studies devote some attention to strike action, it is only with reference to their broader areas of concern. Only secondary attention is given to general trends in the changing nature of strikes over the long term, although some attention is accorded to the effects of ideology. Theory building in these studies concerns the nature of trade unionism and the labour process, with, again, the phenomenon of strikes per se only receiving secondary attention.

However, these studies do provide invaluable constructs for locating the changing nature of strikes. For example, Maree (1986) offers key insights into the changing nature of the trade union movement, focusing on the emergence of the independent trade unions in the 1970s, and, in particular, their successful

combination of a strong shop floor with a total independence from the established union movement (with many also adopting autonomous political stances).

Maree (1986:439-476) discusses a number of strikes which assumed a particular significance for the independent unions (good examples being the 1976 Armourplate and Heinemann strikes). These strikes reveal much about the relative strengths of the independent trade unions at this time, as well as the changing nature of state strategies when confronted with an increasingly assertive trade union movement and well-organized strikes. More broadly, Maree provides important insights into the functioning of the independent unions and the nature of shopfloor democracy, drawing on the earlier British experience of worker organization (see Maree 1986:33-53). In particular, Maree (1986) explores the emergence of shopsteward structures in the 1970s, paralleled with the broader rise of the independent unions, and the formalization of their organization.

In contrast, Webster (1986a) explores the changing nature of the labour process in the South African metal foundries. Particular attention is accorded to strikes in the 1970s, with four disputes being evaluated in detail. Webster (1986a:150) concludes that the strikes formed part of a broader shop floor struggle for control, and contrasts the failure of the co-optive Liaison Committee system with the rapid growth of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU). Webster's study provides invaluable insights into locating strikes in terms of managerial strategies and the system of control within a particular industry, although not with the intention of providing an overall perspective on the

changing causes, or, indeed, internal dynamics, of South African strikes in the post-war period. It thus does not cover the changing nature of strikes in detail, nor the effects of those more directly quantifiable causal variables.

Secondly, there have been those studies on particular strikes and/or strike waves, most notably those documented in the "South African Labour Bulletin" and "Work in Progress". Again, these reports provide invaluable insight into the micro-dynamics of strike action, and the specific circumstances surrounding them, but accord limited attention to long-term trends. Of particular importance are the "Labour Bulletin" articles, often based on primary information from within the independent union movement.

A series of articles dealing specifically with strikes is contained in Volume VI, whilst the first editions of the "Labour Bulletin" provide much information on the day-to-day activities of the first independent unions (see Maree 1987a:xii). Many of these early articles were written by academics involved in organizing the first worker service organizations in Durban, and were devoted not only to recording events, but also to the practicalities of establishing viable trade unions. Detailed coverage is provided of events such as the mass strikes of 1987. In addition, crucial insights on the changing nature of union strategies are provided in the union statements and interviews published by the "Bulletin", often with the objective of making positive contributions to debates within the union movement.

A fourth method of analyzing strike action is in terms of the immediate technological or social environment, sometimes referred to in the literature as "socio-environmental" perspectives. These viewpoints ascribe strike action to community structures (Kerr 1964), alienation as a result of technology (Blauner 1966) and poor communication (Mayo in Hyman 1981). Again, the applicability of these viewpoints to the South African situation will be more fully assessed in the subsequent section.

Both Blauner and Kerr and Siegel maintain that particular industries will be inherently strike-prone. Blauner argues that jobs which are more difficult to perform, in those sectors of industry where the process of production is both messy and dangerous, will ultimately have more combative workers (McCord 1980:117). Citing the example of the Eastern United States, Kerr and Siegel assert that workers from small isolated communities will be more militant. In particular, they claim that miners, dockers and seamen tend to come from such communities, and are thus more strike-prone. In contrast, Mayo (Hyman 1981:58-59) asserts that strikes are largely the product of poor communication, and can be resolved if this problem is redressed.

Kerr and Siegel's approach seems to have little wider applicability. Citing the French experience, Shorter and Tilly (1974:343) assert that it seems more commonly the case that workers from industrial centres, not those from isolated communities, that seem the most willing to resort to strike action. Furthermore, it seems that variations in technology

(and hence, according to Blauner, alienation) have little effect on the nature of strikes over the long term (Shorter and Tilly 1974:337).

All three socio-environmental perspectives focus on the immediate workplace and community environment, with little attention being accorded to wider social and economic factors. Indeed, Reddish (1980:300), a proponent of Mayo's theories, asserts that "goodwill and esprit de corps cannot be bought". In other words, it is suggested that economic prosperity does not ensure workplace harmony. In addition, these perspectives are often based on the assumption that conflict within the workplace environment is abnormal, and is the result of ultimately solvable factors.

This is particularly the case with the "communication approach", with its stress on "team spirit" and the nurturing of a joint "pride in the company's achievements" (Reddish 1980:299). Furthermore, all three perspectives ignore variations in the type of worker resistance manifest, and the nature of worker grievances.

It has been Mayo's communication approach that has been most widely employed in the South African case. In particular, in the 1970s, when confronted with the rise of the independent trade unions, management resorted to a number of strategies for improving communication. This included attempts to establish Liaison Committees in terms of the then prevailing labour relations legislation, as well as the use, in a consultative capacity, of experts in "bantu culture" (Webster 1986a:134). The latter tended to operate on the mistaken assumption that blacks

were only recently exposed to Western culture, and gave, in at least one instance, columns of advice headed "fifty things to do with Bantu workers" (ibid.:136). These attempts to increase communication failed to forstall the upsurge in strike action in the 1980s, and made no attempt to take account of wider economic and political factors.

4.0 The Positive Political Economy Alternative

An alternative to the orthodox political economy tradition is that of Positive Political Economy (PPE). PPE represents a broad theoretical framework, very different to the empirically-driven, issue-orientated and sometimes interventionist approach that has characterized many political economic studies dealing with strikes in South Africa. The PPE approach combines an exploration of the nature of bargaining between free economic agents, with an assessment of the accumulation of power within formal organization (Milogram & Roberts 1990:58). It is argued that distinct social groupings, including firms and trade unions, entail certain indivisibilities that may be above individual preferences (Olson 1990:214). Going beyond economic modelling, Milogram and Roberts (1990:59-63) argue that such models allow little scope for management actions, the process whereby decision alternatives are formulated, and the possibility of uncertainty.

Ultimately, the Positive Political Economy approach moves away from the mainstream political economy tradition based on assumptions of a certain distribution of wealth and power, instead focusing on the process of rational decision-making in

the broader political and economic context, and the process whereby institutions constrain, direct and reflect individual behaviour (Alt & Shepsle 1990:1-2). The validity of this approach to comprehending strike action in South Africa is fully explored in subsequent chapters.

5.0

The Managerial Discourse

In addition to the above approaches, a distinct discourse of strike analysis is provided by managerial consultants within South Africa. For example, as well as periodic reports on strikes (Levy 1986:1-19), Levy & Associates (later Levy, Piron and Assocs.), a leading labour relations consultancy, also release annual reports on labour relations in South Africa. Such reports are divided into a number of distinct sections, typically covering union activity, strikes, labour legislation, wage bargaining trends, and likely future scenarios. Up until 1989, these reports were largely based on official statistics. Since then, however, they have simply been referenced "Levy, Piron & Associates", in line with Levy's (1985:9) article acknowledging some of the limitations of relying only on official sources. Patterns of strike action are graphically depicted, and in later reports (Levy & Piron 1989-90:25) some limited graphical trends analysis is performed between the incidence of strikes and union membership. A scrutiny of footnotes revealed that the National Manpower Commission and the Central Statistics Office remained "invaluable sources", but with greater use being made of newspaper clippings and other "primary sources". Presumably,

newspaper clippings were used in providing additional descriptive data and in substantiating general trends (see Chapter 3). In addition, Levy & Piron run periodic surveys of employers, although it is evident that these are geographically confined, whilst their findings are only available to subscribers (SALB 1988:4-6). Another major consultant providing information on strikes, albeit within a somewhat looser framework, is the Innes Labour Brief. Founded in May 1989, the Innes Labour Brief compiles research manuals dealing with broad socio-political trends, in addition to in-house training/workshops (Innes, Kentridge and Perold 1992:iii). Again, there is a certain vagueness as to sources employed, but these also seem to be a combination of official statistics, newspaper reports, and periodic private surveys and interviews. However, the Innes Labour Brief is generally more critical in orientation than most other services of this nature, and its publications contain viewpoints from a wide range of ideological perspectives (see *ibid.*:10-95).

These managerially-focused reports do successfully highlight major trends and key developments in a highly accessible fashion. However, they are mostly underpinned by an approach that tends to be somewhat piecemeal, with the primary objective presumably being to present managers with a number of decision-making alternatives, rather than definite conclusions (see Thompson & McHugh 1990:135). As Thompson and McHugh (1990:135) note, there are certain constraints on this approach. Businesses are constrained from freely analyzing, evaluating and implementing a full range of options. This is a result of high degrees of

specialization within the modern business organization and the constraining influence of routine. In other words, the nature of the modern business organization may itself constrain management from acting as totally free decision-makers. Thompson and McHugh (1990: 157) argue that, in practice, management are often guided more by existing practices than by strategy founded on options provided, *inter alia*, by consultants. Whatever its impact on managerial practices, this category of studies has a very limited theoretical component and constitutes a discourse distinct from more purely academic studies.

A major limitation of all studies using initial releases of official indices is that the Department of Manpower tends to adjust strike totals, with initial releases often inaccurately showing over- or under-reporting of strikes in certain months (commonly December) (NMC 1986:9). Furthermore, many of the conclusions reached are orientated towards short-term issues and problems, with only limited attention being accorded to the long-term strategic implications (see Thompson & McHugh 1990:157). The data is presented in a basic summary form, but limited analysis is undertaken of the relation between potential causal variables and the incidence of strike action. Whilst the basic data is highly accessible, no attempt is made to draw sustainable conclusions or to develop theoretical or explanatory models. Again, this may represent the product of a "problem-shooting managerial approach", with primary attention being directed towards immediate issues and little towards developing a long-term understanding (see Thompson & McHugh (1990:157)).

The validity of all these broad theoretical and empirical approaches for understanding strikes in the South African context will be fully explored in subsequent chapters. However, it can be argued that it is necessary at this stage to consider some supplementary factors which may affect the nature of strike action.

Additional insight into the causes and nature of strikes may be afforded by taking account of the dynamic between subjective and objective circumstances, that is of the play between broader objective (and more directly quantifiable) trends, and subjective, less quantifiable factors. The former would include factors such as shifts in wage levels, or the numerical strength of the trade union movement, and the latter encompasses issues such as the previous experiences of all parties with regard to industrial disputes or other forms of collective action, and their interpretation thereof. As Arrow and Hankopolija (1985:24) note, there is a serious tendency to over-emphasise current information as opposed to past experiences. It is possible that strikes may indeed be the product of both objective circumstances and subjective understandings and interpretations of previous disputes, necessitating a broader view that considers and draws on aspects of all three traditions.

However, certain caveats need to be noted in making use of such a subjective-objective distinction. Firstly, it should be noted that the two are in some way interrelated. As Giddens

(1984:328) notes, individual actors are locked into a two-way dialogue with wider social structures. Both change, yet are changed by, the other. Such wider structures do not only encompass the lump sum of individual transactions, but also wider power relations and inequality. Thus, to Giddens, wider objective social forces are not simply an aggregation of economic trends, but also of less quantifiable (albeit still objective) political and economic relations. In contrast, individual (which responds to past experiences and the interpretation thereof) takes place where the individual retains the capacity to act otherwise (Giddens 1984:14).

Secondly, subjective and objective forces should not be seen as locked in an exclusively dualistic or dialectical relationship. As Weinstein (1990:86) notes, such a linkage may be uncertain, and not necessarily one of opposites. Indeed, the dividing line between the two may be somewhat blurred and uncertain, although it is useful to continue to make a distinction between broad trends and individual subjective responses and actions. In the case of this study, the concern is not with possible dialectics between subjective and objective social factors in general, but rather with how they - possibly on a complementary, possibly on a mutually cancelling basis - can represent two different sets of variables that may cause strikes. As Sayer (1992:22) notes, the subjective should not be seen solely as a passive process of interpretation (based, *inter alia*, on previous experiences), but also as encompassing creative action seeking change as a result of such interpretations. Furthermore, subjective responses do not simply concern isolated

individuals, but intersubjective relations among a group of people (ibid.:22). In other words, a group of workers in a factory may embark on a particular path of collective action, based on their combined (subjective) interpretations of previous instances of strikes and/or organization.

Furthermore, the contradictions and linkages between broad national trends and local circumstances should be considered. These include issues such as local variations in the incidence of strike action, as a result of both variations in material circumstances and less quantifiable (and more subjective) variables (such as the traditions, culture and previous experiences within particular regions). It may even be necessary to take account of the internal dynamics within disputes, and how different parties viewed their unfolding.

7.0 The Internal Dynamics of Strikes

As noted earlier, most models of the internal dynamics of strikes follow the tradition of Hicks (see Burkitt 1975:87), who proposed that the duration of strikes was based on a cost-benefit analysis by both management and workers. The costs of prolonging the strike are weighed up against the benefits of any concessions by the opposing party that may be forthcoming. Hicks's model is graphically depicted in Chapter 2, where the limits and possibilities of the Hicksian model are more fully explored. However, it should be noted that the Hicksian model may be inherently limited by its assumption of a "consistent psychology of the working man" (Kennan 1986:1101), with an emphasis on

consistently rational responses by all parties to a dispute, as well as by the fact that it makes little attempt to link the causes of strikes with their duration.

Ashenfelter and Johnson have attempted to overcome the latter limitation through developing a more integrated model. Similarly to Hicks, Ashenfelter and Johnson assume that the greater the duration of a dispute, the greater the costs incurred, and thus the greater the need to reach a compromise (Kennan 1986:1101). However, it is also argued that a firm's wage strategy is framed by its desire to maximize profits and its need to at least break even (ibid.:1101). Strikes are a product of the unions' assertiveness and firms' ability to grant increases (ibid.:1102). Whilst the Ashenfelter and Johnson model is notable in that it attempts to provide a unified understanding of the causes and the duration of strikes, it is limited in that it assumes a trade union presence, that strikes are preceded by a period of collective bargaining and that strikes are predominantly about wages. The changing role and composition of the trade union movement (relatively few workers were organized by effective unions prior to the late 1970s) and the fact that few strikes in the pre-1980 period were preceded by a period of bargaining (see chapter 7) make this model of limited potential utility in the South African case, in contrast to the simpler, albeit more limited, model of Hicks, the latter being an "existing theoretical resource that has the potential to be both useful and valid" (Skocpol 1984a:17). However, as Kennan (1986:1102) notes, Hicks, and Ashenfelter and Johnson, assume a consistently rational behaviour by all parties to a dispute.

In view of the above, this thesis does not seek to provide a mechanistic and predictive model for understanding strikes. Rather, it represents a pragmatic attempt to shed light on the nature of strikes in South Africa from 1950-1990, and to assess the constraints and potential in this context of existing models of understanding strikes. Furthermore, basing its arguments on general trends, substantiated and enriched through recourse to qualitative documentary material, it represents an attempt to develop a new theoretical understanding of this key manifestation of social conflict. It is hoped that it may be possible to bridge the key theoretical gap between understanding the conditions and attitudes of individual workers at the workplace and broader trends in collective action (Shorter and Tilly 1974:339).

Ultimately labour relations represents a social relationship (Baudrillard 1990:109), and strikes represent the ultimate product of a complex network of power relationships and inequalities. In view of this, this study attempts to assess a wide range of models and draws on a range of empirical material, from overall trends to specific instances of strike action. It is hoped that through this, a more encompassing explanation may be developed, which is yet sufficiently focused to have a practical utility. Moreover, it can be argued that a broader illumination of social reality is possible through focusing on discontinuities (Foucault 1988:96-109). In other words, it is important to devote particular attention to situations where a

new set of social relations emerges, such as before and after the establishment of the independent trade union movement. By studying when strikes occur, new insights may also be gained into those circumstances where they are unlikely to take place.

Strikes, like any other form of social conflict, involve the exercise of power, and as such reveal the relevant strengths of both parties, not only with regard to the immediate dispute, but also in terms of the broader relations of power in society. Thus, in addition to their immediate economic causes, strikes have a broader social and political dimension. Strikes may be ultimately open-ended, with experiences during disputes possibly assuming a higher degree of importance in determining the outcome than the original trigger.

9.0 Conclusion

Strikes have traditionally been analyzed from a number of distinct traditions. The validity of the insights provided for the South African context will be assessed in detail in the following chapter. However, further issues which deserve consideration include the possibility that strikes may be the product of both objective and subjective forces, and regional variations, as well as the multi-faceted nature of strikes. Strikes can vary from short, seemingly spontaneous disputes, involving relatively few workers, to prolonged "trials of strength".

This does not necessarily entail the creation of overly complicated models embracing all conceivable causal variables.

Rather, it suggests the employment of a "multi-dimensional" theoretical idiom (Holton 1992:238), in which no single factor is privileged without recourse to social reality. Certain limits on this approach should be recognized. Of necessity (in this case, partially a product of the source material), this approach is somewhat fragmentary, with an unwillingness to codify industrial conflict in terms of a limited number of variables with the same degree of finality as, say, the more quantitative models of strike causality and/or trade union power.

The following chapters critically assess the effects of the "prime movers" identified in existing theory as potentially causing strikes, as well as more subjective factors such as interpretations of previous experiences of industrial disputes. This is followed by a look at a series of individual instances of strike action and the relationship between strike causality and the duration of such disputes. Employing tools developed in both economics and sociology, an alternative, partially synthetic, mode of understanding of strikes will be developed, incorporating those aspects of existing theories and models which have a proven validity in the South African context.

METHODOLOGY

Ultimately, the process of research concerns not just method, but also the underlying methodology, or philosophy of social research, in terms of which the basic assumptions and criteria underlying research are framed (Bailey 1982:32). Furthermore, methodology represents a corpus of procedures for analyzing social reality, which may then be codified into theory (Hughes 1980:12). A further distinction which should be made is between theories and models of strike action. The former represent a broad mode of understanding or attempt to explain in general terms a particular phenomenon or grouping thereof (see Bailey 1982:40). The latter represents a highly specific and readily testable explanation focusing on a particular set of causal variables, within a broad theoretical tradition and with certain theoretical implications. The objective of this section is to outline the basic methodological standpoints underlying this study, and the frameworks of analysis employed.

1. The Methodology of Historical Sociology

As Skocpol (1984a:1) notes, social studies do require some foundation in historical experience. Events need to be grounded in time and space, whilst their specific order should be accounted for in assessing outcomes, with individual actions located in terms of their interplay with structural contexts (ibid.:1). Ultimately, the theorizing process is about trying to make general sense out of specific social events (ibid.:2).

It is the ultimate objective of this study to make such "general sense" of strikes through arriving at a theoretical understanding

of their nature in the South African context. Skocpol (1984a:17) asserts that it is necessary to acknowledge "whatever existing theoretical resources are employed that are seen useful and valid" in terms of this historical approach.

The 1950-1990 period was selected because it encompasses a number of key developments that have shaped the nature of industrial conflict in South Africa, ranging from the emergence of a vigorous and broadly-based trade union movement in the 1970s, to dramatic changes in statutory collective bargaining structures. Thus, the effects of fundamental changes in the nature of potential causal variables can be readily assessed. In addition, new light can be shed on the origins and nature of the current South African industrial relations environment.

Whilst sharing with other methodological approaches an "objective of establishing controls over variation to distinguish valid from invalid ones", research designs employing such comparative historical analysis attempt to reach conclusions through logical juxtapositions of limited and selected numbers of social events or trends (Skocpol 1984b:378). Particularly useful is the method of difference, which involves comparing a number of distinct "happenings" or cases and assessing commonalities, as well as crucial differences (Skocpol 1984b:379). The use of this method can entail isolating a number of potential causal variables and evaluating each across a chosen time period - taking account of regional (or spatial) factors - as a means of assessing which variable or combination of variables is valid (ibid.:381).

In addition, as Giddens notes, this method can provide the

basis for sociological theorizing (Smith 1991:130). Ultimately, it is through only through recourse to historical trends that any theoretical generalization of social phenomena becomes truly meaningful (ibid.:130). People's activities do not exist in isolation, but in a very specific context in terms of both time and space (Giddens 1984:3). Thus, for example, strikes should be seen not only as isolated incidents, but as part of a long-term trend, which is not simply the lump sum of individual transactions, concerning which some general conclusions can be reached. There is an essential duality in the relationship between individual and local actions and wider social structures and forces, a relationship which Giddens terms the "duality of structure" (Giddens 1984:12-17). In terms of this dualistic relationship, social "happenings" such as strikes are the product of both local actions and wider social forces. Thus it is necessary to evaluate the impact of both broad national-level trends and individual cases and instances.

Giddens's contribution is thus useful in locating both the value of employing an historical approach, and, more particularly, the method of difference, in theoretical terms. The utility of Giddens's social theories in providing a basis for understanding the nature of industrial conflict and his common ground with theoretical advances by other contemporary thinkers in sociology and economics will be more fully discussed in subsequent sections.

In this thesis, a number of potential causal variables of strikes are isolated. The effects of each on strikes (and each other) is evaluated over the 1950-1990 period, taking account of

regional dynamics. This is followed by an assessment of the relationship between the causes and the internal dynamics of strikes, guided by employment of the historical sociological tool of difference (Skocpol 1984b:381).

2. Realism and Beyond: Understanding Causality

2.1 Social Causality: The Realist Contribution

Following on the work of writers such as Bhaskar¹, Andrew Sayer explores the practicalities of understanding causality and the possibilities of modelling within the realist framework. Sayer (1992:89) asserts that there is a need to distinguish between relations which are contingent or external (the one is not necessary for the other one happening), and internal relations. Sayer asserts that social causality can be understood as per the following diagram:

Object X (with structure S)	- Possessing causal powers P	- Under specific conditions will or will not achieve E
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(Sayer 1992:108).

Sayer (1992:108) asserts that the process of social causality may involve a range of mechanisms which may or may not be contingent upon each other (i.e. a range of causal powers P). Whilst there are limitations in maintaining a consistently mechanistic framework of analysis, it can be argued that it is possible to incorporate Sayer's basic outline of causality within a broadly historical-sociological paradigm, while maintaining the use of the broad tool of difference. This thesis is based on the

assumption that it is possible to make use of such tools in a pragmatic fashion, yet avoid getting bogged down in endless debates over the role of scientific knowledge and differing interpretations of the truth (Rorty 1982:xiv). The latter debates, Rorty asserts, are counter-productive in that they represent attempts to separate "pure" science from "pure" philosophy and make absolute distinctions between the two (Crook 1991:169). The alternative, the one employed in this thesis, is to adopt an essentially pragmatic approach, discarding the tyranny of scientific absolutes in getting on with the business of analyzing social life in its various manifestations (Wood 1993:88).

2.2 Understanding Social Causality: A Pragmatic Alternative

As Hage and Meeker (1988:i) note, a key problem in sociology is the linking of theoretical constructs to the complexities and variations of the real world. They (ibid.:i) assert that the concept of causality has been co-opted by statistical and technicist path models, limiting the phenomena that can be studied to those where adequate and comprehensive statistics are available. However, as Sayer (1992:22) argues, it is possible to employ causal analysis to all temporal phenomena, supplying the basis for theory-building. This is the case even if incomplete data may, again, necessitate the employment of a range of different sources and approaches from the historical to the statistical (Hage and Meeker 1988:16-20). Only through such an approach is it possible to provide a detailed understanding of both the general trends (the whole) and individual incidents (its

component parts) of industrial conflict (see Giddens 1984: 2-6).

Furthermore, it can be argued that understanding strike causality is not just about identifying the immediate triggers of strikes, but also about identifying what potentially may constrain or enable them - those forces which preclude or facilitate strike action. It is often assumed that extraneous variables represent little more than a nuisance to be factored out in model building, yet analysis of complex social phenomena necessitates accounting for complex networks of multiple factors (Bailey 1982:51-52). This may again necessitate the modification of existing models using Sayer's basic model as a pragmatic departure point, and further theory building, so as to encompass direct and indirect causal factors, and the temporal aspect.

Meanwhile, it may be necessary to accept that one may not necessarily be able to identify continuous long term trends, but rather discontinuities - such as before and after the emergence of the independent trade union movement. It is thus necessary "to collect meanings" and fully analyze each stage, and view the conditions surrounding breaks or discontinuities (Foucault in Poster 1984:74), a technique broadly within the parameters of the method of difference. Understanding the nature of these discontinuities may shed new light on the relationship between social and economic developments and strikes, and provide some insights into current and future developments with regard to the changing nature of strikes.

3.1 Limits of Official Statistics

The basis of official (and independent) estimates of key potential causal variables - such as changes in black real wages in the non-agricultural sector - has been altered several times during the period under review, for example, before and after 1968. Overall strike totals can be obtained through official statistics and by summarizing press accounts. The former relies, in terms of Section 65A of the Labour Relations Act, on compulsory reports from employers, on a prescribed official form, with the possibility of key strikes being (illegally) unreported. In addition, there is often evidence that workers put forward a range of demands, with only one being officially recorded (see, for example Fisher 1977:335), which makes use of official estimates of strike causality especially dubious. Meanwhile, press reports only focus on the most newsworthy of strikes, resulting in considerable under-reporting of strike totals. However, overall trends in strike action according to this source, as well as independent surveys, are very similar to those from the Department of Manpower (see Wood 1989:266-270; fig. 30), justifying the use of regression analysis in comparing the incidence of strikes with other variables, such as wage levels, albeit on a broad, general level.

However, while it is possible to explore overall trends in strike action by recourse to official sources, only limited detail is available, which may not necessarily be totally accurate. Furthermore, there are no complete figures available

on total employment in the non-agricultural sector until 1960. Thus, for the 1950-1960 period, total employment in the mining, manufacturing and construction industries² was used in calculating strike volume. Whilst total figures were available for the 1960-1970 period, these were calculated on a different basis from those of the 1970-1990 period. Thus, whilst strike volume as a measure may be useful in indicating overall trends in the size and duration of strikes, it is an inherently less accurate measure of strike activity than strike totals in the pre-1960 period.

3.2 The Possibilities of a Multi-Method Approach

Again, all these factors necessitate the use of a combination of different documentary sources. These include official statistics, newspaper reports, union archives³, employer association records, and independent studies. As Bailey (1982:302) notes, comparing documents by different authors (analyst reliability) represents one of the most effective methods of ensuring reliability of source material, although there is no truly objective method of ensuring absolute reliability. The validity of documents is best ensured by external checks, by locating individual documents in terms of the broad social, economic and political context prevailing at the time (Bailey 1982:326).

Documentary sources have the advantage of enabling access to otherwise inaccessible information, covering a relatively large area (Bailey 1982:303). In addition, such sources are particularly well-suited to studies which cover a long period of

time (ibid.:303), especially a study of this nature, and which focuses on long term trends and discontinuities in the relationship between employers and workers.

Given the flaws in official statistics and the 30-year waiting period with regard to most state (as opposed to union and other independent) archival sources, it should be noted that there are certain constraints on this research. An alternative approach would have been a micro study of a few instances of strike action in very much more detail, an approach similar to that adopted by Bonner and Lambert (1987:336) in their excellent study of the 1958 Amato textiles strike. Bonner and Lambert's research was, *inter alia*, based on a limited number of in-depth interviews. Indeed, this basic approach, focusing on the micro-details of a specific dispute, could be extended through recording the full life histories of a selected number of worker activists. It is recognized that there is considerable space for future micro research of this nature. A limited number of in-depth interviews were conducted with trade unions and government officials. In addition, workers' impressions of a single instance of industrial conflict, that of the 1992 MWASA strike were recorded

4. Although outside of the main period under review, it is hoped that these impressions will shed further light on the micro-dynamics of industrial conflict, and of worker perceptions of collective action.

However, this thesis generally follows a macro research-based route, and focusing on general trends and discontinuities, represents a longitudinal study dealing with a forty year period.

This choice was the result of a desire to explore the causes of overall patterns with regard to strike action, and to reconceptualize theories of industrial conflict in the light thereof. In other words, this thesis's primary objective is not only to derive some broad explanation for the changing nature of industrial conflict in South Africa since the 1950s, but also to re-synthesize and update strike theory.

A serious limitation in solely employing documentary sources for a thesis of this nature would be an over-reliance on data that is in some way filtered and/or deemed significant enough to be recorded in writing. In particular, this would result in insufficient attention being given to the attitudes, norms and values of that grouping which actually takes the collective action, the individual workers themselves and their subjective interpretations of the world about them. This problem was resolved through a survey of COSATU members, conducted during early 1994. COSATU remains by far South Africa's largest and most active union federation. It should be noted that this survey represented a co-operative effort, and involved academics from the universities of Witwatersrand, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Natal and Rhodes⁵. The initial objectives of this study were to explore workers' perceptions of political and workplace democracy. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the author independently analyzed those variables which have a relevance to comprehending strikes.

3.3 Survey Method

The total sample size was 643 respondents⁶. As Kenneth Bailey (1982:84-92) notes, sample size is a product not only of the size of the population, but also of the amount of deviation in responses. The sample size was computed after a pilot study had been conducted through simple quota sampling in the Durban region (see Baker 1988:156-158). The final survey was conducted by means of probability sampling, through the area sampling method. Being the most feasible approach, interviews were conducted at the workplace level, rather than in terms of selected individual respondents' names (see Bailey 1982:87-88). Area sampling involves systematic sampling where each unit constitutes a collection of elements.

The overall population was divided up into a series of readily identifiable clusters, defined, firstly, in terms of COSATU region, and then in terms of individual firms. Finally, fieldworkers were instructed to select respondents at each workplace randomly by an accepted random sampling procedure. These elements, together with the spread of urban centres, contributed to a representative sample of COSATU members. The responses to most key questions dealing with perceptions proved remarkably homogeneous⁷, which greatly facilitated in making the sample representative.

It should be noted that use of this sampling method does entail certain inherent limitations. Firstly, as workplaces, not individual names are used, it is possible over a period of time for the same respondent to be interviewed twice. This problem was obviated by conducting the interviews over as short a time as

possible, namely a ten-day period during March 1994. Secondly, it is essential that all stages of the sample are truly representative in terms of the identified population. The only region covered where the sample was not large enough to be fully representative was the Western Transvaal region. For the purposes of statistical analysis of regional differences, this region was incorporated in the Witwatersrand region to form an overall "Southern Transvaal" region. This region was included in the study in order that a reasonable number of NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) members might be encompassed.

The questionnaire was constructed by the collaborative researchers on a co-operative basis⁸. Mostly close-ended questions were used, facilitating cross-comparisons between individual responses, expediting coding, and making for a more consistent and straightforward interviewing process. Some open ended questions as well as two-part questions were used to capture additional detail where necessary. In order to further simplify the interviewing process, certain response categories were collapsed.

The author coded and processed the survey. The use of mostly close-ended questions greatly facilitated the coding process. The data was then inputted onto computer, using the Statgraphics 6.0 software package⁹. Following input, a comprehensive checking and clearing process was conducted. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are employed. It should be noted that most variables were nominal or ordinal, resulting in a distribution of responses that was non-parametric. Consequently, as measures of central tendency, modes and medians

and not averages were employed, as were non-parametric inferential statistical methods. With regard to the latter, some of the variables in this survey were analyzed to determine whether any relationship existed among them. This was achieved by means of contingency tables and the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test¹⁰. Where individual cells in a cross-tabulation were empty, or more than a certain number less than five, response categories were collapsed in a revised matrix. Where appropriate, Yates's correction was used. In addition, the data was summarized by means of univariate and bivariate (cross-tabulation) tables and graphs. Having established whether a statistically significant relationship existed between two selected variables, lambda was used as a coefficient of association (i.e. to test the strength of the relationship between the two variables) on both a symmetric and an asymmetric basis.

4.0

Conclusion

Both broadly quantitative and qualitative data sources are employed, the latter providing the needed additional detail, corroboration and illumination of the broadly quantifiable trends whether extracted from official or survey sources. This represents a particularly useful application of Skocpol's (1984b:379) methodology of difference, of exploring a range of different cases and accounts and assessing common trends and crucial variations. It is hoped that this approach has provided a more detailed substantiation of causal relationships than would

otherwise have been possible. The use of such a range of sources will permit either the cautious acceptance of aspects of certain existing models of strike causality on a pragmatic, yet ultimately more tenable, basis providing the foundations for the development of a new multi-dimensional theoretical understanding.

Endnotes

1. Theory and Scientific Understanding: The Realist Contribution of Roy Bhaskar

As Bailey (1982:32) notes, use of scientific or readily quantifiable data facilitates the formulation of highly specific and precise explanations, yet may, unless recourse is made to more qualitative data, "dehumanize" or oversimplify social happenings. Thus, the relationship between scientific data, actual social reality and the process of reaching a philosophical understanding thereof is a somewhat problematic one.

An attempt to codify the linkages between science and philosophy has been undertaken by Roy Bhaskar (1979:5); who asserts that the relationship is potentially a symbiotic one, whereby science can supply data and analogies, which can be codified through philosophy to reach a general understanding. Essentially, Bhaskar (1979:24-7) concludes that it is possible to develop a logical understanding, doing full justice to the proto-scientific elements in positivism, that accepts certain intransitive beliefs and yet the transformability of social structures. Limitations of Bhaskar's basic approach include his over-emphasis on science, which perhaps, again, "dehumanises behaviour" (see Bailey 1982:32).

Nonetheless, Bhaskar successfully advances a number of useful methodological points. Firstly, he asserts that there is a need to distinguish between universal tendencies and patterns of events, the latter of which are not necessarily repeatable (Bhaskar 1979:12). Secondly, he argues the need for the incorporation of a transitive or temporal definition, although within the broader Marxist theoretical tradition.

2. The three sectors where most strikes take place and where accurate and directly comparable figures were available; this excludes sectors such as commerce and transport.

3. Particular use was made of the FOSATU and TUCSA archives, housed in the William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, as well as a large number of pamphlets and other documents issued by CUSA, NACTU and COSATU. These

pamphlets/documents were personally collected by the author, or accessed at the South African Library (Cape Town), the Labour Research Service (Salt River), and from several other libraries countrywide.

4. The author is extremely grateful to the follow senior student who assisted in gathering this information: Jacob Madumo. The transcripts of these workers' accounts are largely contained in J. Madumo, "Reconstructing the 1992 MWASA strike". Industrial Sociology Project, Rhodes University, 1993.

5. The full research co-operative consisted of Janet Cherry, Dave Ginsberg, Richard Haines, Gilton Klerck, Johann Maree, Roger Southall, Eddie Webster, and the author.

6. Section 1.1 represents a modified version of a more comprehensive discussion of the research methods employed, which forms part of a forthcoming collaborative book on the survey. See also Wood and Coetzee (1994).

7. The standard deviation of responses to most key questions dealing with perceptions ranged from 0.8 to 1.7.

8. see endnote 5.

9. IBM PC compatible 386 and 486 personal computers, fitted with co-math processors and at least 8MB memory, were employed. Student assistants under close supervision performed the actual process of data capture.

10. For a full discussion of the uses and limitations of the chi-squared test in surveys of this type see Haines and Wood (1993).

Key Dates and Developments

Political	Unions	Strikes
Defiance (52) Campaign PAC Founded(58) Anti-Pass Protests Sharpeville(60) ANC/PAC Banned Soweto Uprising (76) UDF Formed (83) Vaal Triangle Uprising Tri-Cameral Parliament Established 1985 State of Emergency 1986 State of Emergency De Klerk's February 1990 Speech	SATLC Disbands (54-5) SATUC Established(55) SATUC Renamed TUCSA(62) SACTU Established(55) SACTU Exiled(65) UTP Established(71) GFWWF Established(72) IAS Established(74) TUACC Launched (74) FOSATU Launched (79) CUSA Launched (80) NACTU Launched(86) Disbands(86) Disbands (90) BAWU Established(72) Western Province Workers Advice Bureau GWU Launched (77) BAWU Splits/ SAAWU Formed(79) UWUSA Launched(86) COSATU Launched(85)	Langeberg (57) Amato (58) Durban(73) East London East Rand(81) 1987 Rail/ Mines

(Dates in brackets 19(68))]

**SECTION 1: GENERAL TRENDS AND DISCONTINUITIES IN STRIKE ACTION:
THEORY AND THE SOUTH AFRICA CASE**

CHAPTER 1

**UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF STRIKES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN
CONTEXT: GENERAL TRENDS AND THE VALIDITY OF ESTABLISHED MODELS
OF STRIKE CAUSALITY**

This chapter constitutes the first half of an evaluation of the validity of existing explanations of strike action in the South African context, and deals specifically with those developed to explain strike causality. The primary objective of the chapter is to establish a framework for understanding strikes. It therefore offers an assessment of the viability of established models for understanding strikes in the South African context, eliminating those models which are obviously inappropriate and setting aside other models for more detailed subsequent evaluation. The chapter seeks to establish the foundations for developing an alternative theoretical understanding of strike action, an understanding that synthesizes and builds on appropriate causal models and contemporary social theory. This endeavour is based on an assessment of general trends in South African strike action over the years 1950-1990.

Established models of strike action identify causal or contingent factors such as wages, trade union strength, political dynamics and socio-environmental conditions. As noted in the methodology section, it can be argued that in the South African context one is faced with not so much continuous evidence as discontinuities, not only in terms of limitations in statistical indices, but also in terms of a somewhat incoherent interpenetration of variables which may either directly cause strikes, or shape the conditions under which they take place. This situation is not unique to South Africa - in much of the developing world, statistical evidence remains problematic. This does not necessitate a wholly qualitative approach, with its own inherent problems, but rather that quantitative trends should be

substantiated with qualitative evidence wherever possible. In this chapter, the various models of strike causality are evaluated within the South African context in terms of the changing relationship among political, social and economic developments, in broadly quantitative terms, although the effects of more qualitative factors are briefly explored.

There are certain limitations in simply comparing graphical trends, which may be overcome through the use of regression analysis, which facilitates the separation of causal relations from mere correlations between variables (Bailey 1982: 390). Although regression analysis is only as accurate as source material, and is particularly limited when there are only a limited number of observations, it nonetheless can greatly facilitate in the process of identifying those causal variables which are of relevance to comprehending strikes in the South African context. However, any general trends and relationships will have, of necessity, to be corroborated through recourse to other forms of source material in order that the hypothesised model for understanding strikes outlined below may be either fully proved or disproved. In other words, regression analysis is employed only as a means of highlighting those areas where a possible relationship may exist, to be further explored through the use of more qualitative descriptive data.

1.0 Strike Causality: A Proposed Framework for Analysis

As noted in the method section, Sayer (1992:89) argues that social outcomes are not only the product of direct causal variables, but also of intervening contingent factors or external relations. In other words, in certain circumstances, intervening conditions will contribute to shaping the final outcome. It is hypothesised that given the differing political, economic and social approaches to understanding industrial conflict, a suitable framework for comprehending the incidence of strikes would be as follows:

Causal Factors -	Under specific -	Will result in
	Conditions (C)	Strikes
Economic Factors -	C -	Incidence of Strikes
Organizational Factors		
Subjective Factors		

There are a number of economic variables which can potentially be linked to strike action. However, it is arguable that the economic factors which have the most direct impact on the decision to strike will be material conditions and the possibility of bringing about a change thereto. There are also several organizational factors which could potentially affect the incidence of strike action. However, it seems possible that the factor which is likely to have the most immediate impact will be that of the organization of workers themselves, their capacity

to withdraw from the labour process, and to mobilize support and enforce solidarity after the dispute breaks out. As will become evident in Chapter 7, informal worker organization may, at times, be surprisingly effective. However, there is little doubt that it is in those circumstances where effective trade unions are present that strike action is most feasible. Similarly, it seems evident that the most important subjective variable would be the impressions of individual workers themselves, based on their experiences and interpretations of previous outbreaks of industrial conflict.

Contingent variables which could shape the nature of industrial conflict include, first, the amount of information opposing sides have of their opponents' intentions. Secondly, whilst it would only be in exceptional circumstances that a particular item of industrial relations legislation might directly cause a strike, there is little doubt that such legislation could have a contingent effect, shaping the specific conditions under which a strike may take place. Other variables which might have a significant contingent effect on strike action include the political environment, more specifically the extent of political mobilization and protest, and spatial dimensions. The framework thus hypothesised can be expressed schematically as follows:

Causal Factors	- Under Specific Conditions	- Will Result in Strikes
Material Conditions	C1,C2,C3,C4	Incidence of Strikes
Trade Union Organization/ Mobilization		
Subjective Factors		

Where C1 represents the extent of political mobilization and protest, C2 industrial relations legislation, C3 spatial dynamics, and C4 the amount of information opposing sides have of each other's intentions.

As noted in the methodology section, this thesis is broadly located in the realm of historical sociology, and makes use of the methodological tool of difference (see Skocpol 1984b:379). By this it is meant that the framework for analysing strikes should be located in the context of a determinate historical setting. Skocpol (1984b:379) asserts that social events are best viewed in the context of historical differences and discontinuities. In other words, it is necessary to understand patterns of strikes as specific to historical periods or settings with potentially unique sets of causal and contingent variables. Recognition of the common ground and differences between each period, and the discontinuities between them, will not only contribute to a greater understanding of the outcomes, but also to the nature of the causal and contingent variables. In the course of the thesis, a number of distinct periods are identified. Their specific commonalities and differences and the theoretical implications thereof are evaluated in Chapter 9.

2.0 Potential Causal Variables Identified in Established Models of Strike Analysis

2.1 Economic Models

Most attempts to understand strikes on a quantitative basis have in the first instance focused on economic variables, especially the material circumstances of workers, importantly wages. For example, Penceval (Santomero and Seater 1978:513) asserts that "strike activity can be explained by changes in economic variables, so that it should be an endogenous, rather than exogenous variable". This viewpoint has been most refined by Hibbs (1976:1033), who argues that the three key economic factors that may have some effect on strike action are movements in real wages, changes in the demand for labour (i.e. unemployment), and changes in the ratio of aggregate profits to employee compensation (i.e. the profit/ labour share in national incomes, and, hence, the ability of employers to grant increases).

2.1.1 Unemployment and Strikes

Hibbs (ibid.:1043) argues that it is unemployment that is the most sensitive indicator of business conditions - in a tight labour market employers have difficulty in replacing strikers, whereas in a situation of high unemployment there is an increased number of potential strike-breakers. This discounts the possibility of a highly segmented labour market, with supply being controlled through state intervention.

The relationship between strikes and black¹ unemployment in South Africa is depicted in figure 2 for the 1960-1980 period and

figure 3 for the 1980s. In the 1980s, accurate official statistics were available, whilst for the 1960-1980 period, an independent indicator of unemployment totals, Simkins (Bell 1984:5) was employed. It should be noted that whilst these unemployment figures are not directly comparable, they do provide a general indicator of overall trends in unemployment. Unfortunately, accurate data on black unemployment is not available for the 1950s.

Table 1 depicts a regression analysis between Simkins's unemployment estimates and strike totals. The resultant probability level of .52047 is not statistically significant. Table 2 depicts a regression analysis of the relationship between official estimates of black unemployment and strike totals in the 1980s. This time the relationship can be seen as statistically significant, with probability levels of 0.02465, although the r-squared value of 53.75% denotes that this relationship can only explain that amount of variance from the regression line (figure 4)². As can be seen from the curve, higher levels of strike action in the 1980s seem, in some way, to be related to increased unemployment. However, the different nature of these two indicators should be considered. It is possible that the variation between the pre- and post-1980 period may be the product of the different methods employed by Simkins and the Central Statistics Organization. Nonetheless, it is evident from both sources that high unemployment does not discourage striking.

Black unemployment did fall prior to two increases that took place in strike totals in the 1960-1980 period, in 1964 and 1973 (see figure 1). Conventional wisdom holds that high

unemployment is a deterrent to striking. Nonetheless, it can be argued that other factors, such as the mass resistance and mobilization in the 1980s could conceivably overshadow the deterrent effect of high levels of joblessness. Indeed, the high number of dependents per black worker and the nature of informal networks of support (see Hyden 1983: 69-71) could place increased pressure on black workers to seek improved material conditions in periods of high unemployment through strike action. Furthermore, the existence of such networks could even provide assistance to striking workers (see Sitas 1988).

In addition, the phenomenon of mass unionization in the 1980s could have contributed to a further segmentation of the labour market between "insiders" and "outsiders", unionized and non-unionized workers, replacing earlier racial wage discrimination (see Knight & McGrath 1977:245). Unionized workers could well press for wage increases, if the long term employment consequences did not directly affect them. Alternatively, rising unemployment could result in increased numbers of strikes over retrenchments. The relationship between unemployment and strikes will be further evaluated in subsequent sections, where particular attention will be accorded to the possibilities of discontinuities, of distinct periods where unemployment had specific effects on strikes.

2.1.2 Profits and Strikes

Hibbs (1976:1042) notes that the profit factor is, in the end, self-cancelling. If profits are high, the demands of workers increase, but so does the willingness of employers to grant

concessions, and thus head off strike action. Certainly, this assertion seems to be true for South Africa. For example, the opening up of the Free State Gold Fields resulted in record profits for the mining houses by the late 1950s, which could well explain the general rise of wages in this sector (see Wilson 1972:46), particularly as there were signs of growing socio-political discontent, with the issue of a national minimum wage being used as a mechanism of mobilization. Similarly, the gold price windfall of the early 1970s again permitted the mining houses to grant pay concessions, at a time when there was increasing conflict on the mines. The same is true for the manufacturing sector - increased profits led employer groupings, such as the Bantu Wages and Productivity Association, to press for higher wages in the late 1950s.

These groupings were prompted by the prospect of increased resistance and low levels of productivity (which, in itself, can be a form of conflict at the workplace). Citing the example of the United States, McConnell (1981:606) asserts that there is a definite relationship between wages and productivity levels. Again, in the early 1970s, when confronted with the possibility of unprecedented levels of industrial conflict and enjoying record profits, many employers were quick to grant wage concessions. There are numerous other examples of this, which will be fully discussed in subsequent chapters.

2.1.3 Wages, Aspirations and Strikes

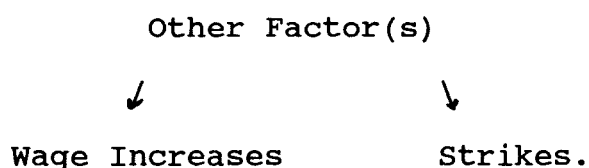
Another potential cause of strikes could be wage levels. Overall trends in wage levels in the non-agricultural sector, nominal and real, are depicted in figures 5 and 6 respectively. As can be seen from these graphs, black wages in particular are marked by a series of readily identifiable periods or discontinuities, such as before and after the 1972 increases. While this does not preclude the possibility of a general relationship between wage levels and strikes, it is evident that the nature and hence effects of the wage variable have radically changed during the period under review.

Figures 7 and 8 and tables 3 and 4 depict a regression analysis of the relationship between overall real wages and black real wages (both in terms of 1985 prices), and strike action, respectively. Again, both relationships are statistically significant, as can be seen by tables 3 and 4, although the r-squared values indicate that only 68.32 % and 62.87 % of the variance of strike totals per annum can be explained by shifts in total and black real wages respectively³.

These graphs and tables reveal that it seems to be the case that it is not low wages that cause strikes, but rather higher wage levels, or more probably, as Hibbs (1976:1043) argues, wage aspirations, that have a greater effect on strikes. In this context, aspirations may be defined as the assumption that one may rise on the socio-economic scale (Young 1948:65). It should be noted that aspirations tend to over-run the achievement thereof (ibid.:65). It is conceivable that the relationship between wage rises, heightened aspirations and strikes may be

potentially a spurious one. Thus, instead of:

Wage Increases - cause - Heightened Aspirations - cause - Strikes
it is possible that:



Thus, it is necessary to explore more fully the causes of wage increases in order to assess whether they themselves directly cause strikes, making the wage variable irrelevant.

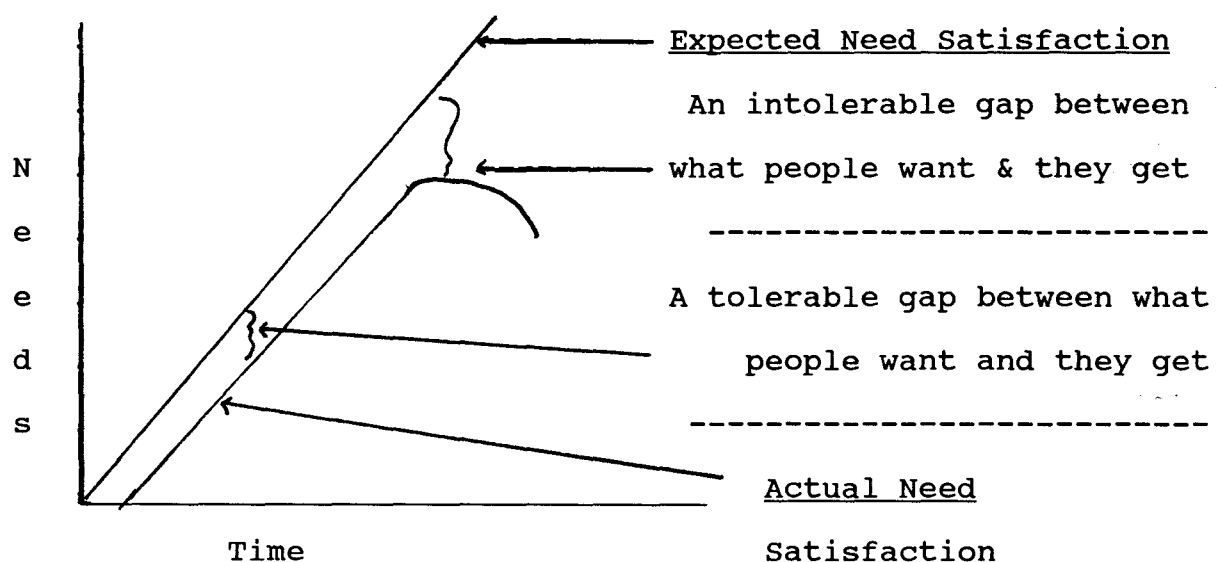
Secondly, it is possible that the relationship between wages and strikes is wholly coincidental. Against this must be considered the fact that there seems to be considerable regularity in this relationship, a regularity that seems more than coincidental. However, if the limitations in official statistics are borne in mind, a more detailed analysis, employing a range of alternative sources, is in order.

Of course, strikes may not only be the product of changes in wage levels, but may also cause wage increases - what Hibbs (1976:1048) refers to as a possible lagged reciprocal relationship between wages and strikes. The extent of this will be explored in chapter 2. However, it is evident that the increase in strikes was, at least in part, a response to rising worker militancy, which would have had some effect on wage levels (see Santomero and Seater 1978:512).

Davies (1978:143) argues that widespread social protest is likely to occur when a period of economic and social development is followed by a "short period of sharp reversal". Stability is

ultimately dependent on the prevailing "mood" in society (ibid.:143). In a society which is utterly impoverished, people are predominantly occupied with staying alive, or in a situation where resistance seems hopeless, significant social protest is unlikely to occur (ibid.:145) - further evidence that low wages do not cause strikes. If protest seems more feasible, then widespread protests are possible (ibid.:145).

Thus, if wages are increasing (i.e. if it seems evident that an improvement in material conditions is possible), it can be argued that increased numbers of wage strikes will take place. Davies's thesis is depicted in the diagram below:



The expectations or aspirations gap can be defined as the gap between hopes and expectations (e.g. of a desired wage level or of greater political rights), and the chances offered for them to be met within a prevailing social reality (Crespi 1992:113) - a situation where aspirations over-run achievement (Young

1948:65). In such cases, a high degree of relative deprivation can be said to exist. As Schlemmer (1992:574) notes, perceptions of relative deprivation are not necessarily softened by incremental improvements. Perceptions of the unfairness of remaining imbalances in material conditions (be they based on racial or other criteria) could indeed become more acute, particularly at the margins, where levels of deprivation and frustration tend to be the highest (ibid.:574).

As Hibbs (1976:1043) asserts, wage expectations are based on hopes, as opposed to achievement. It is assumed that expectations will tend to increase with improved material circumstances - expectations represent a specific elaboration of meanings and values prevalent at the time (Crespi 1992:113).

It can be argued that the incidence of strikes seems to increase after a long period of stagnant or dropping real wages, yet at a time when wages have begun to increase (Hibbs 1976:1043, see also figure 6). This would result in a continued expectations gap and unusually high levels of deprivation, with wage increases seeming increasingly possible, resulting in a greater propensity to resort to strike action.

Figure 10 depicts a regression analysis between shifts in total real wage levels, lagged (-2) in relation to strike action. This reflects a statistically significant relationship - albeit with a 6% lower r-squared value than the relationship between real wages and strikes per se (table 6). Thus, again, low wages do not cause strikes, but aspirations seem to affect the incidence of strike action.

Shorter and Tilly (1974:337) argue that whilst the

deprivationist models provide some promising insights when assessed in the most general sense, they fall short when drawing specific inferences on strikes. In other word, why do rising aspirations lead to strikes only in certain cases? Only when other factors such as basic working conditions are identified and included in the formula does the question of deprivation become truly useful in analyzing specific cases of strike action (ibid.:337). A further question is whether strikes, in turn, can affect wage levels, further heightening aspirations and thus triggering off a new cycle of strike action. In essence, it will be necessary to identify what causes wage rises after a period of stagnation, ascertain whether this genuinely precedes any upsurge of strike action, and provide additional substantiation in terms of a range of alternative sources.

2.1.4 Inflation and Strikes

It is important to note that labour does not suffer from any "money illusion", but takes the effects of inflation fully into account (Hibbs 1976:1043) - workers are not fooled by rises in money wages if real wages fall. For example, as can be seen from figure 6, when black wages fell in real terms in 1987, unprecedented numbers of strikes took place (despite nominal wages remaining static). Indeed, there is a statistically significant relationship between inflation and strike totals - higher inflation levels seem to contribute to more strikes, as reflected in figure 9 and table 5, as predicted by Galin (1981:7). Yet, closer examination reveals that strike totals fell in 1975, despite an increase in inflation. Conversely, the

drop in strike totals in 1988 was again matched by a fall in the inflation rate. However, other factors certainly could have contributed to this, from limitations in union organization to the effects of the coercive 1987 Labour Relations Act Amendments. Thus, whilst there seems to be some connection between strike totals and inflation, other factors cannot be discounted at this stage. In subsequent chapters, the relationship between inflation and strikes will be explored in greater detail, using a range of different sources and assessing factors such as the possibility of disproportionate price rises in the cost of basic foodstuffs.

2.2 The Industrial Relations Model

Most models focusing on the impact of industrial relations variables on strikes have accorded primary attention to the relative strength of the trade union movement. In order fully to understand this possible relationship, it is first necessary to review the general literature dealing with the strength of unions versus wage levels, which may be either the result of strike action or less direct forms of pressure.

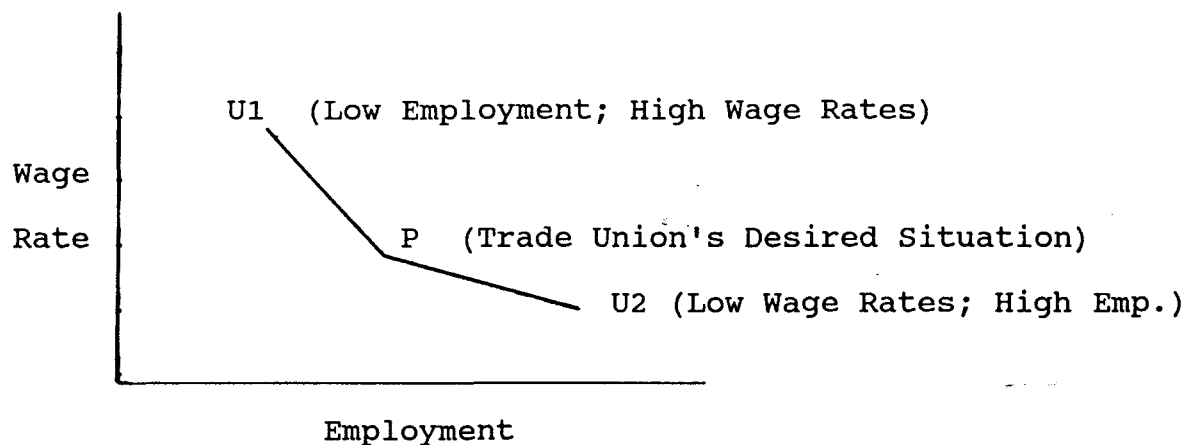
2.2.1 Unions, Wages and Strikes

Burkitt (1975:43) argues that the primary aim of trade unions is to defend and improve both the wage rates and conditions of employment of their members. This is attempted through a range of strategies, from restricting entry to particular jobs to strike action. However, as Cohen (1987:35) notes, economic disputes by themselves have political repercussions of far

greater importance in terms of workplace and industry-wide power relationships than "non-existent struggles over control". In other words, in seeking to maximize the economic benefits accruing to their members, union actions represent a far more effective challenge to existing relations of power at the workplace than alleged struggles between management and labour over immediate issues of control over the process of production.

In contrast to Dunlop's (1950:45) assertion that trade unions are rational decision-makers, solely concerned with maximizing wages in a free-market situation of supply and demand, Burkitt (1975:45) argues that the effect of all wage struggles is to limit the arbitrary power of employers, whose freedom of action will be limited by new rules. Subsequent collective bargaining between unions and management creates a code of rights for industrial workers, even if conflict was initially about wages (ibid.:43). Burkitt concludes that, whatever the strategic objectives of unions, the ultimate effect they will have in terms of extracting concessions from management (reflected, for example, in standards of living) will be a direct function of union power (ibid.:47).

Burkitt (1975:53) suggests that when a trade union attempts to maximize both employment and incomes, the situation depicted below will prevail. Here, the union would demand a massive increase in wages to compensate for increases in unemployment and vice-versa.



A major shortcoming with these employment-based models in the South African context is that they do not take account of the possible effects of an absence of a social welfare system or any other satisfactory unemployment benefit scheme. In this case, should unemployment be high, as noted earlier, the average worker is faced with an ever-increasing number of dependents, placing further pressure to seek wage increases, even if this will exacerbate the unemployment situation.

There seems to be no relationship between unemployment and strikes prior to 1980. In the post-1980 period there is a statistically significant relationship between rises in unemployment and strike action. This situation corresponds with U1 on the above chart, although it should be noted that the wage rises of the 1980s started from a low base, and, in many sectors, still do not constitute a living wage. Thus, unions, as the representatives of workers, may continue to seek wage increases in periods of high unemployment. Interestingly, Martin (1981:110) argues that wages in highly unionized sectors will in fact show less sensitivity to fluctuations in the unemployment rate.

Kerr (1964:446) argues that trade unions will not always

successfully increase wages - certain types of trade unions under certain circumstances will actually depress them. This would be the case with certain types of company unions. On the one hand, they serve to rally workers to meet corporate objectives and fill an organizational vacuum. On the other, they may block more effective trade unions from organizing. Trade unions may be distinguished by their attitudes towards alliances with other groupings (ibid.:446). This is an important distinction in the South African context - few unions in the 1950-1973 period made use of the strike weapon, in comparison to the independent trade unions in the post-1973 period. Thus, it is not only union strength, but also the type of union which should be considered.

2.2.2 Other Measures of Union Effectiveness

Ross (quoted in Burkitt 1975:44) suggests that unions are primarily political institutions. Issues such as union prestige and maintaining one's position are of great importance (ibid.:44) - the decision to embark on collective action is not solely the product of a desire to maximize wages. While demands expressed often are economic, they are "filtered through" the political context (ibid.:43).

Schmidt and Stragus (Parsley 1980:3) argue that assessing union action purely in terms of shifts in wage levels may be based on notions of incomplete causation. For example, high wage levels are a feature of geographically-concentrated industries, which are also the easiest to organize (ibid.:3). Instead, the effects of unions may be more directly gauged in terms of direct

actions, such as strikes, rather than in terms of wage levels - the latter relationship may be somewhat obscured by a number of intervening variables. Thus, in assessing the British case, Cronin (1979:17) noted a direct relationship between increases in strike action and periodic upsurges in union organization.

Similarly, Hipkin (1986:19) asserts that attempts to introduce trade unions and collective bargaining have tended to focus on a purely economic explanation of trade union behaviour, instead of taking account of "the all-embracing process of wage determination", which may encompass wider political developments.

It can be further argued that conditions are neither static enough for a situation of supply and demand to coincide, nor does perfect rationality prevail (ibid.:19).

The South African situation is also further complicated by the varying political roles adopted by the unions themselves. Whilst the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) played an important role in the Congress Alliance⁴ in the 1950s, it had a weak shop floor basis, and, as will become apparent from subsequent chapters, its affiliates had a very limited capacity to engage in collective action at the workplace. Until the 1980s, most other groupings of unions tended to avoid political involvement, either owing to an inherent conservatism, or a fear of attracting state repression. In contrast, the independent unions of the 1980s assumed the role of what Webster (1987b:217) refers to as "social movement" unionism. In essence, this represented mobilization against government policies with the retention of a strong grass roots organization on the shopfloor. This was the product, on the one hand, of gradual reform of the

industrial relations system, and on the other, of the state's unwillingness to introduce meaningful political changes (ibid.:217). The situation was exacerbated by rising youth unemployment.

In response, the unions were forced to rethink the relationship between workplace and community struggles, being faced with the choice of retreating into a narrowly defined role within the factories, or taking up the concerns of their constituency and forging alliances with the national liberation movement (ibid.:217). Following the wave of state repression that took place in 1987-1988, the independent unions' internal political debates were subsumed by the need to build a broadly-based strategic alliance for change (Fine and Webster 1989:272). This new political role did not lead to a weakening of shopfloor organization, but rather a new consensus between political activists and those involved in workplace organization (ibid.:266). In other words, the independent unions continued to play an active role in factory level struggles, yet became also one of the leading opponents of the political status quo. In terms of industrial conflict, this led to the rise of stayaway action, in addition to the persistence of conventional strikes. This development contested the inherent pessimism of the Leninist tradition, which assumed that trade unions would ultimately veer towards conservatism, on account of their foundation in the status quo and tendency towards a lack of accountability (Adler, Maller & Webster 1992:310). The independent unions seemed capable of engaging in national level negotiations, yet backing up their demands with mass action at the grassroots level

(ibid.:310). Chapter 8 explores the long-term implications of this dual role for collective action at the workplace, and whether social movement unionism has indeed been superseded by new forms of trade unionism in the 1990s.

2.2.3 Union Strength and Strikes in South Africa

A regression analysis of the relationship between the growth of the union movement in the post-Wiehahn period⁵ and strike action is depicted in figure 14. This period, and indeed the period following the birth of the independent unions in the early 1970s represented, again, a major break from the past. Although there were important initiatives to unionize black workers in earlier decades, most notably under the SACTU umbrella, such unionization drives reached relatively few workers, compared to the mass unionism of the 1980s. As can be seen from table 8, a statistically highly significant relationship exists between union growth and strike action.

An analysis of the relationship between union strength and strike action is not possible in the pre-1980 period owing to incomplete union membership figures. In addition, not only membership totals, but also the differing types of unions - prior to the 1980s, only a minority of South African trade unions resorted to strike action - need to be considered. Whilst the (generally white and coloured) TUCSA unions in the 1950s and 1960s had a fairly large membership, they relied heavily on closed shop agreements with management and bargaining within the industrial council system. The same was the case with the whites-only South African Confederation of Labour (SACLA) unions.

Accurate indicators of shifts in membership of the predominantly black trade unions (those unions which most commonly used the strike weapon) are not available for the 1950s and 1960s. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) unions only reached limited numbers of workers. In 1956, for example, they had a membership of only 20 000 workers (Lodge 1983:191), the core of that federation being three sets of parallel unions⁶, the Food and Canning Workers (FCWU and AFCWU), the National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers, and the Textile Workers Industrial (TWIU and ATWIU) unions. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the modest rise in strikes in the late 1950s (see figure 1) was paralleled by the growth of SACTU, whose membership peaked at 55 000 in 1962 (see Lodge 1983:191). Strikes declined during the early 1960s, coterminous with the collapse of SACTU. However, while in the 1950s SACTU had the policy of supporting all strikes (see subsequent chapters), it had only very limited resources at its disposal, and was not able to offer strikers much in the way of material assistance.

2.2.4 Labour as a Different Commodity

Offe (1985:73) argues that workers may respond differently even if faced with the same basic circumstances - labour power is not like any other commodity (Offe 1985:173). It is difficult to reduce labour power to simply a series of equations, there being no "positivistic spirit of conformity"; instead there should be a more qualitative and descriptive approach in assessing the

effects of trade unions on wages and strikes (ibid.:174). Furthermore, workers are already in a disadvantaged position, there being relatively few employers to many workers, whilst trade unions have the difficulty of balancing the need for strong organization with the constricting effects any bureaucracy has on militant action from below. However, Offe does not discuss the reasons behind the dominant role played by wages as a trigger for industrial conflict.

Certainly, a trade union which rarely strikes does after a while lose the capacity to do so. For example, after a long period of inactivity, the white Mine Workers' Union (MWU) called a strike at the O'Okiep copper mine in 1979 (see Cooper 1979b:4-29). Workers were divided with little communication between leadership and rank-and-file, resulting in the strike collapsing. It is also the case that trade unions occasionally resort to strike action ostensibly for wages, but really to keep in training in case of a major confrontation (Martin 1981:144). Trade union leaders often face dissatisfaction from members if they perceive them coming too close to management, resulting in pressures to take a more militant stance (ibid.:144). However, all these factors do not detract from the importance of the wage issue.

Parsley (1980:29) asserts that factors specific to particular industries play a greater determining role than simple questions of union organization. He concludes that spillover effects and problems of interpretation preclude a simple numerical analysis "disentangling the complexity of the issue". It can be argued that changes in the nature of union

organization and union relationships with the state and employers necessitate further analysis (see chapter 3).

In the period leading up to the upsurge of strikes in the years 1972-4 (see fig. 1) blacks were largely unorganized. Whilst the role of the fledgling worker service organizations in assisting strikers during these years should not be underestimated, it is clear that such bodies were not in a position to provide the level of sustained support a conventional union could offer. Nor were the bureaus in any position to offer the strikers financial assistance. Any help had to be low key, for fear of attracting the attention of the authorities.

3.0 Potential Contingent Variables Identified in Established Models of Strike Analysis

3.1 Strikes and Political Factors

3.1.1 Representivity and Strikes

Originally, Dunlop (quoted in Douwes Dekker 1982:3) argued that key political variables of strike causality revolved around the size, strength (in terms of members of parliament) and orientation of the government⁷. Workers are more reluctant to strike under a socialist government for fear of embarrassing it (ibid.:4). Meanwhile, a large government is bound to incorporate many pressure groups, resulting in few being alienated by its actions (ibid.:4). However, it can be argued that as it stands, Dunlop's thesis is of little value in the South African situation⁸. The National Party's domination of parliament and

its commitment to preserving white rule did not change overtly in the 1950-1988 period. It never had to resort to coalition government after absorbing the tiny Afrikaner Party, whilst it remained implacably opposed to any programme of comprehensive social welfare measures to benefit the black majority throughout the period under review⁹.

Hibbs (1978:165) argues that the political process essentially concerns the allocation of resources and thus political bargaining can potentially replace industrial bargaining over resource allocation. This is most likely to take place under socialist governments and least likely under right-wing governments (ibid.:165).

In other words, repression may encourage strike action. This could well explain the stayaways of the late 1950s following the crushing of the defiance campaign in the early years of that decade, and the rise of strikes in South Africa in periods such as 1986-7, when state repression arguably resulted in suppressed political conflict re-manifesting itself at the workplace, in the form of the mass strikes of 1987. However, this viewpoint is based on the assumption that conflict is transferable. This issue will be more fully explored in subsequent sections.

Figure 1 depicts strike volume and totals, against which some comparisons may be drawn. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act does not seem to have had any direct impact on the nature of strikes. Whilst this legislation seriously disabled several key black trade unions, it should be noted that these unions were extremely weak at the time and offered only very limited support to strikers. Both strike totals and volume fell sharply in 1988,

which could have been the result of unprecedented levels of state repression, as well as the coercive 1987 Labour Relations Act Amendments and the fact that several trade unions, most notably the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), had severely over-extended themselves during the 1987 strikes.

3.1.2 Political Protest and Strikes

Major outbreaks of political protest seem to have had a very mixed effect on strike action. The Sharpeville "unrest" did not result in increased numbers of strikes, although there is little doubt that the post-Sharpeville wave of repression severely weakened the black trade unions. However, as noted earlier, these unions were in a position to offer only very limited support and encouragement to strikers during these years. The Soweto uprising took place in a year of unusually low strike totals and volume.

Whilst it can be argued that much of the latent protest manifest in the workplace in 1973-4 was channelled into the political arena in 1976, this cannot explain the decline in strikes in 1975. The massive upsurge in strike action in the 1982-7 period was coterminous with rising social protest. Detailed information on officially-denoted "unrest incidents" is available from April 1985 to March 1987 (Star 6/11/1987), a period during which most of the 1980s resistance was concentrated. The relationship between "unrest incidents" and strike action over this period is not statistically significant (see table 9).

Shorter and Tilly (1974:343) argue that the political

objectives of striking usually revolve around forcing the government's hand and letting the public know the vigour of workers demands. Thus collective action at the workplace can be a means of placing pressure on the political centre. However, in the South African context, action of this type rarely fits in with the official definition of a strike, where the demand is actually stated by workers at factory level. Action of this nature more often fits into the category of "stayaways", such as those that took place in the late 1950s, in 1976 and throughout the mid and late 1980s. The nature and incidence of this distinct form of collective action, and its relationship to more conventional instances of strike action, will be more fully explored in Chapter 6.

3.2 Institutional Dimensions

Other possible factors which could affect the incidence of strikes include the nature of plant and industry-level bargaining structures, ranging from Liaison and Works Committees to Industrial Councils (Douwes Dekker 1982:20), as well as the activities of the Wage Board in the pre-Wiehahn era. Ross and Hartman (Hibbs 1976:651) assert that collective bargaining structures have the effect of reducing the incidence of industrial conflict. However, in the South African case, the situation seems far more complex. Some bargaining structures, such as the Liaison Committees of the 1970s, were widely discredited and vested with very little real power (see Section 3). Meanwhile, the Works Committees (operative at the same time) were used by a number of independent trade unions (most notably

the General Workers Union) as a means of achieving recognition, and not, as was the intention behind their creation, as a vehicle for reducing conflict. Perhaps as a result, very few of these committees were brought into being. Meanwhile, as can be seen from figure 11, Wage Board activity was irregular and very limited, thus having only a small impact on strike totals.

Blacks were excluded from participation in the Industrial Council system until the 1979 Wiehahn reforms, which paved the way for the registration of black trade unions. However, during the 1980s, the incidence of strikes dramatically increased - the extension of the industrial council system and the introduction of the Industrial Court, following the 1979 Wiehahn recommendations did not seem to constrain workers from striking (see figure 1). As Webster (1987b:217) notes, these reforms failed in their objective of politically incorporating the independent trade unions.

A related issue is that of factory level bargaining. Knowles (1952:160) has suggested that strikes tend to occur on a seasonal basis¹⁰. Figure 12 depicts strikes on a monthly basis for the years 1960-1984, when full information on these trends was available (months are labelled 1-12). July is a period when many South African firms finalise their wage negotiations, with organized labour exerting its strength, revealing something of the relationship between bargaining and industrial conflict. This is particularly likely to be the case in those situations where a union is fighting for recognition by a hostile management, resulting in a need to make use of "industrial muscle" (Salamon 1988:342).

3.3 Technology and the Environment

3.3.1 Community, Technology and Strikes

There have been three major perspectives on strike causality that accord a primary place to the immediate social and/or technological environments, all of which have a qualitative basis. These include Kerr and Siegel's (Kerr 1964) landmark study linking strikes to community structures, Blauner (1966) on alienation at the workplace and Elton Mayo (Hyman 1981) on communication. As noted earlier, Kerr and Siegal argue that certain types of industry exhibit a high incidence of industrial conflict (Kerr 1964:193). This is a reflection of the type of community from which the workforce is drawn. Workers from small, closed communities tend to exhibit unusually high levels of combativeness and militancy (ibid.:193). These communities would tend to have a fairly cohesive structure, making it easier to organize workers on a collective basis (Eldridge 1968:37).

Like Kerr and Siegal, Blauner (1966:176-8) also argues that certain industries will tend to be particularly strike-prone. However, he ascribes this to the work situation - jobs that are unpleasant to perform (be it because they are dirty or dangerous) will result in a more combative workforce (McCord 1980:117). The technologies of production can result in unusually high levels of alienation with consequently high levels of industrial conflict (Blauner 1966:176-8).

A third perspective, developed by Elton Mayo (Hyman 1981:58-59), argues that poor communication is a major trigger of workplace unrest. By keeping channels of communication open,

through "supportive leadership" and by encouraging the development of a cohesive workplace community, it is possible to reduce the incidence of such conflict.

3.3.2 The South African Experience

In the South African case, contrary to Kerr and Siegel's hypothesis, most strikes have taken place within the major urban centres and, more specifically, Durban and the PWV region. During the 1950s, most of the recorded major strikes took place in the main centres - for example, the Amato strike in Benoni, the Langeberg strike in Port Elizabeth, the bus strikes in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg, the Johannesburg Flour Millers' Strike, and the Durban dockworkers' strike. Similarly, the mass stayaways of the late 1950s were also largely confined to the major urban centres. Whilst several strikes were recorded in more rural areas, such as Wellington and Hammersdale, these tended to be relatively close to major urban centres.

The same is true for the 1960s, where the major strikes taking place included the 1960 Durban and Port Elizabeth Leatherworkers' strikes, the Port Elizabeth bus strike, the Durban hospital workers' strike and the Lion match strike, also in Durban. During the 1970s, unprecedented numbers of strikes took place, including the 1973 Durban and 1974 East London strike waves.

Similarly, strikes in the 1980s also were concentrated in the main centres - including the 1981 East Rand strike wave, the 1980 motor industry strikes and the 1987 mass strikes. It seems to be the case that urban workers are the most willing to resort

to strike action in South Africa. However, the Kerr and Siegal thesis may have an element of truth if the "small isolated communities" are taken as compounds or hostels. In the 1980s unusually large numbers of workers living in compounds and hostels struck - including municipal workers and miners. This point will be further evaluated in subsequent chapters.

There is also little evidence to support the Blauner thesis in the South African case. There have been several major miners' strikes, particularly in the 1980s. However, the bulk of strikes have been confined to the manufacturing sector. Unusually high numbers of textile industry strikes took place in the 1970s, but these were largely confined to the Frame Group of companies, which had, at the time, a reputation for poor industrial relations practices (IIE 1974a:18). The motor and metal industries seemed particularly strike-prone in the 1980s, but they only formed a small component of total strikes taking place. In the 1950s and 1960s very few strikes involving black workers took place in either of these industries.

4.0 Strikes and Hidden Forms of Industrial Protest

As noted in the introduction, strikes constitute one of a range of possible forms of overt collective action at the workplace, others including stayaways. However, it should be recognized that there are also less visible forms of collective action, which, by their very nature, are difficult to measure, although they may have similar or related causes to overt instances of strike action. Resistance of this type is rarely considered in

the literature on worker organization and resistance in the developing world, yet "forms an everyday part of the consciousness and action by the African proletariat" (Cohen 1994:135). Shorter and Tilly (1974:337) argue that when people are denied adequate channels for voicing their grievances, feelings of frustration and aggression rise. However, it should not be assumed that "a smooth and easy transition exists between aggression and the decision to strike" (ibid.:337).

Whilst, as Shorter and Tilly (ibid.:338) note, theories that link individual feelings of frustration with group behaviour are incomplete, it is evident that there are a number of different ways in which this frustration may be expressed. Responses could include, inter alia, a high propensity to desert and high labour turnovers (especially when proletarianization is enforced); sabotage (in reaction to management control); accidents or sickness (psychological adjustment); theft (differential reward or recovery of surplus value); and participation in political protests (Cohen 1994:138-149).

Rex (1981:43) defines such actions as "compulsive alienation", a gradual violation of established norms. Compulsive alienation represents the product of a situation where the objective causes of social conflict exist, yet where one side is reluctant to engage in collective action for fear of the consequences (ibid.:14). Instead, more passive forms of resistance are employed, forms which seek to deny the normative basis of the opposition's position and make it clear that only the minimum degree of compliance is being exacted. It is ultimately relatively costly for the dominant party to maintain

control in such a situation. Deleuze and Guattari (1983:11) refer to such resistance as "rhizomatic". Using the metaphor of a root system, it is argued that such resistance is concealed, yet can assume a variety of forms, branching off in a range of directions (ibid.:11). Unarticulated or unorganized resistance is extremely difficult to repress, yet reveals much about the functioning of the system of control (Van Onselen quoted in Cohen 1994:137). Deleuze and Guattari (1983:53) note that such forms of collective and individual action cannot readily be understood through conventional sociological tools of analysis. As such they fall outside the focus of this thesis, directed as it is at the more visible form of protest, strike action. However, some tentative deductions are made as to the circumstances in which hidden industrial conflict, as adverse to strike action, is likely to take place.

5.0

Conclusion

There is thus little doubt that whilst some of the explanatory models for strike causality are clearly inappropriate in the South African context, several of them do identify causal and contingent variables which may affect the incidence of industrial conflict. It seems evident that the most important potential causal variables include wage aspirations, inflation, unemployment and trade union factors. An example of a contingent variable might be industrial relations legislation¹¹. However, the relationships among, and the complementary roles of, these potential causal variables remain unclear, necessitating further

empirical investigation. Whilst there appear to be some important trends and patterns, it is also evident that several potential causal variables are marked by discontinuities, and should be seen in a broader historical context (Skocpol 1984b:379). For example, the role played by the trade union movement was radically different in 1990 from what it was in 1950¹². It is recognized that strikes constitute only one of a range of possible forms of industrial protest. Any causal analysis should thus allow for the possibility that, in certain circumstances, discontent at the workplace could have a less visible outcome than strike action. In the following chapter, theories of the micro-dynamics of strikes are re-evaluated, and the possibility of developing an integrated approach, based on both established models and recent advances in broader economic and social theory, is explored.

Endnotes

1. South Africa's apartheid legacy has made the nomenclature of different racial groupings an extremely contentious business. Generally, it is accepted that the term "black" refers to coloureds, Indians and Africans. However, in official statistics, "black" is used to refer to Africans, and in the interests of clarity, and to facilitate further comparative analysis, this nomenclature has been retained when referring to official and independent statistical sources (e.g. "black real wages").

2. However, it should be noted that r-squared represents a measure of linear relationship. In the case of a curvilinear relationship (see figure 4), these percentages may somewhat understate the strength of the relationship.

3. *ibid.*

4. That is the broad alliance of organizations centred around the African National Congress (ANC).

5. After the Wiehahn reforms, black trade unions could, and increasingly did, register for participation in the statutory collective bargaining structures.

6. Parallel unionism refers to the racial division of an existing union, or the establishment of a separate parallel affiliate dedicated to organizing a single racial grouping, as a result of segregationist labour legislation, most notably the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act (Lewis 1984:147).

7. A variation of this model is provided by Hibbs (1976:1033), who argues that political factors affecting the incidence of strike action include, on the one hand, the role of conventional social democratic parties in discouraging strike action and the strength of communist parties in mobilizing labour discontent. The effect of social democratic parties on strike volume depend on their policies, which may vary greatly (Hibbs 1978:165). For example, redistributive policies may increase the tax burden and thus greatly increase the incidence of strikes. Hibbs concludes that the leadership of social democratic parties is largely incapable of deterring strikes, while communist parties can become important agents for mobilizing socio-political discontent.

This argument has little relevance in the South African case. Throughout the 1950-90 period, the South African Communist Party (the SACP, formerly the CPSA) played only a very limited role, primarily indirectly through black trade unions in the 1950s, whilst at no stage was there a black socialist party with an interest in curbing strike action. Since the unbanning of the SACP in early 1990, that party has pursued the interests of an inclusivist, accommodationist political settlement, albeit with the long-term stated objective of socialism.

8. There seems to be no direct linkage between changes in Prime Ministership/Presidency and strike totals. Certainly, fewer strikes took place in the Malan than the Strydom years. However, the Vorster era saw a long period where relatively few strikes took place (the 1960s) and two unprecedented strike waves (Durban in 1973 and East London in 1974). While the Botha era was characterized by unusually high numbers of strikes, other factors, such as the rise of the independent trade unions (which began in the Vorster era), as well as rising aspirations, deserve consideration. The accession of De Klerk (and a more open political environment) saw a rise of strikes in 1989, but the increase did not reach the peak of the Botha years. There are some connections between repression and strike action. Whilst there are complex factors underlying the drop in strikes in 1988, state repression certainly contributed to this. Likewise the more open political environment and the lifting of the State of Emergency could well have contributed to the resurgence in strike action in 1990. However, the general relationship was a complex one, necessitating further in-depth analysis.

There seems no consistent relationship between election periods (often characterized by a more conservative stance on the part of the government) and strike action. While the 1958 election, which was marked by the "Nats Must Go" campaign and a

largely unsuccessful stayaway, saw a drop in the incidence of strikes, the extremely repressive environment surrounding the 1987 election coincided with unprecedented numbers of strikes (see figure 1). Similarly, the incidence of strike action dropped during 1953, but not in 1966, both election years.

9. As noted earlier, Douwes Dekker (1982:3) argues that the following political variables deserve consideration in the South African case: the strength of the ruling party in terms of MPs; the relevant Prime Minister; whether or not an election is due to take place; and the cabinet size. However, in practice the cabinet size is unlikely to have much relevance, owing to its only representing sectional interests, whilst a whites-only election would only result in greater repression (ibid.:20). Generally speaking, as the political model was conceived in terms of the European political reality, it is unlikely to have much relevance in the South African situation.

10. Knowles (1952:166) asserts that strikes are unlikely to occur during holiday periods. Indeed, few strikes occur during the Christmas period when many firms are closed.

11. Additionally, it is possible that political mobilization and protest, as well as the spatial dimension, and the amount of information opposing sides possess as to each others' intentions could be potential shaping variables, but this cannot be corroborated without further recourse to empirical and theoretical material, a corroboration which is undertaken in subsequent chapters.

12. The identification of distinct periods and the exact nature of discontinuities between them are more fully explored in subsequent chapters, with detailed conclusions being reached in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 2

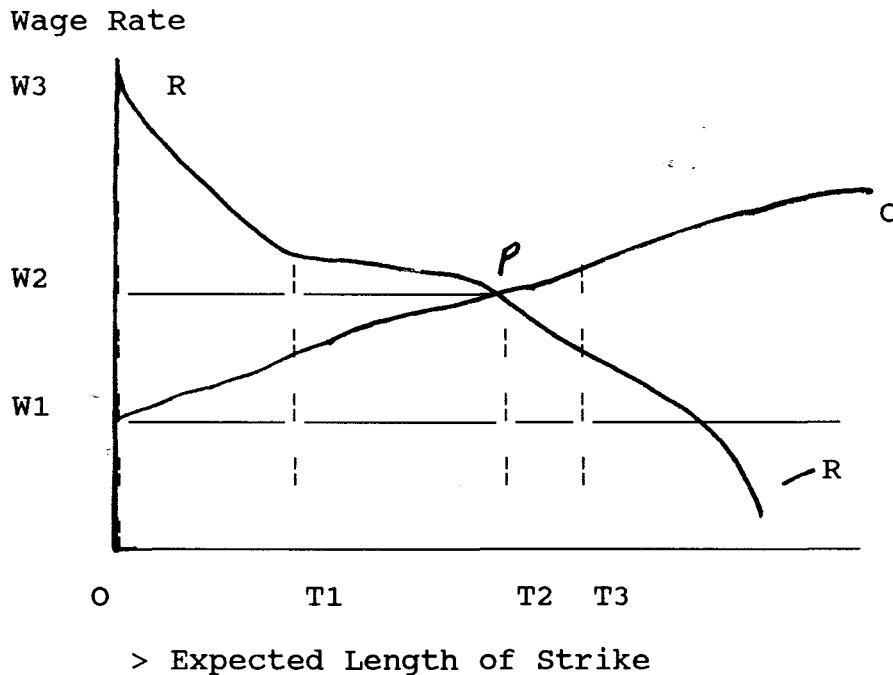
UNDERSTANDING THE MICRO-DYNAMICS OF STRIKES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT AND BEYOND: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

This chapter consists of an evaluation of existing theories dealing specifically with the micro-dynamics of strikes. This is followed by an evaluation of additional factors, not covered by existing theories of strikes, which could both cause and/or condition the nature of this form of industrial conflict. These factors, together with those relevant variables identified by existing theories of strike action, will serve as a basis for the construction of an integrated theoretical understanding, to be re-evaluated and developed in the subsequent substantive chapters.

1.0 The Micro-Dynamics of Strikes

1.1 Understanding the Specific Dynamics of Strikes

A number of models have been constructed to explain the internal circumstances under which strike action takes place, most focusing on the trial of strength dispute (Burkitt 1975:87). Of great influence has been the Hicks (1932:141) model, which suggests that employers are faced with a choice - either resort to protracted struggle, with an attendant loss of income, or grant wage concessions. It is possible to construct a schedule along to enable one to plot how much an employer will be prepared to pay in wage increases to prevent a stoppage, with a point being reached where the cost of stoppage is equal to the cost of wages (ibid.:142). The situation is depicted below.



CC is the employers' concession curve and RR the union resistance curve. OW_1 is what the employer would pay in the absence of trade union pressure. OW_2 is the highest wage the employer is prepared to pay. While the union may settle for less, it has the potential to improve the situation of its members (Burkitt 1975:87). Union concessions are measured as the gap between its resistance curve and OW_3 (desired wage rate). Essentially, this model is based on the assumption that the length of a strike is the result of a rational costs benefits analysis on behalf of both parties. The strike will last as long as one party believes the costs of the strike are less than the benefits of achieving the desired wage level.

A serious limitation of this type of theorem is that the situation tends to change during a strike. Changes in the attitudes of employers and labour may result in a lengthening or shortening of the strike to a stage when one set of rational

criteria may not necessarily prevail. Violence or the intervention of the authorities may harden attitudes, whilst negotiation or mediation may result in a greater willingness to compromise. Perhaps Hicks's model is most valid as a "snapshot", as a vivid depiction of a situation at a given point of time, but subject to dynamic adjustment. For example, issues such as wage demands and actions by individuals during the course of the strike may interact to shape its nature and ultimate outcome, in the context of a particular time and geographical location ("space") (see Giddens 1984:25). The possible effects of such factors will be explored in subsequent sections.

Other important considerations include the potential of the firm to survive the loss of income stemming from a wage increase, which in turn is partially affected by the ability of the firm to pass on any increases to the consumer (Reder 1980:76). This in turn is affected by the relationship between the firm's costs (and prices) and those of its rival firms (ibid.:76). Trade unions enter the picture by calling for government intervention and/or by attempting to organize through the whole industry, in order that all firms face the same wage pressures (ibid.:77). Conversely, management will try to reduce wages in situations of high unemployment and when the trade union is at its weakest (ibid.:78).

Clearly, there is some merit in Reder's argument, the major failing stemming from the need to address local variations. Reder himself suggests that in situations of high employment it may not be irrational for a union to force a firm to close (ibid.:80). However, other factors such as the potential for the

state to intervene are also of importance in such disputes.

Barbach (quoted in Reynolds 1987:144) argues that all labour disputes are about price and power. Reynolds (1987:145) argues that even the threat of strike action proves debilitating in terms of investment lost. This seems to be something of a generalization and is difficult to prove in most circumstances - much vaunted cutbacks due to perceived trade union threats are often attributable to a "basket of factors". Further limitations of Hicks's model include the fact that it makes certain assumptions as to the psychology of the "working man" (Kennan 1986:1101) and the prevalence of rationality.

1.2 Rethinking the Micro-Dynamics of Strikes

Clausewitz, the greatest philosopher of war, has made a number of important observations which are equally applicable to the study of industrial conflict. He suggests that there is great uncertainty in any conflict, which he refers to as the "fog of war" (Clausewitz 1968:188). This uncertainty applies both to one's opponent's position and one's own. "All action must be planned in a mere twilight, which in addition not infrequently - like the effect of fog - gives things exaggerated dimensions and an unnatural appearance" (ibid.:189). He points out that a conflict situation is a dynamic and ever-changing one (ibid.:188). Actions will spark reactions from one's opponent, which may not always be predictable.

Clausewitz refers to this state as a "living reaction" (ibid.:188). He further suggests that the presence of friction

in conflict further confuses issues - what can go wrong invariably does go wrong (ibid.:168). A further issue which may be added is the question of rational choice prevailing in a situation of industrial conflict. This is not the place to explore the philosophical debate over the question of rational choice; but suffice it to say that rational abstract decision-making may be flawed in that it fails to take full cognizance of the localized dynamics of a particular set of social circumstances. After a while the decision to stay on strike or return to work may be clouded by the actual experience of the strike to date.

It can be argued that Hicks's model indeed provides a graphic description of industrial conflict, but only at a particular point in time. One day (or even second) later the situation may have changed, and with it the graphical schedule depicting the situation as it stands - that all things staying constant, the dispute will last for a particular period and exhibit certain characteristics.

In real life, the situation will be a dynamic one, and thus (as noted earlier) the strike's outcome will not only be shaped by demands, but by the internal dynamics and experiences during the strike (the "living reaction" Clausewitz refers to), and by time and space (when and where the strike took place). In other words at a particular point of time the balance of power will exhibit certain characteristics, but shortly thereafter this will change, either due to material conditions or perceptions based on uncertainty.

2.0 Towards a New Theoretical Understanding of South African Strikes

2.1 The Complexity of Strike Action

Most versions of the quantitative model of strike causality (i.e. models primarily based on quantitative data and on certain liberal economic assumptions with regard to consistent rationality and the self-regulating nature of markets, which may be extended to non-economic variables [Milogram & Roberts 1990:58]) deal either with what causes strikes or with the internal dynamics and duration of strikes. As noted earlier, it can be argued that the two may not be necessarily distinct. In other words, the cause of a strike may be inherently bound up with its course. In particular, subjective interpretations of the previous experiences of workers of collective action before the strike started, and experiences during the strike, frame both combativeness and the ultimate duration of the dispute.

George Simmel was one of the first social theorists to articulate a dialectical understanding of the relationship between broader social trends and localized and individual struggles for autonomy (Frisby 1989:38). In other words, Simmel asserts that there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between broader socio-economic forces and subjective understandings and interpretations.

This conception can readily be applied to developing a broader understanding of strikes, although it can be argued that the relationship need not necessarily be dialectical, and that subjective and objective forces combined might trigger strike

action. A certain level of inflation may, for example, place pressure on workers to resort to strike action, but the ultimate decision to strike and the duration thereof may be determined by the more subjective factors, such as the previous experiences of the parties to the dispute.

Indeed, the distinction between subjective and objective factors may not always be clear-cut, especially when factors such as the economic effects of informal networks of support are considered. Not always identical to the subjective/objective distinction, is the relationship between broader trends and local circumstances. However, it can be argued that both may contribute to strike action, whilst specific sets of regional and local circumstances may also contribute to determining the nature and incidence of this form of industrial conflict.

Frisby (1989:38) notes that rapid socio-political change may mean that this distinction between broader trends and local conditions is no longer clear-cut, but has become blurred. For example, local conflicts can assume national significance. A good example of this would be the 1973 Durban strikes. A response to a very particular localized set of circumstances (including developments within the Kwazulu homeland and the role of the University of Natal SRC's Wages Commission in organizing workers), it provided much of the impetus for the emergence and rapid expansion of the independent trade unions on a national level.

This concept has been further developed by Fredric Jameson. Jameson (1991:416) asserts that relationships at the workplace do not automatically form part of a total system. Instead, they

can incorporate a variety of localized tendencies and counter-forces. What takes place at an individual or local level may indeed occupy an ever-changing position with regard to the wider social totality (Jameson 1991: 416). In other words, the relationship between local social happenings, including industrial conflict, should not be seen as automatically linked with broader social trends. Industrial conflict may occur despite an unfavourable broader socio-political environment, whilst it may not only be determined by factors such as wages, but also affect them.

2.2 Key Determinants of Strikes

It is therefore necessary to take account of two issues when analyzing South African strikes - what causes strikes, and how this relates to their internal dynamics. The different models of strike causality identify the following variables as of importance:

1. Economic model
 - a. Real wages.
 - b. Inflation.
 - c. Expectations of a wage increase.
 - d. Unemployment.
2. Political model
 - a. Social democratic party policy.
 - b. Communist party strength.
 - c. Head of government.
 - d. Election/Non-election period.
 - e. Cabinet size.

- f. Political repercussions of wage demands.
- 3. Socio-environmental model
 - a. Community/region.
 - b. Technology.
 - c. Communication.
- 4. Industrial relations model
 - a. Size of trade union movement.
 - b. Type of Union.
 - c. Collective bargaining structures.
 - d. Labour legislation.

In view of the above, it seems evident that the following potential causal variables have a statistically significant relationship to the incidence of strikes in South Africa: deprivation/expectations of a wage increase; union size; unemployment (but only in the 1980s, and contrary to the view that unemployment discourages striking); and inflation. It should be noted that all these variables have undergone dramatic changes during the period under review. In other words, the situation is one not only of trends, but also discontinuities.

Expectations, unemployment, union size and inflation are all variables identified in established models of strike causality, although it is difficult to quantify the first-mentioned, other than through an assessment of the (direct or lagged) relationship between increased real wages and increased strikes.

Political "unrest" incidents, as noted earlier, are, in the South African context, a more appropriate measure of the possible effects of political developments on strikes than changes in the

composition of coalition governments, head of government and relative strengths of socialist and/or communist parties. Such a measure is, however, only useful where such resistance was over a relatively long time period such as the 1980s, making regression analysis possible. There seems no direct relationship between political "unrest" and the incidence of strike action, although it is possible that an indirect relationship could exist (see chapter 6).

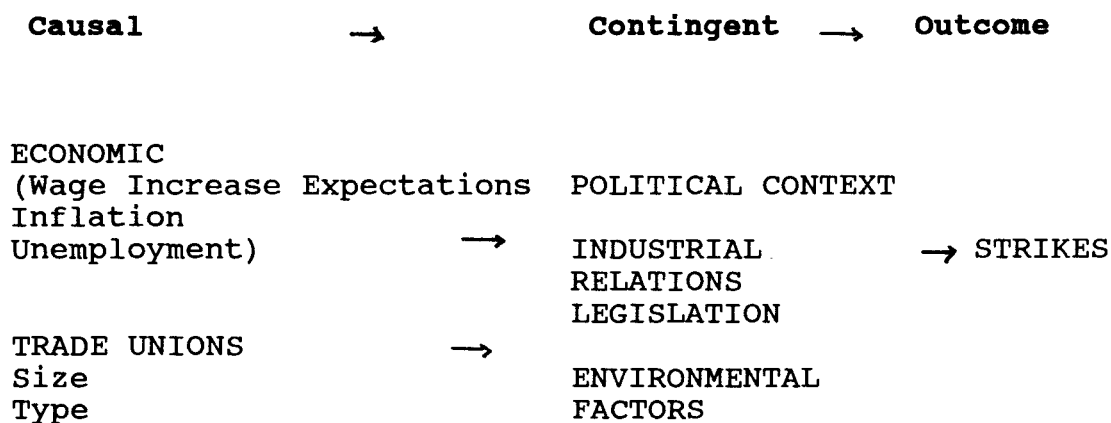
Unemployment is an ambiguous measure, apparently not only constraining, but in the 1980s seemingly encouraging strike action - not the direct deterrent envisaged in the original model. There are limitations in the use of inflation as a measure in that the very poor may spend more on basic foodstuffs, which were subject to disproportionate increases in the 1970s and 1980s (see chapter 2), although there is, as noted above, a statistically significant relationship between the official Consumer Price Index and strikes. Less quantifiable variables include the policies of individual unions towards strikes, spontaneity, the effects of repression and the uneven distribution of those effects, as well as, possibly, regional variations.

Thus, whilst aspects of established quantitative models of strike causality are indeed useful in understanding strikes, individual models do not, without substantive modification, provide a full means of understanding and explaining strikes. Instead, it is argued that any framework for understanding strike causality should be multi-faceted, which may entail the inclusion of variables such as culture, which would include the previous

experiences of strikes and the perceptions of workers thereof, as well as extended informal relationships and networks of support. Secondly, it seems evident that there are few long-term trends, but more often discontinuities, such as before and after 1973, when the independent unions emerged. Discontinuities would reflect changes in the broader social environment, resulting in the possibility of greater risk-taking in the form of collective action, as well as, again, the ongoing influence of past events. Again, this does not rule out the theorizing process, but rather suggests the need for a more inclusive framework for analysis, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative components. Indeed, assessing the nature of discontinuities may reveal much about existing relationships within the workplace and wider society.

Thirdly, it can be argued that any such broader theoretical understanding should take cognizance of the relationship between the causes and the internal dynamics of strikes, taking account of regional variations. While there seems evidence of heightened aspirations during 1973, this cannot account for the fact that most strikes were concentrated in Durban. Furthermore, it should be noted that not only strike totals but also strike volume increased dramatically in the 1980s - the size and length of disputes are ultimately important indices. These variables can only be understood through recourse to individual instances of strike action, and through assessing the relationship between these disputes (including when and where they took place and the costs and benefits incurred by both parties) and broader trends, between the local and the general.

The variables identified as possibly affecting strike action are summarized in the following diagram. However, it should be noted that this represents only a broad schema, to be further corroborated and developed in subsequent sections, in order that the more detailed hypothesis contained in Chapter 1 may be proved or disproved.



The exact impact of these causal and contingent variables on strikes, and the relationship between them, will be more fully explored in subsequent chapters in the light of further empirical evidence, as will the relationship between the causes and the internal dynamics of strikes (see Sayer 1992:89).

2.3 Strikes in the South African Context

Baudrillard (1990:116) asserts that the nature of strike action in the West has changed. Strikes no longer represent "life and death struggles", but rather are based on the assumption of an inherent flexibility on the behalf of both parties. Within the laissez-faire perspective, parties seek to maximise their economic gain, without necessarily wishing to challenge existing

power relations in society. It is on the assumption of a underlying rational, economically orientated cost-benefits analysis by both parties to the dispute, that most models of strike causality are based. However, it can be argued that this assumption may not always be made in the developing world.

In other words, strikes are often seen as a geographically specific and confined struggle between workers and management, over a single set of issues, that will be resolved without the very existence and status of either being challenged. However, in the South African context, many strikes have resulted in the mass dismissal of workers, often with the assistance of the authorities, or, more recently, protracted and bloody "trials of strength". Good examples of the former would include the Amato textiles strike of the late 1950s, and of the latter the 1987 Miners' strike (see chapter 7). Quantitative models of strike action also tend to discount the possibilities of wage disputes where one party is in a sufficiently powerful position (possibly owing to a reliance on the full coercive powers of the state) to be totally inflexible, even if the enormous costs of a protracted dispute may be entailed (e.g. the 1980 Johannesburg Municipal Strike). Furthermore, the conceptions of individual parties to an industrial dispute of their own strength may prove illusionary. Workers or management may well overestimate their own strength and underestimate that of their opponents.

An example of the former would be the above-mentioned Amato textiles strike of the late 1950s, where, after a series of easy victories, workers totally underestimated the relative strength and resolve of management and the firm's financial backers. In

addition, as with any conflict, a certain "fog and friction" will always be present (see Clausewitz 1968: 188-189). There is always some degree of uncertainty as to the intentions of the opposing side, and differing interpretations of the outcome of previous disputes and of the build-up and course of an ongoing one. Even the demands expressed by strikers may not always be fixed and specific, but may at times be somewhat vague and "floating" (see chapter 7).

Whilst this makes the task of understanding strikes significantly more difficult, this need not, as noted earlier, necessitate a rejection of theory, or even model, building. Rather, this study attempts to assess strikes as the product of both specific sets of social circumstances on a local and regional level, and of more general economic and political trends. To understand the full complexity of this relationship, it is necessary to assess the nature of broad trends in strike action and possible causal factors such as real wages, and the specific causes and internal dynamics of key selected strikes.

3.0

Conclusion

There is, at this stage of this study, insufficient evidence to construct such a broadly-based, socio-economic model for understanding strikes. Much of the evidence is fragmented, with limitations in the reliability of key indices as well as insufficient detail, particularly in certain time periods. ~~The~~ lacunae include black wage levels in the late 1980s, the strength of active trade unions prior to 1970, the indicators of strike

activity, and different source material on unemployment before and after 1980. In particular, this makes multiple regression analysis of the more quantifiable variables not possible, due to the relatively small number of observations for (i.e. short duration of) periods where comprehensive data on all relevant indices is available. However, a number of causal factors which, in the broadest sense, seem to have some relevance to the South African context, may be identified. These factors may be broadly classed as variously economic (i.e. wage expectations and inflation), union-related, legal-political and cultural.

The additional substantiative and illustrative evidence will be provided in subsequent sections through recourse to trade union archival material and other primary and secondary qualitative data on both general trends and individual instances of strike action. It is hoped that recourse to these sources will provide the necessary corroboration and additional detail for the process of theory building.

SECTION 2: THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF STRIKES

CHAPTER 3

THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF SOUTH AFRICAN STRIKES 1950-1969.

The 1950s saw a considerable widening in the racial wage gap and, through most of that decade, a considerable worsening in the material conditions of Africans. In contrast the 1980s saw general increases in both African real wages and strike action. The objective of this, and the subsequent chapter, is to provide a more detailed exploration of the relationship between economic factors such as wages and inflation, and strike action, and to partially construct an alternative theoretical explanation encompassing this relationship.

As noted in the previous two chapters, there seems to be a relationship between certain economic variables and strike action. For example, wage rises (and hence increased aspirations) do seem to encourage collective action at the workplace, albeit that the former seems marked by discontinuities. However, it is possible that the relationship could be causally spurious. In other words, that a third factor directly affects both wage levels and the incidence of strike action, without wages and strikes being at all causally related. It is thus necessary to identify the principal causes of wage increases during the period under review in order to assess whether these factors could also directly affect the propensity to resort to strike action. Alternatively, it is possible that the relationship is wholly co-incidental, making a more detailed analysis of those specific incidents where major wage rises predated strike action imperative.

Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence at this stage to ascertain whether strikes, in turn, affect wage levels. In other words, more detail is required on the exact nature of

causality, and whether causal relationships can, perhaps, be two-way. In addition, there are certain limitations in official indices both in terms of accuracy and a lack of detail, especially with regard to regional variations.

This chapter deals primarily with the relationship between key economic variables and strikes over the years 1950-1969, a period characterized by generally low black real wages and little strike activity, although some attention is also accorded to the nature of general trends and discontinuities.

1.0 General Trends and the Limits of Official Indices

In the light of the evidence adduced in the previous chapter, it seems that four main economic factors can affect the propensity to strike. These include inflation, altered expectations as a result of wage increases, and, in the case of the 1980s, unemployment.

As noted earlier, in assessing changes in wage levels, as with any other potential causal variable, there is evidence of not so much of continuous trends as of discontinuities. These discontinuities concern changing patterns not only in strike action, but also in statistical source material. As with other official statistics, the method of calculating black real wages has changed several times - such as in 1965 and 1980. Furthermore, it should be noted that several homelands gained independence in the 1970s and early 1980s and were then excised from official statistics. Wages in these territories are generally lower than those nationally.

There are similar problems in official statistics of strikes, with considerably more information being available in the post-1980 period. However, some general trends are clear. For example, most of the 1950s were marked by both stagnant wages and little strike action. This, and the subsequent, chapter reevaluates and substantiates the analysis of this relationship contained in chapters one and two through recourse to independent quantitative and qualitative source material.

A related question concerns the definitions of poverty and minimum effective and subsistence levels, which are important in gauging the exact nature of material conditions. This is affected by factors ranging from average family size to where people purchase their foodstuffs, rendering such indicators of dubious utility (see Rand Daily Mail 15/7/1972). In the 1980s union demands shifted to questions of living wages, transcending such measures (FOSATU 1981b:n.p.). Even in earlier years, inexact and often arbitrary definitions of poverty can provide only limited insights into the relationship between material conditions and industrial conflict. This situation was exacerbated by "the myth of the compounds", the notion that compound-dwellers had no dependents and could thus survive on extremely low wages (Thorne n.d.:n.p.). Nonetheless, indicators of poverty are of some use in assessing regional variations and the effects of inflation of those in the lowest income brackets.

It is indeed possible to gain a general perspective from distinct periods, particularly from the 1980s, where more detailed and seemingly more accurate information is available.

Furthermore, as is clear from previous sections, some overall

impressions are possible - whilst little information was available in the 1950s, and the means of arriving at total figures vary considerably, there is little doubt that, owing to a combination of factors, considerably fewer strikes took place during that decade. The differences may not be accurately comparable on a totally quantitative basis, but some overall conclusions may be reached. The accuracy of these observations can then be substantiated through more detailed empirical source information, dealing with both regional variations and general trends. As Hage and Meeker (1988:16-20) note, the use of a range of different types of source material may provide the firmest basis for understanding the causes of many temporal phenomena.

2.0 Material Conditions and Strikes:1950-1955

Independent studies substantiate the general trend of very low wages in the early-to-mid 1950s. These include studies by the SAIRR (1950), Spandau (1972:377-387), and the SATLC (1949a; 1949b). The SAIRR study, based on the spending patterns of black households, found that blacks were forced to spend an increasingly large proportion of their incomes on basic needs for survival, such as food and clothing (SAIRR 1950:75). This situation was exacerbated by inflationary pressures. In his study, based on the PWV region, Spandau discovered that the deficits of income over essential minimum expenditure experienced by black families was L3/11/9 per annum on the Reef and L7/11/5 in Johannesburg. Average annual incomes were L12/6/6 and L15/18/11 respectively. Although it is less clear on what basis

the SATLC study was done, it echoed the findings of the above two studies, asserting that disproportionate increases had taken place in the costs of food, fuel, light and rent, whilst wages "were lower than they were in pre-war days" (SATLC 1949a:n.p.).

However, very few strikes took place at this time (see figure 1 and chapter 7). Thus, poor material conditions alone do not result in strike action.

Secondly, Penceval's (Santomero and Seater 1976:513) assertion that changes in economic variables, such as wages, lead to strikes, does not seem to apply in the case of South Africa of the early-to-mid 1950s. Although (objectively) material conditions were changing (in fact, deteriorating), very few strikes took place. This is most probably the result of more subjective factors. As Davies (1978:143) notes, a climate of "little hope" will result in low levels of resistance.

Less certain is the reason for these low wages. For example, Purcell has argued that the government lacked any coherent wage policy, in contrast with Spandau, who asserts that the government had a deliberately regressive incomes policy as a means of keeping wages low (Spandau 1972:382). There is substantial evidence to support Spandau in terms of official statements by Cabinet Ministers at the time¹. Whilst the mechanisms of enforcing low wages seem unclear, there is little doubt that the lack of government attention to low wage levels, the controlled nature of labour supplies and the generally repressive political climate can have done little to improve material conditions.

Certainly, there is little doubt that low black wages

reflected the then prevailing government sentiments on the matter (SATLC 1951b:n.p.). Obviously, wage levels are always linked in some way to wider political forces, but this seems particularly so in South Africa during the early-to-mid-1950s². Thus, political variables might not only be seen as a possible contributor to strike incidence, but also as influencing the nature of the wage variable. An oppressive political environment and a government policy of maintaining low wages and reducing social benefits to blacks (Hirson 1989:193) could well have contributed to a climate of "little hope" and, consequently, of low aspirations (Davies 1978:143-146).

While, as noted earlier, there are certain limitations in the methods employed to measure strike incidence in the early-to-mid-1950s, it is clear that very few strikes took place during this period, particularly if newspaper reports and other records of strike activity are considered (for example, the reports contained in the Guardian 1950-1952). This is particularly the case in the years 1950-1955. Thus, at this time, there seems to have been no linkage between low (or even declining) real wages and the positive incidence of strikes. This does not rule out wages as a key factor in strike causality, but rather reveals that low wage levels alone cannot explain strikes, which remain, as predicted by Hibbs (1976:1046-8), a product of wage aspirations. However, an additional factor may be negative experiences of collective action. Most recorded strikes in the 1950s resulted in defeats for workers (see, for example, chapter 7).

In deconstructing the relationship between wages and strikes

in the 1950s, further illumination may be obtained by comparing strikes and wages in specific sectors of industry. Comparative information is only available from official sources, and thus incorporates inherent limitations, but this information, released through the "Yearbook of South African Statistics", is far more comprehensive than that officially made available for the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst still somewhat incomplete, the general sectoral distribution may give some idea of trends operative at the time, which are reflected in the table below:

Strikes per Sector

	Mining	Manufacturing	Construction	Communications
1950	8	19	1	2
1954	16	31	4	4
1956	10	57	6	7

(CSO 1950, 1954, 1956)

As can be seen from the above, strikes were concentrated in the mining and manufacturing sectors, sectors where the racial wage gap had widened, and where overall black real wages had remained extremely low. In the construction sector, the wage gap widened even more dramatically, but probably in this case as a result of the increased employment of blacks in a menial capacity.

Thus again the incidence of strikes cannot be linked to low wage levels in particular industrial sectors, but rather to aspirations. During 1954-6 modest wage increases had taken place in both mining and manufacturing (figures 16 & 17), a time when strike action also rose. Nonetheless, strikes remained relatively uncommon and of short duration. Clearly, the

relationship remained a complex one, with a variety of counter-tendencies existing (Jameson 1991:418), including, possibly, adverse experiences of previous strikes.

There is therefore some evidence of links between economic developments and industrial conflict in the 1950s. However, there seems evidence of other, more subjective, factors, including a lack of previous experiences of industrial action. Again, this does not necessarily entail a rejection of the possibility that aspirations may lead to strikes, but rather stresses the need to see them as multi-causal social phenomena.

3.0 Stagnation and Change: 1956-1959

According to official statistics (see figure 6), the real wages of Africans stagnated in the mid-to-late 1950s. Again, there is some independent corroboration of this. For example, a study by Arkin (1960:317), conducted in the early 1960s, revealed that three out of four Africans still could not obtain the basic means of survival. Lambert (1988:18) argues that this situation was exacerbated by state policies of forced removals to the homelands, which greatly limited rural subsistence production as a supporting mechanism. Furthermore, the pay-skill differential widened substantially in this period (EAC n.d.:n.p.). In other words, the pay gap between whites (generally clustered in the more skilled jobs) and Africans (generally clustered in the less skilled jobs) widened.

These conditions led to a vigorous debate at the time, with concern being voiced within certain sectors of the business

community about the dangerous social consequences of such conditions (SAIRR 1958-9:215). This led to the establishment of the "Association for the Improvement of Productivity of Bantu Workers". The name of the Association reveals something of its purpose - to improve the "physical fitness and mental alertness of bantu workers", which were seen as being adversely affected by low pay (SAIRR 1958-9:215). The Association's general objectives were supported by both Assocom and the Federated Chamber of Industries. Thus, poor material conditions were identified with low productivity. McConnell (1986:607) asserts that there is a definite relationship between wage levels and productivity. Efficiency wage theory holds that it ultimately pays employers to pay higher wages as this will result in greater productivity and reduced labour turnover (Barker 1992:136).

Low productivity can constitute a "hidden" form by which workers may voice their displeasure with the status quo (Salamon 1988:214-335). Indeed, if there is evidence of extremely poor material conditions³, and little prospect of improving them, conflict could remain hidden or "rhizomatic" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:1-10), only breaking out in more directly noticeable forms when subjective and objective circumstances were more conducive to collective action.

Both official strike totals and strike volume rose during the years 1955-7 (see figure 1). This seems corroborated by the increased numbers of strikes reported in the press and independent strike reports of individual instances of conflict (see, for example, Horrell 1969). At this time overall wage

levels were stagnant (see figure 6) whilst there is little evidence that the political climate was any less repressive. However, prompted by concern over low productivity, sections of the business community were publicly calling for wage rises (SAIRR 1958-9:214-5), and some increases were granted in the PWV region (Star 15/6/1959). This could have contributed to an atmosphere of heightened expectations in the area, which led to a limited increase in the number of strikes taking place there. Indeed, strikes seemed concentrated in a few urban centres (see chapter 7).

As Jameson (1991:416) notes, relationships at regional and workplace level need not necessarily form part of a total system, and a variety of localized tendencies and counterforces can take place. Although black real wages remained stagnant, localized initiatives to improve wages could well have fuelled aspirations, leading to a modest increase in strikes within a few regions. A national environment not conducive to striking may be counterbalanced by regional and more subjective forces (see Frisby 1989:35). Thus, it seems that regional variations should be included in any theoretical understanding of the incidence of strikes, as well as, possibly, variations of response to the same broad economic forces.

However, it should not be assumed that possible expectations of a wage increase on a geographically specific basis can provide the sole explanation for changes in the incidence of strikes in the 1950s. Indeed, other variables may well have affected the incidence of strikes, making a range of explanations possible (Simmel 1980:56-60). Another possible economic causal variable

is unemployment. As noted earlier, it is generally suggested that high levels of unemployment serve to discourage strike action. Unfortunately, there is little accurate data on black unemployment in the 1950s. Gathering this data was the responsibility of the now-defunct Bantu Administration Boards, which did not make this data readily available.

Nonetheless, there are indications that black unemployment increased substantially during the late 1950s (SAIRR 1958-9:197). However, strike totals began to rise by the close of that decade. This could be explained by one of two reasons. Firstly, available evidence suggests that strikes were geographically concentrated, with very few strikes in the rural periphery, where unemployment was the highest (see Horrell n.d.).

Secondly, in view of South Africa's lack of an effective social welfare system, increases in unemployment would have the effect of increasing the number of dependents per worker, increasing pressures to seek wage increases (see chapter 1). Should the worker lose his or her employment through this action, he or she could fall back on well-developed, albeit increasingly stressed, informal networks of support⁴. Thus high unemployment need not necessarily curb strike action. Whilst unemployment cannot be seen as the major causal factor of strikes, it could have been a contributory factor in the tensions leading up to strike action in the late 1950s. However, there is no indication of any such relationship in the 1960s.

4.0 The 1959 Wage Determinations and Their Effects

In an apparent reversal of earlier government policies in this regard, but probably in partial response to requests by politically-influential organizations such as the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut (AHI)⁵, a number of new wage determinations were made in the late 1950s (Katzen 1961:201). For example, the minimum wages payable on the Reef and Pretoria were revised for the first time in 17 years through Government Notice 1147 of 24 July 1959 (Katzen 1961:201). Following these rises, several Industrial Councils, including those for the Iron, Steel and Metal Industries, increased the minimum wages of black workers (SAIRR 1958-9:213). This represented an important policy shift. However, as Steenkamp (1962:93) notes, black wages still needed to be significantly increased to meet rises in the cost of living and related factors.

Coterminous with these determinations, a more general increase in the real wages of Africans began to take place (see figure 6). Pussell (1968:94) asserts that this was the result of independent action by employers, despite government wishes to keep African wages low, but Steenkamp (1962:116) suggests that the general increase of wages followed on the Wage Board determinations. Hipkin (1986:87) argues that there is inadequate evidence to conclude that a direct linkage existed between the two developments.

Likewise, any connection between the increases and pressure from the workplace in the form of strikes seems limited. Wages may have contributed to strike causality, but there is little

evidence that strikes impacted back on wage levels at this time. Lodge (1978:198) asserts that the general rise in wage levels was in response to a mounting wave of strikes. However, by 1958, officially recorded totals of strikes began to drop again, and only rose in 1960, after the bulk of determinations began to take effect (see fig. 1). Strike volume remained low throughout this period. In other words, although the relatively modest pay rises may have fuelled aspirations, resulting in a limited increase in strikes, these remained of very short duration and/or involving few workers. Although the wage determinations represented an important policy shift or discontinuity, overall changes in wage levels had similar effects on the incidence of strikes to what was the case in the early 1950s.

However, it is evident from the continued activity of the Association for Wages and Productivity (and its very name) that the wage increases were, at least in some part, motivated by concern over low productivity, a "hidden form" of industrial conflict and an indication of dissatisfaction at the workplace. Discontent does not seem to have translated into large numbers of strikes, owing to the lack of other contributory factors and of "smooth space" for action (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:422), a lack which diminishes the ability to take collective action in a repressive environment, which may be a product both of overt state policy (Kessel 1972:367) or of adverse earlier experiences of disputes. Furthermore, strikes remained geographically concentrated, partially as a result of regional variations in wage trends, but also owing to factors as diverse as the differing attitudes of individual Native Labour Officers towards

workers' pay demands (Horrell n.d.).

5.0 The Silent Years: The 1960s

Whilst the 1960s were a period of sustained economic growth, they were also a period of capital intensification, which proved a major contributory factor to rising unemployment (Simkins 1981:64). Unemployment in the 1960s is reflected in figure 2. However, as can be seen from table 1, there is little evidence of any relationship between strikes and unemployment at this time.

Black real wages remained extremely low in the 1960s, with a widening of the wage gap in some cases (see figure 6). Official data in this regard is again corroborated by a number of independent studies. For example, in a TUCSA document, it was alleged that many workers could not afford the basic essentials of life (TUCSA 1960b:n.p.). Furthermore, the wage gap between unskilled (mostly black) and skilled (often white) workers was many times wider than in most industrial countries (Houghton 1960: n.p.).

It should be noted that the determinations of the late 1950s did have some impact, most notably in Johannesburg, where wages for Africans rose by a modest 7.5 % per annum after implementation (SAIRR 1961: 189). Pressure for further increases continued into 1960, with some evidence to the Economic Advisory Council suggesting that further increases would boost consumer demand, in addition to continued concerns over low productivity (EAC 1960:n.p.). In response to this, limited pay rises were

introduced in the construction industry (ibid.:n.p.). Nonetheless, the impact of these increases was more than offset by rises in the cost of living in the 1960s (see fig. 6 ; TUCSA 1960a:n.p.). The situation was exacerbated by the continued lack of an effective social welfare system and the higher taxes paid by blacks (Financial Mail 30/5/1969). As noted earlier, a modest increase in strikes took place from 1960-1. Thus, as Hibbs (1976:1043) notes, workers do not suffer from "any money illusion", and take the effects of inflation fully into account when deciding to resort to collective action. Most probably, the primary effect of such limited increases would be in increasing aspirations, by making further, and more meaningful, pay rises seem possible.

There were limited wage increases in the PWV region in 1963, when a number of firms agreed to increase wages paid to R2/day (Rand Daily Mail 11/1/1963). Again, those firms which granted increases claimed improved productivity (Star 29/10/1963). Thus, as noted earlier, there is some evidence that although the circumstances might not make possible, or other forces might not combine to contribute to, strikes, conflict might be expressed in the "hidden" form of low productivity - i.e. industrial conflict may be "rhizomatic". Despite this, the Chairman of the Wage Board argued that further wage increases could not be justified without increases in productivity (Natal Mercury 11/12/1965). Similarly, the President of the Chamber of Mines argued that the price of gold (pegged at \$35/oz.) made any further increase in costs untenable without a commensured increase in efficiency (Anderson 1963:25-31). This in fact

represented the other side of a vigorous debate over whether further wage rises would increase productivity, or if wage rises could only be justified if productivity increased (Eastern Province Herald 19/5/1964). Many employers seem to have adhered to the latter position (ibid.). Thus, the relationship between pay and productivity remained a contentious one. On the one hand, as McConnell (1981:607) suggests, it can be argued that "income per worker can only increase at the same rate as output per worker". Conversely it can be argued that productivity will only increase when pay does until an efficiency wage is reached. In practice, employers seem to have been divided on this issue.

The limited increases some PWV employers granted had very little broader impact in improving material conditions, with 57% of blacks in Johannesburg continuing to remain below the poverty line (Rand Daily Mail 24/12/1964;). Most Africans remained below the poverty datum line, with fewer than 20% of Africans changing occupation (SAIRR 1963c:n.p.). Indeed, the majority of the income of most Africans was still spent on basic foodstuffs (SAIRR 1963b:n.p.), whilst the starting salary for the jobs held by 90% of Africans was less than R30 per month (SAIRR 1964b:n.p.).

Nonetheless, these increases were followed by rises in both strike totals and strike volume (figure 1, see also chapter 7).

Arkin (1960:308) asserts that this rise in the incidence of strikes was a symptom of "widespread feelings of resentment against the social order in general". However, "if workers' attentions are devoted to securing the bare necessities of life,

they will have little time to find a remedy for their problem....[thus] urban natives of Langa and Sharpeville are far more likely to suffer from a sense of injustice...than the inhabitants of the Transkei reserves" (Arkin 1960:308). In other words, strikes are again, at least partially, a product of aspirations. This would explain why strikes rose coterminously with wage increases (see fig. 7, table 3) - modest rises in pay fostered, on a highly localized basis, an increase in the incidence of strike action. However, the overall number of strikes remained low, probably a product of the generally repressive political climate and organizational limitations (see chapters 5-6).

By mid-1965, the long cyclical upswing of the early 1960s began to level off (EAC 1966b:n.p.). Whilst this did not seem to result in increases in unemployment (see fig. 2), it probably contributed towards dampening further wage increases, despite continued calls for pay rises from the Chamber of Commerce (SAIRR 1964:233). It should be noted that there seemed to be little relationship between black unemployment and wages at this time, owing to the highly segmented nature of the black labour market, with blacks being crowded into certain occupations (Shuttleworth 1981:75).

While official statistics do indicate modest increases in black real wages through the late 1960s, several independent studies illustrated the poor conditions which blacks continued to experience and the size of the wage gap between blacks and whites (see SAIRR 1966:210; SAIRR 1968:109, SAIRR 1969:83). In addition to divisions within the black labour market, a further,

and more rigid, division was between a thin layer of skilled (mostly white) workers and a vast majority of unskilled workers (Biesheuvel 1962:27). Owing to a shortage of training facilities, and continued government hostility to a relaxing of the colour bar (Biesheuvel 1962:27; EAC 1966a:n.p.), this division was to continue well into the 1980s. The widening wage gap and the limited nature of the increases in black wages are reflected in the below table dealing with the manufacturing sector:

Year	Whites (%)	Blacks (%)
1960	160.1	33.75
1970	299.6	57.67
Real Annual Increase	37.7	2.77

(Horner 1972:4).

These trends are mirrored by the official statistics for mining, manufacturing and construction, as can be seen from figs 16 -18, as well as by independent studies conducted by the IIE (n.d.c.:n.p.) and SAIRR (1969b:n.p.).

The high demand for scarce white labour and the failure to draw on African labour was ultimately the cause of this widening of the wage gap (Myers 1976:32). This was the product of the politically-powerful position of white labour and their legally protected status (ibid.:32). Very few exemptions were granted to statutory colour bars, whilst white workers remained, by and large, implacably opposed to any black advancement (Knight and McGrath 1977:248). Other factors enforcing a racial division of labour would include the economic costs of changing an entire

labour force and social factors (Hendrie 1981:250). The latter could include deep-seated racial beliefs concerning the inferiority of black labour, making many employers reluctant to "waste" money on upgrading their skills (ibid.:250), and resulting in a cycle of low pay, little job mobility and low status.

Despite (or because of) the position of white workers as privileged labour market "insiders", they only very rarely resorted to strike action, periodic threats to the contrary notwithstanding (Myers 1976:35). This was probably a product of their over-reliance on state patronage and their privileged status on highly centralized collective bargaining structures. As Spandau (quoted in Hendrie 1981:257) notes, racial discrimination seems often to have had little to do with skill, but rather with the sheer power of white workers, often simply in terms of legal prohibitions.

African workers were divided between urban and rural workers, with the latter being in a worsening position vis-a-vis the former (Hindson 1987a:73). However, even urban workers remained in an extremely vulnerable position, and faced forced removals, forced labour and imprisonment for pass law offences, or loss of Section 10 exemptions should they be declared "idle" (Hindson 1987a:69; c.f. Simkins 1981:24)⁶. Whilst there is evidence that town dwellers were substantially easier to unionize, could obtain better paying jobs and had a higher strike profile, they themselves were in a very weak position, and frequently faced being "endorsed out" after striking (see chapters 5 & 7). Thus even black "insiders" were faced with a

range of coercive measures should they resort to strike action, which would have had the effect of further constraining collective action at this time. As a result of this, when blacks moved into previously "white" jobs, they did not immediately attain a more powerful and privileged status, which could have included the capability of mounting more effective collective action, but rather forced the rate for that particular job down (Hendrie 1981:257).

The very limited pay rises which took place in the late 1960s seem to have had very little impact in increasing aspirations, as the incidence of strike action began to decline after 1965 (see figure 1). Again, there is evidence that some of the tensions translated into "hidden" forms of conflict such as low productivity (see Financial Mail 16/6/1967). Many in the private sector argued that productivity would only increase with an improvement in the basic educational system for blacks, making it impossible for them to increase pay without reforming education (Horner 1972:22). Whilst the linkage between pay and productivity was noted, employers were reluctant to simply increase wages as a means of resolving the problem.

This need not imply that social conflict is "transferable" (Rex 1981: 16-35), which may imply a certain psychological consistency of purpose. Rather, industrial conflict may be "rhizomatic" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:1-10). Whilst there may continue to be an aspirations gap, strike action may remain rare, unless other contributory variables are present (such as, perhaps, knowledge of previous successful instances of industrial conflict). Thus, a combination of forces (such as a lack of any

effective trade union organization following the collapse of SACTU) precluded (or rather deferred) a significant increase in industrial conflict in the late 1960s.

6.0

Theoretical Implications

There seems to be considerable additional empirical substantiation for the general trends in strike action noted in chapters 1 - 2. Firstly, there is evidence that low wages (or extremely adverse material conditions) do not cause strikes. Instead, as Hibbs (1976:1043) suggests, strikes seem to be the product of wage aspirations. In other words, wage increases raise hopes of gaining further improvements in material conditions.

Conversely, as Davies (1978:143) notes, strikes are not likely to take place in a situation "where resistance seems hopeless". However, contrary to Hibbs's (1976:1048) prediction, the relationship between wages and strikes in the years 1950-1970 does not seem to be a reciprocal one. There is no evidence that the limited numbers of strikes that took place resulted in wage increases.

However, there is evidence to support the assertion that workers will fully take into account the effects of inflation when assessing any wage rises granted (Hibbs 1976:1048). Thus, not only may limited wage increases have the effect of increasing aspirations and hopes for an improvement in material conditions, but, in failing to redress the effects of inflation, may scarcely improve the material conditions of workers. As noted earlier,

the relationship between unemployment and strikes remains a complex one, but there is little evidence of any relationship between the two in the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition to objective economic forces, a number of less quantifiable factors seem to have had some effect on the incidence of strike action. These would include regional variations, particularly as a result of differing managerial attitudes towards granting pay rises. Highly localized pay rises seem to have been prompted by concern over low productivity. Although these rises represented important discontinuities in terms of overall trends in wage levels, most had similar effects - localized upsurges in industrial conflict. As Jameson (1991:416) asserts, local and regional relationships may at times be distinct from the total system. This implies that regional differences in wage levels may result in highly localized increases in strike action, although the national incidence of strike action may remain low.

Low productivity may, as noted earlier, constitute a hidden or "rhizomatic" form of industrial conflict. Although a generally repressive climate of "little hope" may not be conducive to striking, dissatisfaction over poor material conditions may well have been manifest in a more concealed form. This may well have been the predominant form of industrial conflict manifest in the 1950s and 1960s.

Whilst, during the 1950s and 1960s, strike action remained rare, a number of general trends are apparent. Firstly, extremely low wages and poor material conditions do not, alone, cause strike action. There is a general pattern of the incidence of strikes increasing following modest wage increases. Although such rises were often highly localized, representing departures from previous wage policies, they seem to have had a consistent effect on the incidence of strikes. Evidently, such increases boosted aspirations and hopes for further, and more meaningful, improvements. There is little evidence of any relationship between unemployment and strikes, although a definite linkage seems to exist between rises in the cost of living and the incidence of strikes. Ultimately, however, strikes seem a product of both objective material conditions and more subjective factors, such as, possibly, previous experiences of industrial disputes. Strike action seems therefore to be a product of several independent variables, while there is evidence that strikes may only be one manifestation of industrial conflict, other forms of which may be potentially hidden or "rhizomatic".

Endnotes

1. Natal Daily News 4/4/1957; Evening Post 25/3/1957; SATLC 1951b:n.p.

2. As Devereux (1983:4) notes, increasing legal barriers were placed against the economic advance of blacks, whilst the United Party's (very limited) welfare programmes were cut back.

3. At the time the Wage Board resisted granting any pay increases, asserting that both the national economy and small business could be endangered thereby (SAIRR 1958-9:214, see also

Ensor 1977: 50-69).

4. Such informal networks of support constitute a component of the complex range of income generation and distribution mechanisms "outside modern contractual relations of production" (see Rogerson & Preston-Whyte 1991:2). However, there is a symbiotic relationship between the modern economy and such mechanisms, with individuals switching between the two, often on a regular basis (ibid.:2). Such mechanisms link those on the margins with those occupying a relatively privileged segment of the labour market.

An indication of the prevalence of these informal mechanisms of support was provided through a survey conducted by the author in the Albany district during 1994. This research revealed that 53.6% of the economically active population provided financial support to friends/relatives who were unemployed.

5. Who had joined the growing ranks of business organizations concerned over low productivity.

6. If a worker, inter alia, was discharged three times for misconduct in the course of one year, or failed to keep a job for less than a month, he was deemed an "idle person" (Hindson 1987a:69).

CHAPTER 4

THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF STRIKES: 1970-1990

This chapter forms the second half of a reassessment of the relationship between economic developments and strike action, this time focusing on the 1970-1990 period. Although certain general trends are identifiable, this period was also one of sharp discontinuities, most notably before and after the 1972 increases. A range of different sources is employed to provide necessary additional detail and substantiation of the general relationships between certain economic variables and strike action noted in chapter one. Again, it is hoped that the additional sources consulted will provide the basis for further theory-building.

1.0 The Changing Nature of Strikes and Material

Conditions: 1970-1975

1.1 Causes of the Upturn in Wages

The years 1970-2 were again marked by relatively low and stagnant black real wages (see fig. 6). As Spandau (1972:387) notes, wage levels were often inadequate to meet the bare minimum of expenditure necessary on food, clothing and transport. Again, independent studies corroborate the official statistics. A 1972 UNISA study revealed that whilst the Poverty Datum Line for the average African family stood at R70 per month, 79% of Africans were receiving wages below this, with a further 13% earning below the Minimum Effective Level of R105 per month (SAIRR 1972:136).

A survey conducted by the Productivity and Wages Association¹ revealed that 80% of Africans in the commercial and industrial sectors received wages below the Poverty Datum Line (Eastern

Province Herald 28/7/1972).

Furthermore, the infrequent nature of wage board activity resulted in determinations being made only on a four-yearly basis per industry (SAIRR 1972:242), and no attempt was made to make the process of arriving at determinations more flexible or "sympathetic" (Melter 1973:2)². In other words, not only were the material circumstances of black workers generally poor, but there was little official interest in improving matters.

During the 1970-1972 period strike totals remained more-or-less constant at a generally low level. Again, those strikes independently recorded tended to be geographically concentrated (refer to the examples in chapter 7), with few being recorded in the homelands or secondary centres. As borne out by the experience of other periods of stagnant or declining real wages (e.g. the early 1950s), it seems that low wages and poor material conditions do not necessarily translate into strikes. It seems that the lack of prospects for improvement, especially if the activities of the Wage Board (see Chairman of the Wage Board 1971:n.p.) and Industrial Councils are considered, reinforced an environment of "little hope", resulting in a low incidence of strike action.

The stimulus to increase black real wages in the early 1970s came from a number of quarters, totally unrelated to the very few strikes that took place at this time. Firstly, a British House of Commons Commission found that extremely low wages were being paid to African workers³. Many employers cited low productivity as a reason for not increasing pay (ibid.:2). This reasoning helped to engender a vicious circle of low pay/low

productivity, and represents a curious inversion of conventional economic theory.

On average, Africans constituted the majority of such companies' workforces, but only some 25% of their wage bills (SALB 1974c:11). The expose led to a major political row in the U.K. (Daily Dispatch 19/3/1973). In reaction, several companies announced that they would increase pay levels even if it entailed a decline in profits (Daily Dispatch 19/3/1973). This decision was made somewhat easier by a manufacturing boom at the time.

Secondly, a more far-reaching stimulus to wage levels followed an aircraft crash involving Malawian migrant labourers, which led to the Banda regime halting migrancy to the South African gold mines. In reaction, the Chamber of Mines made a policy decision to recruit more South Africans (c.f. Cooke 1970:n.p.). This led to more attractive pay levels being offered, in turn being made possible by the gold price windfall⁴. Prior to this, extremely low wages had been paid to both South African and foreign workers. In the case of the former, the practice was based on the assumption that blacks had additional financial support through subsistence agriculture in the reserves (IIE n.d.d.:n.p.). In fact, black South African mine workers tended to have family incomes less than the average, resulting in their being the "poorest of the poor"⁵.

Other factors which prompted the pay rise, according to the President of the Chamber of Mines (Goode 1973:n.p.), included the issue of productivity, with a higher gold price enabling "imaginative approaches" to pay increases which would result in an increase in output per worker. However, many employers in

industry seem to have still held rather different views with regard to the relationship between pay and productivity. For example, a leading employer in the textile industry argued the "the bantu worker had no motivation for higher productivity [if linked to pay increases], because his standard of living did not require more income. If a higher salary is paid, then absenteeism simply increases" (EAC 1973:n.p.). Such thinking, once again, entails a vicious circle of low pay and productivity and represents an inversion of efficiency wage theory. Because workers could not be trusted with more pay, productivity remained low, resulting in continued negative attitudes concerning the capacity of workers, similar to the low education-low pay cycle noted earlier. The productivity-wage debate amongst employers seems to have been laid to rest in the 1980s, when black pay and productivity (see figure 19) both increased dramatically, although there is no statistically significant relationship between the two (see table 10).

1.2 Effects of the Upturn in Wages

There is little doubt that the pay increases on the mines, particularly, had a considerable "spillover effect" on different sectors of industry. The effects of the wage increases are tabulated below, whilst their contribution to the general rises is depicted in figure 6.

Sector	% Contribution	% Due to Employment Increases	% Due to Wage Increases
Agriculture	1	—	100
Mining	25	—	100
Manufacturing	28	39	61
Construction	17	49	51
Transport	4	48	52
Communications	5	61	39
Government	19	45	55
Finance	1	—	—

Source: Nattrass (1977:417)

The wage increases in the construction sector seem linked to the pay rises in the manufacturing sector and increased demand for construction following the growth of manufacturing output (Nattrass 1977:416). In reaction to this, the building industry offered a "new deal" with annual reviews of salaries (Eastern Province Herald 13/3/1973). There is no doubt that the relatively large pay increases of 1972-3 ushered in a new era (or discontinuity), impacting on aspirations and, consequently, strike action.

Indeed, the year 1973 was marked by a totally unprecedented strike wave in Durban, whilst during 1974 an unusually large number of strikes took place countrywide, with a strike wave in East London. In a 1973 survey, Mare noted the following wage levels:

Centre	Average Wage (weekly)	Percentage Africans in Lowest Grade
Port Elizabeth	R12.31	39.89
Johannesburg	R10.53	30.73
Durban	R10.45	26.63
East London	R 6.57	45.24

Source: Mare (1973:2).

Although, as noted earlier, there does not seem to be evidence

of a fixed linkage between wage levels and strikes, it is perhaps interesting to note that the two centres hit by strike waves in the years 1973-1974 paid the lowest wages⁶. The general increase in black real wages led to greater hope of an improvement in these two centres, and hence, increased aspirations (see Davies 1978:143), resulting in rising strike action. Notably, very few strikes took place in rural areas, where material conditions were worse than in Durban and East London, but where there was little prospect of increases.

Indeed, many unskilled industrial workers in Durban were earning as little as R7.59 per week (BWPA 1971:n.p.). Interviews with Durban strikers revealed that the strikes were primarily about wage aspirations. Most workers believed that the "strikes were caused by failure to pay adequately" and "disgusting low wages", and felt that some improvement was possible - "we are strong" (IIE n.d.b.:n.p.).

In a survey conducted by Schlemmer (1975:5) in the Durban region shortly after the strike wave, 70% of workers cited low pay as their main grievance. In all, 50% of workers surveyed experienced strong feelings of what Schlemmer refers to as "relative deprivation", whilst 51 \% were aware of the potential bargaining strength of united black workers (Schlemmer 1975:8). There was no distinction drawn between industrial sectors in this regard, with African workers generally "not accepting material disadvantage as a fact of everyday life, but as a product of discrimination" (Schlemmer 1975:6). Thus, wage aspirations could have somewhat broader implications, with the identification of poor material conditions with the prevailing political order.

Resentment against the latter would, again, affect the level of combativeness of workers and their willingness to engage in collective action. Once again, then, strikes seem to be the product of both objective circumstances and more subjective interpretations.

Meanwhile, workers in East London could readily compare wages received with those of the neighbouring centre of Port Elizabeth, whilst news of pay increases by certain companies could have further fuelled aspirations. However, it seems that expectations could not have been the sole trigger for the strike waves. For example, a 1974 UCT Wages Commission study conducted in Cape Town revealed that all the workers interviewed believed they should receive pay rises of at least 100% (see Mare 1974:2), indicative of high aspirations. Nonetheless, Cape Town does not seem to have been a major centre of strike action in the years 1973 and 1974.

An important contributory factor could have been the highly visible and often successful nature of many of the strikes in Durban and East London, which seems to have greatly popularized the idea of striking. Again, strikes would seem to be both a product of (objective) economic developments, and more subjective factors such as workers' exposure to, and interpretation of, previous instances of industrial conflict. In the case of the Durban strike wave, employers were quick to grant wage increases, and there is little doubt that this encouraged further strikes, as the wave gained momentum (Wood 1992:19-20).

Inflation rose during these years, with particularly dramatic rises in the prices of basic foodstuffs. Food prices

rose on average by 26% during 1973 (TUACC 1974:n.p.), providing further evidence of the links between inflation and strike action. It should be noted that the rate of inflation in basic goods and services was considerably higher than the official CPI - by a difference of some 14% in 1974 (SALB 1975:1)⁷.

1.3 Declining Strike Totals

By 1975, strike totals had begun to drop. Yet a 1976 survey by Graaff (1976:88) revealed that 77% of workers were unhappy with their wages, indicating a continuing aspirations gap. However, there seem to have been diminished prospects for gaining an improvement in economic circumstances. The rate of increase in black real wages slowed (see figure 6), and strikes during these years seem to have had a lower success rate (see Bonner 1987:57).

Both these factors could have served to reduce the incidence of further strike action.

An additional indication of the complexity of the situation is that despite a decade of general rise in real wages, the increases did not always offset the ravages of food-price inflation. This became particularly apparent during the closing years of the decade, when strike totals began to rise again. By 1980, workers were forced to spend a higher proportion of their salaries on basic foodstuffs than in 1970 (SALB 1980:2). Consequently, money remained an important rallying point of strikers throughout the decade (Sitas et al. 1984:26). Thus, in assessing the linkages between wages and strikes, it should be noted that real wage levels, no matter how accurately calculated, may conceal factors such as cost increases in basic

foodstuffs versus increases in the cost of living generally. As noted in chapter 1, there is a statistically significant relationship between changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the incidence of strike action. However, the relationship may be even stronger between rises in the cost of basic foodstuffs and strikes, if the rapid increases in both the late 1970s and early 1980s are considered.

2.0 Cause and Effect: 1974-1980

2.1 Strikes and Wage Increases

The question arises as to whether strikes were in some way responsible for the pay rises of the mid-to-late 1970s. In other words, whether the relationship between wages and strikes might be a two-way one (Santomero and Seater 1978:512). On the one hand, the increases may be explained by the growth of the manufacturing sector. For example, a 1977 survey of manufacturing firms revealed a capacity and willingness to increase wages without resorting to staffing cutbacks (Nattrass 1977:420). However, record profits alone cannot explain a willingness to grant increases.

For example, the years 1964-1969 represented a period of growth in manufacturing, without concomitant pay increases. Yet the effects on wage levels of major instances of strike action, such as the 1973 and 1974 strike waves, should not be underestimated. In both cases, many employers, when confronted with an unexpected challenge from the shopfloor, were quick to grant increases (IIE 1974a:16-18;Devereux 1983:44). In other

words, in contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, the 1973-4 period represented a totally new era, or discontinuity, where, for the first time, the collective action of workers had a sustained effect on overall wage levels.

Successful strikes would not only result in further pay increases (in itself fuelling aspirations), but also increase the numbers of workers who had been exposed to successful collective action. Such workers would have a more favourable view of strike action. Thus, pay rises gained through striking might not only have objective effects, but also change the more subjective perceptions of workers concerning striking.

In contrast to the largely successful strikes of 1973, strikes in the late 1970s often had very mixed results (see, for example, Cooper 1979a:57-66). Many employers seem to have chosen to incur the greater expense of a strike, and of hiring and training an entire new workforce, rather than grant any concessions (Bonner 1987:57). However, this would prove an increasingly costly option, owing to the strength of the unions, changes in industrial relations legislation, as well as the potential threat of community action and consumer boycotts (see WPGWU 1980:77-84).

2.2 Wage Versus Total Strikes

Figure 20 compares the total number of strikes taking place versus wage strikes for the years 1970-7 and 1980 (for 1978 and 1979 fully accurate figures were not available). It should be noted that the figure for 1973 includes the first half of 1974. The figure for 1974 only covers the second half of that year.

As can be seen, during the years 1972-4 and again in 1980, the overwhelming majority of strikes were for wages. However, in the years where fewer strikes took place, in 1970, 1971, 1975 and 1976, whilst wages remained the major cause of strikes, other factors (e.g. pertaining to payment, working conditions) seem to have played almost as important a role. It is possible that strikes not directly over wages could have been not so much a product of wage aspirations, as perhaps a more defensive form of action, opposing changes in manner of payment or working conditions.

In the 1970-1 period, African workers had virtually no organizational support and striking was still a relatively unknown weapon. From late 1974-1977, when, again, proportionately more non-wage strikes took place, there seems to have been a greater police willingness to intervene in disputes, making such action an increasingly risky proposition (see MAWU 1977: 49-59; Glass & Allied Workers Union 1977: 60-72). During 1976, the unions were weakened by the banning of a number of key officials (Maree 1987b:5). In other words, fewer and more defensive strikes could have been the result of negative experiences of striking⁸.

3.0 Resurgence and Challenge 1981-1985

3.1 The Pensions Strikes

A major upsurge of strike action took place in 1980, in response to the government's proposed Pensions Preservations Bill. By 1981, 17.6% of all strikes concerned the issue of pensions

(Berwyn-Taylor 1982:72). Welcomed by the politically-powerful pensions industry, the Bill restricted access to the funds prior to retirement, preventing workers from making use of them as a type of unemployment insurance, to be drawn on in periods between jobs⁹. This situation clearly reflected the of a lack of an effective social welfare system. Interestingly, 7 out of 10 workers involved in the pensions strikes wanted to belong to some form of pension scheme (Schlemmer et al. 1983:4). However, workers preferred in-house schemes, where they could have a greater say over the administration of funds, being generally mistrustful of the motives of both employers and insurance companies (ibid.:5).

The fact that a number of pensions-related strikes took place after the ill-advised bill had been scrapped revealed the extent of this mistrust (WIP 1982b:51-2). Thus, again, strikes seem to have been the product of both objective economic conditions and the subjective interpretations of those involved. The trade unions seem to have had little impact on the strikes. Amongst unionized and non-unionized workers, there seemed to be an equal willingness to resort to strike action (WIP 1982b:51-52).

In understanding the connections between material conditions and strikes, the pensions disputes of the early 1980s are of particular significance. Firstly, they were a response not so much to dissatisfaction with the status quo (although there is little doubt such dissatisfaction existed), as to the proposed changes. Again, it seems that poor material conditions alone do not cause strikes; strikes occur rather when some alteration to

those conditions seems possible. In this case, an attack on an alternative means of support in the absence of an effective social welfare system, affected the incidence of strike action.

Furthermore, the strikes, although not engineered by the unions (WIP 1982b:51-52), were greatly facilitated by strong shopfloor organization, as well as the fact that striking had become a popular defensive mechanism. There was more space for such action owing to a more tolerant labour relations environment, following the Wiehahn Report. Industrial action also had the effect of increasing divisions amongst employers as to how to deal with such action, "creating new opportunities for counter-attack" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:428)¹⁰. Indeed, the Wiehahn reforms represented the start of a new era (or discontinuity), with blacks being included in the statutory collective action, and of more sophisticated (and somewhat less overtly repressive) state strategies to control the unions (see Lewis 1987:170-171).

3.2 Unemployment and Strikes in the Early 1980s

Although unemployment had dropped from 6.1% in January 1979 to 5.8% in November 1981, the absolute number of unemployed rose, with the highest number of unemployed in the Western Cape, up from 15.4% in January 1979 to 19.3% in November 1981 (FOSATU 1982a:n.p.). In the 1980s, a statistically significant relationship existed between rising unemployment and increasing numbers of strikes. This could have been the product of three factors. Firstly, as noted earlier, this could have been the result of increasingly over-extended informal mechanisms of

support, placing immense pressures on workers to seek wage increases. Such networks underpinned the survival of the unemployed, particularly in the short term (Webster 1984:14). Thus, McCartan (1984:13) argued that any problems high levels of unemployment might pose to worker organization could be more than offset by relations of dependency between union members and the unemployed.

Secondly, it could have represented a more assertive stance by the unions against retrenchments. Thirdly, it is possible that a new segmentation of the labour market had taken place, between employed members of the union movement, who were in a relatively strong position to press for wage increases, and the unemployed and those who were not unionized, who would be most directly affected by cutbacks in employment following pay rises. This latter explanation is probably the most likely one in that both real wages and unemployment rose in the 1980s. This issue is more fully explored in the following chapter.

Interestingly, although official wage determinations represented the barest sub-minima (see Budlender et al 1984:5), they often proved unenforceable (WIP 1981a:4). Companies would often choose to circumvent the determinations through a range of mechanisms, including the practice of counting double shifts as single, with the onus being placed on the workers to prove any violations (WIP 1981a:4). Thus, wage "increases" might not even have materialized, resulting in an even greater aspirations gap, and giving further momentum to the rise in strike action in the early 1980s (see figure 1). As in the case of inflation, workers "do not suffer any money illusion" (Hibbs 1976:1043).

Some independent corroboration of the material conditions of Africans in the first half of the 1980s is provided by a range of independent studies. For example, according to Market Research Africa, the claimed monthly average income for Africans was as follows:

Year	R/month
1981	174
1982	204
1983	220
1984	273
1985	352

(SAIRR 1985:131)

3.3 Wages and Skill Levels

Some of the lowest minimum wages set were those contained in wage determination 438, relating to unskilled labour not otherwise covered (SAIRR 1985:131). The 1984 revision of this set the minimum wage at R34.50 per week. However, in practice, the gap between different skill bands narrowed. Between 1973 and 1984, average wage rates for artisans fell by 25.7% in real terms, whilst for unskilled (mostly African) labourers it rose by 25.8% (SAIRR 1985:131).

Nonetheless, strike action continued to rise. It was probably the case that at this stage unionized African workers were in a stronger position to press for wage increases than less effectively organized white artisans. Wages in the mining industry were, by now, well above the minimum wages paid in certain other sectors (SAIRR 1985:131). Again, increases in wages in this sector seem to have led via rising aspirations to mass strike action (see Cobbett and Lewis 1985:11-16).

4.0 Challenge and Counter-Challenge: 1986-1990

Unemployment became increasingly pressing by the mid 1980s (see figure 3). By 1986, it was estimated that black unemployment represented 25% of the total black population and 48% of the total EAP (Sarakinsky & Keenan 1986:22). These trends are echoed by the official indices (see figure 3). Strikes (both in total and volume) also increased at this time (see figure 1). Once again it appears that high unemployment is not necessarily a disincentive to striking, and may be a potential causal variable¹¹.

At the same time, there is evidence that a renewed wave of cost increases, including increases in bus fares and rents, combined with the effects of drought in the rural areas, placed increased pressure on Africans (FOSATU 1984:n.p.). In addition, FOSATU (1984:n.p.) argued that the list of foods which were GST-exempt took little cognizance of the actual diet of African workers (ibid.). Thus, as noted earlier, whilst there is a statistically significant relationship between inflation and strikes (see table 5), those in lower income brackets may have been faced with disproportionate price rises in basic goods and services, placing them under even greater pressures.

The process was particularly pronounced in the Western Cape. During the period May 1986 to May 1987, food prices rose by some 32.7% in that region, compared to 25.8% nationally (Argus 17/7/1989). A number of trade unions charged that these increases were responsible for many of the strikes that took place during this period - "all wage demands were related to the

difficulties people experienced in getting enough to eat" (Argus 17/7/1989). Thus, local circumstances were often far worse than overall indicators of poverty might show (LRS 1987:122).

Wage settlements not only did not meet expectations, but still rarely compensated adequately for inflation. For example, despite increasing industrial conflict, workers, on average, earned less in real terms in December than in January 1985 (SALDRU 1985:123-4). Furthermore, of the 44 new wage determinations for labourers, only 3 kept pace with inflation, whilst real minimum wages declined by some 13% (ibid.:123-4). Although plant-level negotiations between management and workers yielded somewhat better results, the resultant wage increases still did not match inflation (SALDRU 1986:123-4). Again, this would have the effect of encouraging renewed waves of industrial conflict.

An interesting phenomenon, noted earlier for the 1970s, of exceedingly high demands in comparison to the very modest settlements reached, seems also apparent in the 1980s. For example, during 1985, in the food sector, workers on average demanded 121% increases (SALB 1985:132). For manufacturing, during the same year, average demands were for 47% increases, as against 19% granted in settlements (ibid.:132). As noted earlier, the expression of unusually large demands is customarily indicative of high levels of deprivation. This provides further evidence of the relationship between aspirations and strikes.

During 1987, the overall real wages of Africans actually dropped (see figure 6). 1987 was also a year of unprecedented strike action, in terms of both totals and volume. This

represents something of a counter-tendency or discontinuity when compared to previous trends. Possible causes for this rise in strikes include inflation, widespread familiarity with the strike weapon and trade union dynamics (see chapter 5)¹².

A number of the major disputes were "trials of strength", concerning not only wage levels, but also union recognition, and represented challenges to existing relations of power at the workplace (see chapter 7). During 1988 real wages rose again and strike totals dropped (see figure 6). This seems largely the product of non-economic factors, such as widespread state repression and the fact that several key unions were seriously weakened by the 1987 disputes. Furthermore, by 1988 inflationary pressures had declined somewhat (Labour & Economic Research Centre 1988:133), which would also have had the effect of reducing pressures on workers to resort to collective action. Again, wages and inflation can be seen as a contributory but not sole causal factor. Nonetheless, in the years 1989-1990 wages began to rise again, along with strike totals.

This latter increase in strikes can probably be partially explained in terms of a renewed aspirations cycle, but other factors such as a more open political climate and organizational developments within the union movement also need to be considered. The wage factor continued to be ostensibly the biggest cause of strikes into the 1990s. Despite economic problems, it has been argued that the trade unions managed to win wage increases, with the average increase in 1990 being 17.4% (LRS 1991:81). However, such pay increases ultimately failed to reduce the incidence of strike action, and, through increasing

aspirations, seem to have resulted in further strike increases (see DOM 1992).

5.0

Theoretical Implications

The above evidence provides considerable substantiation for aspects of certain economic models of strike causality. Firstly, there is additional evidence that low (or even stagnant) wages do not cause strike action. In most cases, it is in those circumstances where wage levels have begun to rise, creating aspirations for further increases, that strikes take place. In other words, whilst in certain cases strikes may effect wage levels, most of the general increases in African real wages that took place during the period under review predated upsurges in strike action. As Davies (1978:143) notes, social protest is unlikely to occur in those situations where improvement seems impossible, and where the predominant preoccupation is with survival. However, should improvements in material conditions seem feasible, widespread collective action is likely to occur (ibid.:143). It should be noted that whilst this relationship seems to exist throughout the period under review, there are important discontinuities. For example, the increase in black real wages in the 1970s was, proportionally speaking, far larger than earlier increases. This was followed by an unprecedented rise in strikes. Whilst strikes are thus linked to aspirations, wage levels were subject to dramatic adjustment during certain key periods. Although the aspirations-strikes relationship persisted, there is little doubt that the overall situation was

radically different from that of the 1960s. Similar discontinuities are apparent in the early 1980s, again where significant increases in black real wages took place, as well as in the late 1980s, when, in certain cases, real wages actually declined.

As predicted by Hibbs (1976:1048), the relationship between wages and strikes is a lagged one. For example, the general pay rises of the 1970s started before the 1973 Durban strike wave. However, contrary to Hibbs (1976:1048), the relationship does not always seem to be a reciprocal one, particularly in the pre-1970 period. However, there is considerable evidence that the strikes of 1973-4 and of the early 1980s led to further pay rises. In contrast, there is little evidence that strike action affected wage levels in earlier decades.

Although, in many cases, workers put forward a broad range of demands during strikes, the wage demand generally predominated (NMC 1985; CSIR/NIPR 1983; SAIRR 1972-4). Whilst wage demands indisputably have a broader significance, this tendency for the wage demand to predominate provides further evidence of the relationship between wages and strikes.

The regularity of this relationship, encompassing the cautious wage rises of the 1950s, and the sustained pay rises of the 1980s, suggests that it cannot be coincidental. As noted above, wage rises do tend to predate increases in strike action, and can be ascribed to two principal factors. Firstly, there are what may be termed "wild card" factors, peculiar to particular sets of social circumstances. These would include developments such as the forced change in Chamber of Mines recruiting policies

following the Malawian plane crash during the early 1970s; the political row following the British House of Commons report into the service conditions of workers employed by U.K. firms in South Africa, during the same period; the pay/productivity debate of the late 1950s; and concerns for stability following periods of social unrest. Throughout the 1980s, overseas firms operating in South Africa were under sustained pressure to adopt better conditions of employment. None of these factors could conceivably have directly affected the incidence of strike action, any relationship between the two being mediated through wages and wage aspirations.

Secondly, it is possible that the wage rises could be in part the product of market forces. They could register increased demands for black labour and/or changes in the skill composition of the black labour force. Figure 24 depicts changes in black employment in the manufacturing sector from 1960-1990, when comprehensive statistics were available. As can be seen, there were two period when black employment increased dramatically - the mid 1960s and the late 1970s. The percentage of blacks employed as a proportion of the total labour force did not change during this period (CSO 1986; McGrath 1977:97). A similar situation was apparent during the 1970s. It is highly likely that the general increases in employment (and hence in demand for labour) contributed to the general rises in wage levels depicted in figure 6. However, it should be noted that black wage rates from 1960 to 1980 rose disproportionately to that of other race groups (figure 6, see also figure 25). The reasons for this unevenness can largely be explained by the factors outlined

earlier (e.g. the ripple effects on overall black real wages of changes in Chamber of Mines recruiting patterns, overseas pressure, etc.).

However, as noted above, strikes can, in certain cases, affect wage levels. Although most of the general pay rises during the period under review predated strikes, it is possible that strikes may cause such rises to continue. Nonetheless, as can be seen from chapter 7, it was only from the early 1970s onwards that workers seemed to have enjoyed a relatively high degree of success in extracting material concessions from employers through strike action.

During the late 1970s, there were increased moves to boost the supply of skilled black labour to avert skills shortages (McGrath 1990:97). It is possible that the disproportionate increases in black real wages in the 1980s (figures 6 & 25) were the product of changes in the composition of the black labour market, with skilled and semi-skilled workers being able to extract higher wage increases than those who remained unskilled. In fact, there was a notable shift in the skill structure in this decade, with blacks increasingly moving into semi-skilled categories of employment, as is borne out by figure 26, which depicts changes in occupational distribution in the metal industry. Indeed, 60% of the improvement in black real wages was due to changes in skill level (McGrath 1990:102; see also LRS 1990:n.p.). The rise in skills amongst the black labour force also had, as can be seen from the following chapter, implications for trade union organization.

Thus, again, a large proportion of wage rises occurred

independently of, and/or predated strike action, although it is also possible that strikes may, in turn, affect wage levels. It is conceivable that a proportion of the wage rises enjoyed by (largely) semi-skilled and skilled African workers was the result of this relatively privileged grouping resorting to collective action to improve their material conditions. The nature of the possible relationship among skill levels, unionization and collective action is explored in the following chapter.

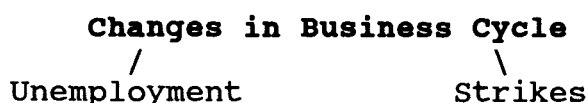
As Hibbs (1976:1043) notes, labour does not "suffer from any money illusion", but is very sensitive to fluctuations in the inflation rate. Strike action generally increased in those periods where the cost of living rose most rapidly. However, changes in the CPI often masked disproportionately large increases in basic foodstuffs, township rents and transport. In other words, workers may have been under even greater pressure to seek wage increases than shifts in the overall inflation rate might suggest. Even if overall real wages are rising, those in the lowest income brackets may in fact be worse off, if the costs of basic commodities have increased disproportionately. Thus wage rises may not only increase aspirations, but may also serve to conceal the deteriorating material circumstances of many.

The relationship between unemployment and strike action seems, if anything, to be the inverse of conventional wisdom. In the South African case, there is little evidence of a relationship between unemployment and strikes in the pre-1980 period. However, in the 1980s, rises in unemployment were matched by increases in strike action.

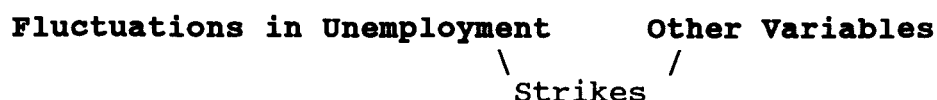
This seems to be the result of a combination of factors.

As noted earlier, it could be a consequence of the nature and functioning of informal networks of support, and the lack of an effective social welfare system. The latter seems to have been also the predominant cause of the 1980 pensions strikes. Also, it is possible that a new form of segmentation had emerged in the labour market, between members of the trade union movement and non-unionists. The former were in a far stronger position to push for pay increases. Any rises in unemployment as a result of pay increases would most affect the non-unionized, who lacked the organizational capacity to resist the retrenchment process. This would explain why both real wages and unemployment rose through most of the 1980s. The ongoing role of the unions in combatting retrenchments could also account for the large numbers of non-wage strikes in periods of high unemployment.

It could be argued that no relationship exists between unemployment and strikes, but that both were products of changes in the business cycle. This possible relationship in the 1980s is illustrated in the diagram below:



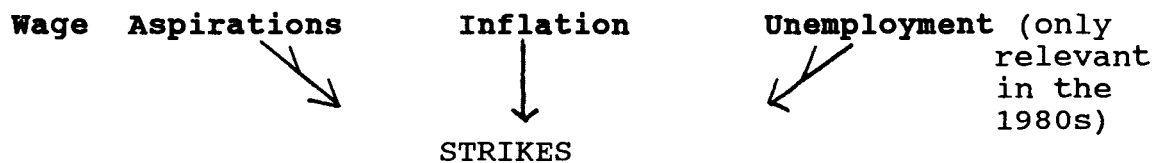
instead of:



However, as can be seen from table 12, there is no statistically

significant relationship between shifts in the business cycle and strikes in the 1980s. Thus, this hypothesis is incorrect: whilst there is a statistically significant relationship between unemployment and strikes in the 1980s, strikes and unemployment did not simultaneously follow shifts in the business cycle.

Thus the economic causes of strikes can be summarized as follows:

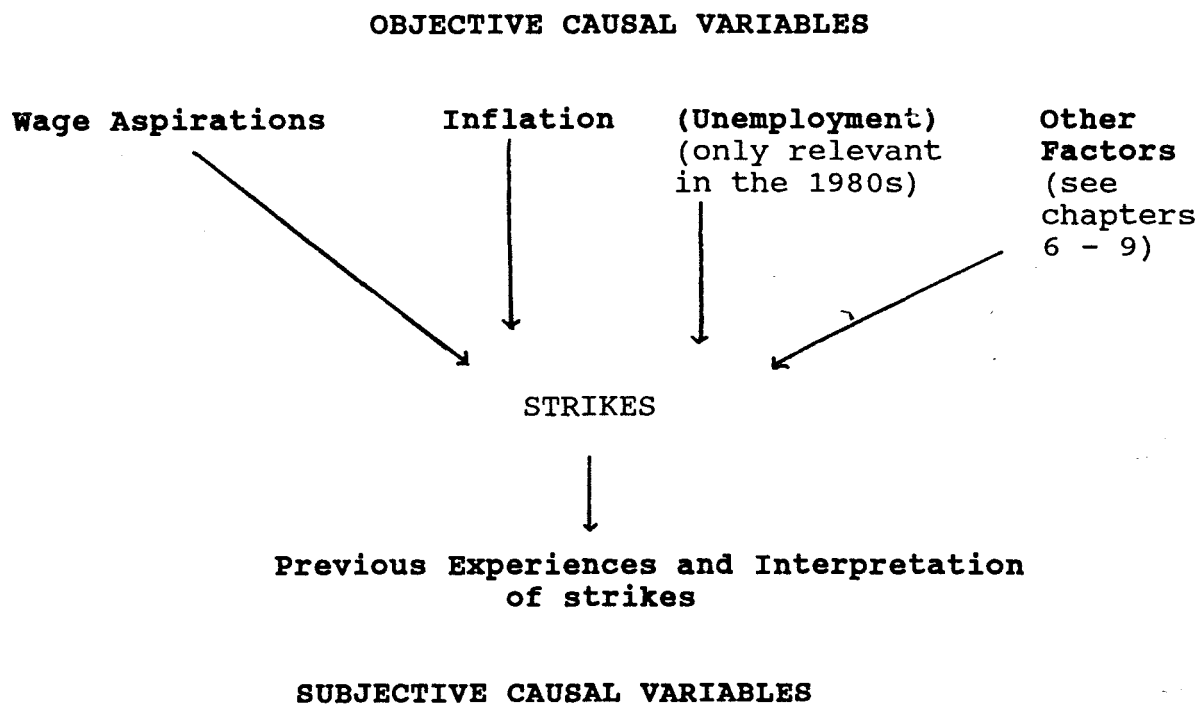


However, there is evidence that strikes are not only the product of objective economic and non-economic forces (such as the strength of the trade union movement), but also the result of more subjective factors. The latter would include workers' perceptions of previous industrial disputes. Strikes in South Africa tend to come in distinct waves, such as in the early 1970s and 1980s. It appears that successful strikes encourage workers in neighbouring factories also to resort to strike action (see, for example IIE 1974a:16-20).

Also of importance are regional variations. Broad general trends may be accentuated in some regions. For example, while pay rises were beginning to take place nationwide, wages were unusually low in Durban in 1973, with disproportionate transport cost increases (IIE 1974a: 16-20). Other circumstances unique to Durban included the activities of the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (a worker service organization) and the nature of

relations between such organizations and the KwaZulu authorities (see SALB 1974d:3-8). The result of all these factors was that Durban became the scene of an unprecedented wave of strikes.

Thus, a provisional model of strike causality should include the following:



There can be regional variations in subjective and objective causal variables. Furthermore, whilst there are clear general trends in strike causality, it is important to note that exceptions do exist. People may respond differently to the same pressures. In other words, as Giddens (1984:14) notes, people retain the capacity to act otherwise. For example, people may strike in situations of high inflation, where there is evidence of rising aspirations, but where there is little previous experience of striking (e.g. the 1973 Durban strikes); at other

times unusually large and long strikes may take place (e.g. 1987).

The ultimate decision to strike may not be made in terms of fixed criteria: it is rather the case that certain causal variables have a lessor or greater effect in specific situations. Workers are subject to a range of pressures, and the demands they express may shift away from the purely wage-related to more defensive issues in periods of organizational weakness.

Finally, there is the possibility that industrial action may be what Deleuze and Guattari (1988:1-10) refer to as rhizomatic. If the situation is not conducive to striking (e.g. a highly repressive environment, with limited previous exposure to strike action), it is possible that powerful grievances (e.g. the effects of inflation) may be manifest in more hidden forms of industrial conflict. An example of the latter would be low productivity. For example, during much of the 1950s and 1960s, there was "a general climate of little hope" (Davies 1978:143). Few strikes took place, and it was repeatedly argued that low wages were adversely affecting productivity (SAIRR 1958-9:215).

6.0

Conclusion

Strikes appear to be the product of a number of distinct causal variables. Whilst there are important regional variations, and occasional differences in response to the same pressures, there are some definite patterns in strike action. This is the case despite a number of general discontinuities, such as before and after the wage increases of the early 1970s. Prior to those

increases strikes were relatively uncommon, whereas industrial conflict reached unprecedented levels thereafter. In other words, while certain causal linkages are apparent throughout, the period under review was marked not only by common themes, but also by discontinuity. For example, the post-1972 and 1980 industrial relations environments were radically different from earlier epochs, although both represented a partial product of dramatic changes in wage levels and employment patterns. Clearly, a conceptual framework for understanding strikes in South Africa should include primarily economic factors such as wage aspirations (as a result of shifts in real wages), inflation, and, in some circumstances, unemployment.

However, it should be recognized that a range of non-economic factors could also affect the incidence of strikes. Other objective factors could include issues such as the relative strength of the trade union movement and labour legislation. Relevant subjective factors could include workers' interpretations of previous experiences of industrial conflict. It is the relationship between these factors and strikes that will form the primary focus of the following two chapters.

Endnotes

1. The word "Bantu" being now omitted from its title.
2. At least 304 036 Africans were still subject to Industrial Council Agreements, although they were not represented on the Councils, resulting in little pressure to increase wages form that quarter (Melter 1973:1).
3. Many employers felt that black workers did not mind low pay. For example, it was asserted that "they can scratch a reasonable living, the sort of living they like incidently, because they don't like the same kind of food we do" (Christian Concern

1974:1).

4. Up until the late 1960s, the gold price was fixed at \$35/oz., but by the 1970s, it had begun to rise significantly (Devereux 1983:45).

5. Indeed, the wage increases of 1973 did not reduce the wage gap, as a result of a substantial pay rise being granted to white mineworkers in June 1973, which effectively widened the wage gap (Randall 1973:26). Thus, despite their very rare use of the strike weapon, white workers remained in a relatively privileged position.

6. Almost 70% of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the Durban region were sole breadwinners, with approximately six dependents (Wages Commission 1973:n.p.).

7. However, as Kahn (1984:20) notes, inflation and unemployment remained unrelated in the South African case, and indeed there continued to be no consistent linkage between unemployment and strikes in the 1970s (see figures 2-3).

8. This was also a period of economic recession. For example, in a number of Natal plants, short time was introduced and widespread retrenchments took place (Sitas, 1984:26). This shifted the focus of the trade unions. As Sitas (1984:41) notes, the unions managed to slow the rate of retrenchment, making many employers "more conscious of the lay-off phase". Thus, disputes during this period were more likely to represent defensive action and consolidation, than attempts to make new gains (see Sitas 1984:41). The increasing prominence of the unions, initially more as an advisor to workers, and later as a full representative, will be evaluated in subsequent sections. However, it should be noted that the unions remained vulnerable and had very limited resources at their disposal.

9. As Schlemmer et al. (1983:4) note, fears of access to the funds and mistrust of the motives of companies administering pensions schemes were persistent concerns of workers.

10. It was in 1981 that the independent unions began to include the notion of a living wage in their general demands. During that year, FOSATU (1981b:n.p.) called for wage levels to be indexed to changes in the CPI, for a minimum wage of R2/hour and rejected attempts to establish an accurate empirical PDL or MEL. Such measures were as seen insensitive to the actual needs of workers, dealing with "non-existent families of five" (FOSATU 1981b:n.p.). This was probably a reflection of the growing strength and assertiveness of the unions, resulting in their increasing involvement in day-to-day shopfloor issues (see chapter 5). The issue of a living wage was to form the basis of a major COSATU campaign in the late 1980s (Economic Research Commission 1988:n.p.).

FOSATU's critique of measures of poverty also is important in that it reveals something of the limits of empirical numerical analysis. As early as 1973, Horner (1973:n.p.) noted that

research had revealed that the average size of families in Johannesburg were indeed larger than 5. More generally, one is dealing not only with hard data, but also with what it entails in terms of specific sets of social circumstances. In strikes in the 1980s, this distinction becomes particularly important. The effects of changes in material conditions are inherently bound up with both the specific local context and differing relations of power. This may result in, again, differing responses to the same broad trends.

11. The Port Elizabeth region had particularly high unemployment (Sarakinsky & Keenan 1986:24), yet even here this does not seem to have prevented increased numbers of strikes from taking place (see figure 21), providing additional evidence of the relationship between unemployment and strikes in the 1980s.

12. Furthermore, the sustained pay rises of the early-to-mid 1980s could have encouraged hopes of further increases, even when real wages had begun to decline.

SECTION 3: STATE, SOCIETY, UNIONS AND STRIKES

CHAPTER 5

**CHANGING PATTERNS IN UNION ORGANIZATION AND THE EFFECTS ON STRIKE
ACTION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE AND THE THEORETICAL
IMPLICATIONS THEREOF**

The relationship between trade unions and strikes is not necessarily only a uni-directional causal one: it also implicates factors such as the impact of the union movement (by means of measures such as strikes) on wages¹, as well as the possibility that strikes, may in turn facilitate unionization. The situation is rendered even more complex by the fact that union strength is relatively difficult to quantify, although some writers, such as Cronin (1979:17), have suggested that membership provides a useful index. However, in the South African context, few accurate records of union membership are available for the 1950s and 1960s, when many unions seem to have had a very low strike profile.

Indeed, it has been argued that labour is different from any other commodity, and can only be understood through descriptive methods (Offe 1985:173). Of crucial importance is representativeness - the question of who, and from what segments of the labour market, did the different trade unions actually represent. This chapter makes use of both descriptive and quantitative measures, although, as noted above, the latter are somewhat incomplete. This, and the fact that the policy and composition of the South African union movement have changed dramatically in the post-war period, makes descriptive evidence of particular value in comprehending the relationship between unions and strikes.

Assessing the changing nature of the South African trade unions over the period 1950 to 1990 is of crucial importance in reaching an overall theoretical understanding. As noted earlier, this period can be readily broken up into a series of distinct

epochs or discontinuities. Firstly, there is the period of the early to mid-1950s, when the trade union movement was in disarray. Secondly there is the 1955-1962 period, when SACTU played an important, albeit constrained and limited, role in mobilizing black workers. Thirdly, the years 1963-1972 were marked by little union activity. A fourth discontinuity is from 1973-1981, when the first independent black trade unions emerged and successfully entrenched their position despite state repression. Fifthly, from 1982-1990 the independent unions rapidly expanded, consolidated and, in several cases, combined organizationally, becoming a major socio-political actor. Finally, there is the post 1990-period, when, following rapid political changes, the unions again assumed a new role.

It can be argued that by providing an overview of the relationship between unions and strikes for each of these epochs, of the differences between the epochs, and of the underlying reasons for changes in the nature of union organization, certain broad trends may become apparent. Such an overview would encompass questions concerning shifts in union strategy, the changing subjective experiences of unionists and workers, and the relative strength of the union movement. Causal relationships between unions and strikes that persist through such disparate epochs would merit inclusion in the construction of an overall theoretical understanding of the nature of strikes.

1.0 Trade Unions and Strikes in the Early 1950s: The South African Experience and the Broader Implications Thereof

Most trade unions in 1950 were organized into the South African Trade and Labour Council (SATLC), a disparate body of trade unions ranging from the radical Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU) to various racially exclusivist unions (see SATLC 1951b:n.p.). Composed of many different unions, with widely divergent organizational cultures, the SATLC lacked a unifying set of principles and a clear programme of action (FCWU 1952:n.p.). The SATLC unions, which mostly represented a relatively privileged segment of the labour market (semi-skilled, skilled or racially privileged), and rarely embarked on strikes in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, as Ross & Hartman (Hibbs 1976:1051) note, trade unions may have a restraining effect. In other words, the relationship between unions and strikes may not only be a causal one, but also, in certain cases, a restraining one.

To the left of the SATLC lay the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU). The 1946 African miners' strike had resulted in a major defeat for the CNETU-affiliated African Mineworkers Union (AMWU) (Sutcliffe & Wellings n.d.:5), with that federation's membership dropping from a claimed 150 000 in 1945 to 17296 in 1950 (Lodge 1983:189)². As Sutcliffe and Wellings (n.d.:7) note, the failure of the strike dealt CNETU's morale a fatal blow, and brought to a head divisions within that union. This reflects the dualistic relationship between trade unions and strikes. Whilst unions may affect the propensity to resort

to strike action, strikes may also affect union organization. Unions alone do not cause strikes, whilst strikes can take place without affecting union organization. However, a union presence and the occurrence of a strike will affect each other³. As a result of the dearth of effective unions, the organizational vacuum in other regions was filled by a number of different types of union⁴. Again, this demonstrates that a union's propensity or, indeed, capacity to engage in strike action is a product not only of numerical strength, but also of internal organizational structure and the composition of its leadership.

As can be seen from figure 1, very few strikes took place in the early 1950s. The low levels of strike volume are a particular reflection of organizational weakness. When the occasional strike did take place, workers had little capacity for anything other than the shortest-lived protest action (see FCWU 1954:n.p.). However, a number of other factors can also be seen as contributing to this, including the stagnant nature of wage levels, which, as noted earlier, could have contributed to a climate where any action for change seemed unfeasible (see Davies 1978:145).

Nonetheless, certain of the CNETU unions, though having only limited resources and capacities for collective action, kept alive the idea of trade unionism, a role not dissimilar to that played by some sections of the ICU (see Bonner 1978:120). Such activity creates "leadership, linkages and experiences" on which future trade unions can be built (ibid.:120). In other words, the expansion of trade unions, as is the case with the incidence of strike action, may be partially the product of the previous

experiences of workers and their subjective interpretation thereof.

Attempts to organize black labour in the early 1950s were further weakened by a range of factors including political repression, rising black unemployment and declining real wages (SAIRR 1952-3:78; Lodge 1978:189). The latter, as noted earlier, could contribute to creating a climate of "little hope", where there seemed to be little possibility of improvement through recourse to collective action. Meanwhile, high unemployment could have had the effect of discouraging workers from joining unions when this might have resulted in a loss of employment⁵. It should be noted that, as a reflection of the limited, diverse and fragmented nature of the trade union movement at the time, not only is there limited overall information on trade union strengths, but there were also considerable regional variations in trade union strength⁶.

As a result of increasing discrimination and the introduction or threatened introduction of restrictive legislation, the racially-exclusivist trade unions within the SATLC were increasingly unwilling to co-exist in the same organization as the seven unaffiliated member unions (Karis & Carter 1977a:55; SATLC 1951b:n.p.). The SATLC proved particularly incapable of developing a coherent policy towards the Suppression of Communism Act (Lewis 1984:168). Partially in response to this, 13 white-exclusivist member unions disaffiliated (SATLC 1951a:n.p.). This led to the SATLC leadership calling an "all-in-all" conference, where they offered to confine the federation's activities to "purely economic and

trade union issues" (ibid.:n.p.). Given the government's hostility to black trade unions, this separation would have doubtlessly meant considerably diminished support for the African affiliates.

2.0 The Emergence and Rise of SACTU

Ultimately, the divisions in the SATLC proved too great and it was resolved to form a new umbrella federation, the Trade Union Council of South Africa (SATUC), later known as TUCSA (FCWU 1955b:n.p.). TUCSA excluded blacks, but urged its members to retain contact through liaison committees (see Lewis 1984:173). Fourteen SATLC unions rejected this compromise, several of which joined to form the Cape Workers' Council of Action, a steering body dedicated to the organization of lowly-paid workers and the repeal of laws which "kept people in poverty, ill-health and repression" (Cape Workers Council of Action n.d.:n.p.; Workers Unite 1955:n.p.).

The Council of Action, together with other former TLC affiliates combined with what remained of CNETU to form the South African Congress of Trade Unions, originally having eight affiliated unions⁷. However, SACTU's main power base and principal financial support lay in the parallel Food and Canning and Textile Unions (see FCWU 1955b:n.p.). Nonetheless, SACTU represented a consolidation and revitalization of union organization, and whilst operating in an extremely constrained environment, it indeed represented a new philosophy of more assertive unionism.

While the wage issue was identified as a powerful means of mobilizing workers, epitomised in the pound-a-day campaign (FCWU 1957:n.p.), it rarely resulted in conventional instances of strike action. As noted earlier, poor material conditions in themselves tend to produce a climate of "little hope", not conducive to strike action. However, rising political mobilization by the late 1950s may have increased hopes for change from that direction, resulting in the stayaways of the late 1950s. SACTU's inherent organizational limitations and the constraints imposed by the environment in which it operated made it extremely difficult to mount sustained strike action. Thus, there is some evidence to support Shorter and Tilly's (1974:335) assertion that strikes are linked to social structures and political participation. This issue will be more fully explored in the subsequent chapter.

In the period surrounding SACTU's launch, a series of comparatively spontaneous strikes was (unofficially) recorded (Sitas et al. 1984:5). This provides some substantiation for the official statistics, which indicate a modest increase in strike action (figure 1), albeit that most strikes remained comparatively short-lived and involved relatively few workers. Indeed, strike volume was generally lower than in the early 1950s. This is borne out by independent evidence of various disputes (see chapter 7). These disputes were not characterized by a high degree of workplace organization or prior planning, or for that matter, union involvement (ibid.). Consequently, realignments in the trade union movement do not seem to have necessarily assisted collective action in the workplace.

However, the episodic growth of SACTU and its involvement in the often successful stayaways of the late 1950s and early 1960s reveal something of an underlying discontent, also manifest in low productivity (see chapter 3).

Lambert (1988:32) asserts that SACTU constituted a totally new form of unionism, redefining the trade union role away from the conventional Western model to one of political or social movement unionism. This new form of unionism would have serious implications in terms of shopfloor organization and, consequently, the capacity to engage in strike action. The ANC, whilst welcoming the launch of SACTU, argued that it would be most successful if the ANC members "in the factories, on the farm, in the gold mine compounds, the hostels, the unemployed and in the sugar plantations of Natal" became SACTU's organizational base (ANC 1958:236).

Categories such as the unemployed and farm workers are notoriously difficult to organize (Bonner 1978:118), and the lack of a strong workplace focus and a blurring of identity among different components of the charterist movement constrained SACTU's ability to deal with workplace issues (see Feit 1975:95-105). However, operating in a highly repressive climate, SACTU had few feasible options other than the route it chose. Again, the relationship between unions and strikes is not simply, as Cronin (1979:17) asserts, a product of waves of unionization and rising union membership, but also of the ultimate strategy the union may adopt.

Nonetheless, once strikes had broken out, the SACTU unions gave at least moral support, in sharp contrast to many other

groupings of unions active at the time⁸. However, the unions seem to have experienced considerable difficulty in offering more material support, although there seem to have been some attempts to build union organization in the aftermath of strikes (FCWU 1955a:n.p.). In practice, SACTU remained most active in the broader political arena (see Mandela 1956a:249), while continuing to use the wage issue as a mechanism for mobilization. During February 1957 SACTU called for a minimum wage of one pound per day and coined the slogan "asinamali", we have no money (Feit 1975:107). The inability of SACTU unions to enforce this demand through individual instances of strike action resulted in a widespread use of alternative strategies such as stayaways and labelling (e.g. the boycott of "Nationalist" goods). Whilst SACTU's claimed membership had reached 53000 by 1961, this did not result in a proportionate increase in strikes, although, as Sutcliffe and Wellings note (n.d.:9), much of this strength could have been mobilized in the stayaways of the late 1950s.

Thus, there is little evidence of a direct relationship between SACTU's numerical growth and strike action. On the one hand, much of the involvement of the SACTU unions in strikes seems to have been post-hoc, confined to the offering of limited moral and organizational support once disputes had broken out. One of the few exceptions to this rule was the role of the FCWU during the Langeberg strike of the late 1950s, when the union was able to offer some material assistance to strikers. On the other hand, there is little doubt that factors such as rising aspirations, with deteriorating material conditions, contributed not only to the rise in strikes in the late 1950s, but also to

support for other SACTU initiatives, such as the stayaways. The mixed results of many strikes, as well as several of the stayaways (see subsequent sections), and the subsequent wave of state repression may have resulted in workers having negative (subjective) perceptions of the possibilities of collective action, including strikes, which could provide a partial explanation for the decline in strikes in the early 1960s⁹. However, SACTU did leave as its legacy a culture of resistance, which could be built on in subsequent unionization initiatives.

SACTU's limited base on the shopfloor resulted in the federation's being severely weakened in the post-Sharpeville wave of repression, with 160 SACTU officials being arrested between 1960 and 1966 (Lodge 1978:197). This further limited the capacity of its member unions to engage in sustained and co-ordinated action, although recourse was still made to the stayaway weapon (see chapter 6). Again, this supports Shorter and Tilly's (1974:335) argument that strikes are linked to both social structures and political participation. In an attempt to broaden its base, SACTU attempted to establish a "United Trade Union Front Committee" with FOFATUSA¹⁰, in order to engage in mass anti-government action at the workplace and beyond. However, FOFATUSA failed to attend the committee's meetings, leading to the initiative's collapse.

The TWIUs had been seriously weakened by a series of unsuccessful strikes, most notably the dispute at Amato textiles (Bonner and Lambert 1987:361), and what was left of these parallel unions withdrew from SACTU in 1964, arguing that the federation was no longer capable of fulfilling its role as a

result of detention and banning orders. SACTU unions played very little role in strikes in the early 1960s, even in a post-hoc way, such as was relatively common in the 1950s. However, despite being possibly a "junior partner in the Congress Alliance", SACTU made a number of (short-lived) organizational gains in the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in the engineering sector (FOSATU 1985a).

Furthermore, it has been argued that SACTU's political involvement led to increased pressures for the reform of the industrial relations system (Kaplan & Morris 1981:104). Yet despite these limited advances, SACTU had effectively collapsed by 1965 as a result of state repression. Re-established in exile, SACTU finally disbanded in 1990 (Roux 1990:47-51). Thus, again, the role of the unions is bound up with political structures and participation (Shorter and Tilly 1974:334). The relationship between unions and strikes is affected not only by union membership, but also by wider relations of power in society. Despite SACTU's collapse, there was a limited increase in strikes in the mid-1960s, strikes which were relatively short and spontaneous and where there was little evidence of union organization (see chapter 7).

3.0 Constrained Unionism: TUCSA in the 1960s

The SATUC unions decided to permit black trade unions to affiliate in 1962 and to change its acronym to TUCSA. This led to a wave of disaffiliations from FOFATUSA, leading to its disbandment in 1965 (Horrell n.d.:32). However, TUCSA decided

to exclude black unions again in 1969, as a result of government pressure and a host of resignations from its more conservative affiliates (see TUACC Council 1974:n.p.). Already by December 1967, 6 out of TUCSA's 9 African affiliates had left the federation (TUACC Council 1974:n.p.). TUCSA's leadership defended the decision to exclude Africans, by claiming that the very survival of the federation was at stake (Financial Mail 21/2/1969). There is little evidence of any TUCSA or FOFATUSA involvement in strikes at this time. Indeed, TUCSA seemed generally opposed to making use of the strike weapon and frequently rebuffed requests for help from SACTU affiliates who were involved in supporting strikers in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see SACTU 1961b;1961c). Again, the relationship between unions and strikes seems not only a function of numerical or financial strength (the TUCSA unions had considerably more financial resources than the SACTU ones at this time), but also of more subjective factors such as union strategy, and the previous experiences of disputes (see *ibid.*).

Some indication of the relative strengths of the union movement is available for 1969, as per the table below:

Federation	SACLA		TUCSA		Unaffiliated	
	No.TUs	Memb	No.TUs	Memb.	No.TUs	Memb
Whites	27	183781	13	33088	58	148985
Mixed	-	-	25	129830	10	20093
Col/Indian	-	-	23	23560	16	27550
Africans	-	-	-	-	14	16040

(source: Horrell 1969:44)

As can be seen, the bulk of union members were white and concentrated in generally conservative unions and federations, bodies which made little use of the strike weapon. This, and

the relatively low numbers of unionized African workers accounts for the lack of any evidence of union involvement in strikes at this time. In the manufacturing sector, 87% of all workers were not unionized (Financial Mail 4/8/1967)¹¹.

Thus, it seems that the trade unions in the 1960s generally gave little material support to strikers, and rarely instigated strikes. This seems a product of state policy, trade union strategy, and the numerical weakness of many of the more militant unions. There was a modest increase in strikes in the mid-1960s, a period when the union movement was in total disarray. Thus, strikes are not always a product of union activity. Furthermore, not only the incidence of strikes, but also the success of the unions seems partially a product of the (subjective) experiences of workers. Whilst negative experiences of both may hinder future unionization drives, such experiences may also have the effect of raising consciousness, thus ultimately facilitating the process of collective organization (Bonner 1978:120). There is little doubt that this period represented a new era or discontinuity in industrial conflict. Although few SACTU unions were in a position to offer sustained assistance to striking workers prior to that federation's collapse, striking workers in the mid- to late 1960s were in a far weaker position, having virtually no organizational back-up.

It was only in the early 1970s that the union movement was revived. One of the first cautious moves came from NUSAS, following the decision at its 1971 National Congress to establish Wages and Economics Commissions at all its member campuses (see FOSATU n.d.b:n.p.). Initially, these Commissions were concerned with gathering wage data for presentation to Wage Board hearings and information on the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) (see Hirsch 1979:34). Assisted by a sympathetic TUCSA official, Harriet Bolton, they established the GFWBF at the end of September 1972¹².

Despite state repression, the Fund boasted over 18 000 members by 1974 (Ensor 1974b:52). In addition, 4000 members of trade unions the GFWBF helped establish continued to receive funeral benefits through the Fund (ibid.:52). It remained committed to establishing new industrial unions whenever it had gained enough members in a particular industry (FOSATU 1979b:n.p.). This industrial orientation would have strategic implications in focusing attention primarily towards workplace concerns, which would have direct effects on the propensity to resort to strike action.

The Fund benefitted from the mobilizing effects of the Durban strike wave. At the time of the strike, interviews with workers revealed that many felt "if we get together as a trade union, and the same weapon is used....there is nothing they can do" (IIE n.d.b.:n.p.). Thus, the relationship between unions and strikes can be two-way. Whilst in some case unions may affect

the incidence of strikes, it is possible that successful strikes may benefit union organization.

Meanwhile, in the Western Cape, UCT students assisted by an ex-SACTU organizer established the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau. Strongly committed to non-racialism, the Bureau still had an all-African membership in 1976 (Horner 1976:74). Horner (1976:74) argues that this was due to the extreme vulnerability of African labour in the Western Cape, owing to the coloured labour preference policy, which consigned most Africans to unskilled or semi-skilled status. However, it can be argued that this vulnerability was not the only factor determining the success of this unionization drive, but also more subjective factors such as the previous experiences of workers (particularly if the role of ex-SACTU officials is considered [Maree 1987b:3]) and rising aspirations. In addition, the success of the Natal workers and the Durban strike wave could well have helped spread the idea of collective organization and action to the Cape¹³.

The University of Witwatersrand SRC Wages Commission (encouraged by a number of academics) and a group of black workers established the Industrial Aid Society (IAS). As was the case with the WPWAB, the IAS was a worker service organization, designed to advise workers, provide funeral benefits and assist in the formation of trade unions. The IAS had only mixed success, its major breakthrough being the establishment of the Transvaal branch of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) (Maree 1987b:4). In September 1976, the Council for Industrial Workers of the Witwatersrand (CIWW) was established as a co-ordinating body between MAWU in the Transvaal and the IAS (FOSATU

1979b:n.p.). It was only in the late 1970s that MAWU in the Transvaal played a significant role in strike action, with, as noted in chapter 7, that union being a key force behind the 1981 East Rand strike wave.

Three years before the formation of the IAS, in 1971, a number of former officials from TUCSA's defunct African Affairs Section sympathetic to the formation of black trade unions established the Urban Training Project (UTP) (FOSATU 1979b:n.p.).

The UTP received some financial backing from church groupings. Within a short time of its launch, the UTP had revived two African trade unions and was servicing a third (Maree 1987b:4)¹⁴. The Project then went on to establish seven more unions (ibid.:4). Its 1973 constitution defined its role as providing educational, organizational, administrative and advisory services (SAIRR 1974:323).

By 1976 the UTP had a membership of 19338, servicing ten unions (Financial Mail 19/11/1976). During that year, it assisted in the formation of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) (Financial Mail 4/6/1976). The new union soon signed on 500 members (ibid.). The UTP unions had by this stage established an ad hoc co-ordinating body, the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU). However, these new unions seem only to have played an active role vis-a-vis strikes in the late 1970s. This provides further evidence of the two-way relationship between strikes and unionization. There is little doubt that these initiatives built on and greatly benefitted from the resurgence of strike action on a national level in 1974. The early 1970s

represented the start of a totally new era in union organization. Although some of the early unions were assisted by former SACTU activists (see Maree 1987b:3), and were able to build on the legacy of that federation, in many respects the new, independent unions represented a distinct break with the past. Both union membership and the incidence of strikes were to reach unprecedented levels in the 1970s.

4.0 The Formation of the First Natal Independent Unions

Stemming from the activities of the GFWBF, a number of new unions were established in Natal during the 1973-4 period. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) was founded in Durban on the 28th April 1973. MAWU initially had a membership of 2327, distributed through the iron, steel and motor industries (Ensor 1974b:46).

In practice, MAWU was originally concentrated at two factories, Alcan and Scottish Cables (Financial Mail 30/5/1973). MAWU's rapid gains seem to have prompted Alcan management to increase the basic pay rate for unskilled workers to R18/week (Financial Mail 28/9/1973). This was the rate MAWU had requested, although Alcan management denied any connection between the demand and the increase (ibid.). This is only one of several examples where the new unions succeeded in raising pay levels. Ironically, such increases could have had the effect of further fuelling aspirations, and thus indirectly contributing to the incidence of strikes.

Sympathetic officials from the Garment Workers Union

provided some assistance, helping MAWU establish a relationship with the managements of Defy and Rowen (Ensor 1974b:46). These officials also gave some help to the Union of Clothing and Allied Workers¹⁵. By 1975, MAWU had 5 000 members (Webster 1987a:18). This again provides evidence of the complexity of the relationship between unions and strikes. Whilst some unions might not engage in industrial conflict they may indirectly assist in the emergence of more militant unions.

During 1972, the long-established Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU), a former SACTU affiliate, was revitalized, when its conservative organizer was replaced by David Henson, a former University of Natal student, who was involved in the Wages Commission and the GFWBF (Hirsch 1979:35). In February 1973, Halton Cheadle, again a Wages Commission and GFWBF activist, took over as organizer. Cheadle immediately stepped up recruiting for the GFWBF (amongst Africans) and TWIU (amongst Indians and coloureds). Hence, trade union policy (and consequent policies with regard to striking) was again demonstrated to be a dynamic process, a product of the subjective understandings of both leadership and members. In this case, a crucial shaping role was provided by intellectuals, who brought a new, more dynamic, approach into the union movement.

Most strikes between January and March 1973 were concentrated in the metal and textile industries, immediately prior to the launch or revival of the Natal unions (Hansard no. 11 1973). These unions were initially concentrated in the Durban region, where most strikes took place during these months. Thus, again, it seems that not only is there a possible relationship

between union strength and the incidence of strikes, but also a reverse one - successful strike action might encourage unionization. The GFWBF was forced to transform itself into a trade union, the Transport and General Workers Union, after four officials were charged with contravening the Friendly Societies Act (GFWBF 1975 n.p.; see also TUACC n.d.). This is-but one of many examples where, as Shorter and Tilly (1974:335) note, the form and composition of the union movement, and, consequently, strikes, was affected by state policy and strategies.

At the 1973 TWIU national congress, it was decided to establish a parallel union, the National Union of Textile Workers (the TWIUs previous parallel affiliate, the African Textile Workers Industrial Union, being defunct). During September 1973, the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) was formally established at an inaugural meeting (NUTW 1973:n.p.). At five factories, workers were strongly enough organized to elect representatives. The new union had an initial strength of 800 members, but this had swelled to over 5000 representing 25% of textile workers in Durban by 1974 (see Hirsch 1979:37; Ensor 1974b:49). This expansion could also have been partially a result of the Durban strike wave, and the subjective interpretations of workers of this event.

Less successful was the Furniture and Timber Workers Union. Started in February 1974, it only succeeded in attracting 300 members (Ensor 1974b:49). This was due in part to the limited numbers of Africans employed in this industry (they were outnumbered by 3:1), but was also a result of dissatisfaction with the GFWBF, which many workers felt had failed to perform the

normal activities of a trade union (ibid.:49). In addition, there seemed to be considerable financial mismanagement (TUACC 1976b:n.p.). Meanwhile, during late 1973, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) began recruiting, although it was only officially founded in early 1974 (Webster 1987a:17; CWIU n.d.:n.p.). Most of the new union's 600 members were employees of African Explosives, whilst the Furniture and Timber organizer provided some administrative assistance (Ensor 1974b:51). By 1975, the CWIU's ranks had swelled to 2 900 (CWIU n.d.:n.p.). All the TUACC unions faced certain financial difficulties, with some unions being unable to meet their running costs (TUACC 1975b:n.p.)

The new unions were, in some cases, handicapped by the reluctance of older workers to join because of unhappy experiences with trade unions in the past (Webster 1987a:21). Thus, experiences of previous trade unions and perceptions thereof might be either positive or negative, both directly affecting the propensity of workers to engage in trade union activity and/or striking. Most employers were opposed to granting recognition to the new trade unions.

By 1975, only one recognition agreement had been concluded - when Smith & Nephew recognized the NUTW (ibid.:29). Nonetheless, these unions actively assisted striking workers and encouraged workers to press for wage increases and improved benefits, and it seems likely that the relatively large numbers of strikes taking place during 1974 (see figure 1) was, in the case of the Natal region at least, a reflection of increased union activity (see chapter 7). Once again the relationship

between unions and strikes was two-way. Unionization could follow strikes, yet union organization could facilitate larger and longer strikes (see figure 1 on the increases in strike volume in the 1970s and 1980s).

A further issue of relevance is the limited penetration of the unions at the time. Whilst recording impressive membership gains, the new unions only succeeded in mobilizing on average 10% of African employees in their relevant sectors by the close of 1974 (Ruskin College 1974:n.p.). Important exceptions included the United Automobile, Rubber & Allied Workers Union and the National Union of Textile Workers, with 900 out of 5000 and 5700 out of 20 000, respectively (ibid.).

5.0 The Formation of TUACC

Shortly after the formation of the five Natal-based trade unions, became clear that there was a need to co-ordinate their activities. The Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) was originally established as a liaison body between the new trade unions and the KwaZulu government (SALB, 1974d:2). The TUACC unions were all committed to non-racialism and factory-level organization (SALB 1979:2). In view of the lack of co-operation of many employers and the open hostility of government, during many disputes workers had called on pro-union KwaZulu councillor Barney Dladla, or KwaZulu "urban ambassador" Ngobese, to mediate. It was felt that the formation of TUACC would formalize this contact (Fisher 1974:2)¹⁶.

However, there is little doubt that TUACC was also brought

into being to fulfil a co-ordinating and facilitating role for inter-union contact and co-operation. This side of TUACC's activities was played down in the early years for fear of state repression. There was a pressing need for such a formation. TUCSA had proved generally incapable of looking after the needs of black workers, despite "making periodic statements in favour of black trade unions" (Fisher 1974:2). Again, the relationship between the unions and strike action should not only be seen in terms of the numerical strength of unions, but also of the type of union and the strategy its leadership followed.

The formation of TUACC and the Durban unions did not reduce industrial conflict, but rather resulted in larger and probably better-organized strikes. Hyman (1975a:63) argues that this was due to the coincidence of race and class conflict. However, a range of other factors need to be considered. Firstly, there are regional dynamics. Whilst there is evidence that in 1973 wages in Durban were lower than in most other regions (see chapter 7), there was far less of an organizational presence in East London, where material conditions were even worse. Strike waves took place in both Durban and East London, although in the case of the former, it was followed by a series of well-organized strikes. Geographical location and hence regional dynamics remain an important factor in understanding strikes.

Secondly, intra-organizational dynamics should be considered. In Durban, the militancy that was a product of rising aspirations and the success of many of the Durban strikes was channelled into a number of generally complementary bodies, mostly the TUACC unions, in contrast with the PWV region, where

the new unions were already organizationally deeply divided, between the IAS/MAWU, the black-consciousness BAWU (see below) and the UTP unions.

6.0 State Repression and the Trade Unions

During 1974, Dennis Davies and three other trade unionists involved in TUACC were banned. These bannings seriously disrupted TUACC's organization, but, as can be seen below, hastened the Council's decentralization of decision-making, thus allowing more input for directly-elected worker representatives. TUACC had a rapidly-expanding organizational base. Whilst strike totals declined, in Natal the TUACC unions continued to play a central role in many disputes (see Mawbey 1975:52-60;1976:40-55), although greater attention seems to have been accorded to consolidating earlier gains. Again, this provides evidence of the linkages between the nature of broader political structures and the incidence of strike action (Shorter and Tilly 1974:335).

In November 1976, during the post-Soweto-uprising wave of repression, 26 individuals directly or indirectly involved in the trade union movement (SALB 1978a:5) were also banned. These included Loet Douwes Dekker and Eric and Jean Tyacke of the UTP, and MAW organizers Gavin Anderson and Sipho Khubeka (Financial Mail 19/11/1976). In addition, the bannings led to the TWIU head office breaking off relations with the NUTW (Webster 1987a:23).

The TWIU claimed that it was opposed to the NUTW working with outside bodies such as the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE). Thus, the relationship between the unions and industrial

conflict was partially bound up with both union policy and intra-union rivalries.

The unions were further weakened by the economic slump of the mid-1970s, exacerbated by disinvestment in the wake of the Soweto uprising. As noted earlier, the rate of increase of black real wages began to slow. This could have reduced aspirations for further increases, which might in turn have not only reduced strikes, but also limited the capacity of the unions to mobilize workers. This point will be further explored later.

Several more conservative employers used the disarray in the union movement to mount something of a counter-offensive. For example, in Durban, soon after the bannings, Frametex began dismissing known trade union members (Financial Mail, 26/11/1976). The Durban unions did not replace the banned office bearers, but instead accelerated the process of decentralizing decision-making (ibid.). The UTP hurried to replace the banned officials (ibid.). Meanwhile, the WPWAB was fully functional again by April 1977 (Maree 1987b:5). The Bureau soon gave birth to a fully independent general trade union, the Western Province General Workers Union, committed to full participation on the shopfloor, with democratic elections for office bearers (WPGWU n.d.:n.p.). Despite (or because of) high unemployment and the effects of the late 1970s recession, which were particularly severe in the Western Cape (see ISER 1986:29), the GWU continued to expand into the early 1980s.

As can be seen from figure 1, strike totals dropped dramatically in the years 1976-1978, although there is evidence that the incidence of strikes may have been somewhat under-

reported during these years (Erwin 1990). Whilst the relationship between the union movement and strikes remained a complex one, being both reciprocal and bound up with the previous experiences of workers and trade union strategy and policy, there is little doubt that repression weakened the ability of the unions to engage in collective action.

7.0 The New Political Unions: BAWU and SAAWU

The 1970s also saw the emergence of a number of overtly political unions with formal links to political organizations. The Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU) was founded by Black Consciousness-orientated students on the Reef as an umbrella union dedicated towards organizing all industrial workers (Financial Mail 9/11/1973). However, BAWU soon encompassed workers who did not necessarily support Black Consciousness, leading to BAWU's transformation to the non-racial SAAWU in 1979¹⁷.

During March 1980, a new branch office was opened in East London, under the guidance of organizer T. Gweta (Rand Daily Mail 31/10/1980)¹⁸. In five months the branch's membership swelled from 10 000 to 15 000 (ibid.), building on the activities of an earlier worker service organization, Young Christian Workers (L.J. 1993). The revitalized union played a pivotal role in many strikes in the region (see Morris 1982:18-27; Roux 1984:26-28). In many cases, these strikes represented spontaneous outbursts from the shopfloor, with SAAWU involvement only being post-hoc (L.J. 1993). Major strikes included strikes at the Mdantsane Special Organization (a construction firm), the SATV Company,

Raylite, Border Boxes, Turner Brothers, Johnson & Johnson, Wilson Rowntree (two disputes), Everite, and Berkshire (Maree 1987c:38). Most of these disputes were not over wages (the chief cause of strikes nationally at this time), but rather over trade union and disciplinary matters. This would indicate both the influence of the union (hence the union-related disputes) and the economically-depressed nature of the region which served to limit perceptions of the possibility of successful strikes for increased pay, resulting in a proportionately-greater number of more defensive strikes.

The Ciskeian authorities waged a concerted campaign against SAAWU in the early 1980s. During 1981, 69 SAAWU members were imprisoned in the Ciskei (Star 15/6/1981). In addition, a large number of ex-Wilson Rowntree workers were briefly arrested following the dispute at that factory (Star 12/6/1981). Meanwhile, the South African authorities sent a circular to firms in East London, urging them to draw up lists of potential strike breakers and take a firm line against SAAWU (Star 10/6/1981), whilst several SAAWU leaders based in South Africa were detained (L.J. 1993). Whilst SAAWU membership rapidly grew from 5000 to 20 000, SAAWU was soon weakened by oppression in both South Africa and the Ciskei (see Rand Daily Mail 10/11/1981). Ciskeian Chief Minister Lennox Sebe warned the unions "to stop their bluffs - you cannot tell me they are more interested in my people than I am" (WIP 1981b: 50). It was clear that Ciskeian authorities were implacably opposed not only to SAAWU's political stance, but also to its conventional activities of workplace organization. By 1985, SAAWU began the process of reorganizing

on more conventional lines, demarcating its membership into industrial sectors (Post 27/3/1985). However, SAAWU never recovered its strength of the early 1980s and soon disbanded to assist in the formation of broad industrial unions.

8.0 Worker Representation on the Mines

Throughout the 1970s, African workers on the mines did not have any union representation. Despite this, both strikes and more rhizomatic forms of industrial conflict increased on the mines during this decade (see chapter 7). The latter could have been the product of both a generally repressive environment and the lack of any effective mechanism to represent workers. Indeed, it is possible that the absence of a union may affect not only the incidence of strikes, but also the form industrial conflict might take.

9.0 The Formation of FOSATU and CUSA

By the late 1970s, the various union groupings began unity talks in the hope of establishing a single co-ordinating federation. CCOBTU withdrew from the initial March 1977 talks, as it opposed the presence of the IIE and the WPWAB (SAIRR 1977:290). However, all but one of the CCOBTU unions boycotted later talks, ostensibly because they received their invitations late (Financial Mail 16/9/1979), but most probably because of ideological differences (see TUACC 1977). These divisions in the union movement ultimately persisted, determining the

composition of the unions and their attitudes to strikes well into the 1990s.

By 1979, there were increasing tensions within CCOBTU over political and organizational questions. This led to two unions splitting, with the majority of both unions leaving the Committee (SFAWU 1983:n.p.). Two additional unions disaffiliated and sought admission to the unity talks taking place (FOSATU 1979a:n.p.). Subsequently, they, the TUACC unions and the motor unions who had recently merged as the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) united to form the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in April 1979 (Isisebenzi July 1979). The new federation comprised of 12 trade unions representing 45 000 workers (SAIRR 1978:266). The rump of CCOBTU, with the exception of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, went on to form the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) on 14 September 1980. CUSA's estimated membership at its launch was 30 000 (CUSA 1980:n.p.). CUSA (1980:n.p.) stressed the need for both "realistic wages" and the principle of black leadership. However, this seemed to be without the same level of emphasis on factory-level organization (or factory level struggles) as the FOSATU unions.

In its first month of operation, CUSA's membership increased by 28% to 35700, with its paid-up membership doubling, to 19000 (Rand Daily Mail 11/3/1981). Meanwhile, FOSATU's membership increased from 45 000 to just under 60 000, whilst its paid-up membership increased from 20 000 to 32 000 (Rand Daily Mail 11/3/1981). However, FOSATU unions seem to have had a far higher profile with regard to striking than the CUSA unions. Again, the

relationship between unions and strikes is affected not only by numerical strength, but also by the type of union concerned¹⁹.

During 1981, FOSATU records indicate that the main causes of strikes where FOSATU was involved were wages (36 strikes), but other causes included management-worker relations (10 strikes), trade union recognition (10 strikes), pensions and working conditions (four each) (FOSATU 1982a:n.p.). Thus, trade union recognition in itself was becoming an important cause of industrial conflict. In particular, increased strikes took place in the East Rand (see above) and Natal (where high numbers of wage strikes took place). Significantly, MAWU had also made significant membership gains in the Pinetown district, at least partially owing to its continued reliance on plant-level bargaining, successfully pushing for pay increases of up to 300% (Sitas 1983:1-2). The new federations represented the consolidation of the unionization drives of the 1970s and, indeed, ushered in another distinct period of industrial relations, one marked by an established, effective union movement, and endemic strike action on a national basis.

10.0 General Trends in Union Membership and Strike Action

As can be seen from figure 15, the main cause of strikes in the 1980s was wages, followed by discipline and trade union issues. The official statistics indicate union matters becoming an important strike trigger, reflecting the same broad trends as were apparent in the FOSATU statistics for 1980. Furthermore,

as Bonner (1983:16-36) notes, the role of the unions, and the increasing organizational support they could offer, would have the effect of encouraging workers to adopt more assertive bargaining strategies and to resort to strike action. As noted earlier, the incidence and course of even spontaneous strikes could be influenced by the building and strengthening of union shopfloor organization. Furthermore, a major limitation of official statistics is that strikes are often triggered by multiple demands, with only one major demand being recorded.

However, they do indicate the importance of the role of unions vis-a-vis strikes, although it can be argued that increasing union strength, and the rise of shopfloor organization, which would impact on the underlying power relationships in the workplace (Flanders 1970:25), greatly strengthened the hand of strikers.

Howe (1984:5) notes that the strike leaders for the period 1979 to 1982 were MAWU, SAAWU, NAAWU, NUTW and FCWU. In other words, certain unions were proven to be more intrinsically strike-prone. Whilst both SAAWU and MAWU had been involved in mass recruiting, the other three unions expanded somewhat less rapidly (SALDRU 1991:n.p.). Thus, the relationship between unions and strikes should not only be seen, as Cronin (1979:17) asserts, in terms of numerical mobilization, but also in terms of more subjective factors. Unlike the 1970s, the continued expansion of the trade unions in the 1980s did not parallel increasing black employment in the manufacturing sector. For example, one of the fastest growing trade unions in the 1980s was the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (SALDRU 1991:n.p.), despite

only very limited increases in employment in this sector (figure 24). In other words, the penetration of the unions had increased. A rising percentage of the workforce was now unionized, with far-reaching implications for strike action.

11.0 The Rise of the Independent Unions and Wage Levels

Consequently, from modest beginnings, the independent unions became a force to be reckoned with by the late 1970s. This raises the question as to whether the unions had any direct effect on wage levels during the 1970s. At first, it may seem that a strong connection exists between wage rises and the rise of the unions in the 1970s. For example, in the metal, textile and electrical industries, there were important rises both in real wages and trade union membership (see figure 25; Financial Mail 28/7/1978).

Conversely, in the clothing industry, limited independent union growth was matched by only modest rises in wage levels (ibid.). However, there seems to be no connection between changes in wage levels and union strength in the chemical, paper, furniture, rubber and leather industries (ibid.). A further factor to consider is that the most significant changes in black real wages took place in the 1972-5 period (see figure 6). During 1972, when black real wages began their upward path, only the first cautious attempts had been made to establish worker service organizations.

As noted above, it seems that rises in strike action take place shortly after a general rise in wage levels begins. In

other words, a rise in wages creates enhanced aspirations, which cannot be fulfilled except through strike action. Rises in wages in one sector, for example mining, may create aspirations and encourage strike action in manufacturing. It seems most feasible that the general climate of heightened aspirations and militancy may well have encouraged the rise of trade unions, rather than vice-versa. However, this should not be seen as a totally one-way process.

As noted earlier, in several cases, management were prompted to increase wage levels when confronted with an independent union establishing itself at plant level. Although the 1973 Durban strike wave was a relatively spontaneous happening, there was some evidence of cautious behind-the-scenes assistance by members of the first worker service groupings (see Webster 1986a:132).

12.0 The Unions and Labour Market Segmentation

Related to this is the question of the unions' constituency, and to what extent the unions were most represented in those sectors of industry which paid the highest wages. McCartan (1984:11) notes that in the Eastern Cape, a survey revealed that trade unions were the most represented in those organizations which paid higher than average nominal wages. These companies tended to be larger and thus had "a greater capacity to accommodate and negotiate with powerful and well-organized unions" (ibid.:11). Such firms tended to have large and relatively skilled workforces (ibid.:11). In all, 63% of workers in "high wage firms" were members of independent trade unions, whilst only 4% were not

unionized (ibid.:11).

More broadly, as Van der Horst (1984:9) notes, many Africans were moving into higher wage brackets - pay was no longer a direct product of colour. Despite rising unemployment and the shortage of (mostly white) artisans, the wage gap had in fact narrowed (see figure 6). Van der Horst (1984:9) attributes this to the increasing movement of blacks into semi-skilled occupations, and the growing power of the trade unions, yet does not fully explore to what extent skill and union strength are related. This issue will be more fully explored in a subsequent section.

13.0 The Rise of the Independent Unions in the Early 1980s

FOSATU expanded rapidly. By 1982 FOSATU had 9 affiliates and 105000 signed-up members, united by a commitment to shopfloor organization, worker control and industrial unionism (FOSATU 1983:n.p.). These three commitments would make that federation's member unions extremely sensitive to changes in worker aspirations, yet, at the same time, capable of providing sustained support for strikers²⁰.

FOSATU continued to stress the importance of not getting involved in popular politics at the expense of organization, yet stressed that this did not mean "becoming a self-satisfied trade union" (FOSATU n.d.a.:n.p.). The Secretary-General of FOSATU, Joe Foster, argued that FOSATU would always be political, but there was a need to "protect the working class from being hijacked by other interests" (Star 14/4/1982). Forster (1982:1-

6) furthermore asserted that "strikes do not make working class politics" and that there was a need to build organization that ensured workers' control.

Thus, while FOSATU placed great emphasis on the capacity to mount collective action on the shopfloor, a broader role for the trade union movement was envisaged. This broader role would have far-reaching implications for an even more spectacular form of industrial conflict than strikes, namely stayaways. The relationship between stayaways and strikes is more fully explored in the following chapter.

In September 1982 the Chamber of Mines signed a recognition agreement with the black Federated Mining, Chemical and Explosives Workers' Union, paving the way for other unions to organize on the mines (WIP 1983a:14). This led to the formation and rapid expansion of CUSA's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Founded in September 1982, the NUM's membership reached 55 000 by December 1983 (Rand Daily Mail 12/12/1983). In its first year of existence, the NUM was only involved in one dispute, a half-hour stoppage at Hlobane Colliery (Rand Daily Mail 1/12/1983). Thus, it should be noted once again union that membership totals alone do not cause strikes. Other measures of the relative strength of unions should also be considered, including financial resources and the degree to which the union has successfully entrenched its position.

In addition, more subjective factors, such as a lack of experience of strikes, should also be considered. Union leader Cyril Ramaphosa stated that the first objective of the union was to deal with the wage question (WIP 1983a:16). By 1985, the NUM

had become firmly established in the Western Transvaal, Orange Free State, Carltonville and Witbank districts (Ramaphosa 1985:63). The union had begun to make increasing use of the strike weapon, with non-NUM members frequently joining strikes (ibid.:68).

14.0 The Unions, Politics and Strikes

Pressures from membership and state repression forced the independent unions to adopt a higher political profile in the early 1980s. The detention of unionists was seen as a direct attack on the union movement (FCWU/AFCWU 1983:2). The death of union leader Neil Aggett in detention was believed to be the direct result of his involvement in the FCWU (FCWU/AFCWU 1983:4). A number of other trade unionists died in mysterious circumstances and the GWU offices in Cape Town were burgled (Motala 1983:67). By 1985, FOSATU had become increasingly politically outspoken, and, in a joint statement with the FCWU, the GWU and the National Union of Mineworkers, stressed an abhorrence of the apartheid state and called for a lifting of the State of Emergency, the release of all detainees, and the withdrawal of the SADF from the townships (FOSATU 1985b:n.p.).

During the same year, FOSATU decided to co-operate with the UDF on specific issues and campaigns, but full affiliation to the front was ruled out as divisive [FOSATU 1985c:n.p.]). Despite this new political involvement, strike totals continued to rise (see figure 1). Thus, the increased political involvement failed to reduce the incidence of conflict at the workplace. Indeed,

much of this involvement was in response to pressure from membership (Hindson 1987b:216). In other words, contrary to Rex's (1981:17-27) assertion, conflict is not transferable. Increased political involvement need not channel militancy or combativeness away from the workplace.

15.0

COSATU and NACTU

In September 1985, it was agreed to launch a new trade union federation comprising of FOSATU, which had a total membership of 130 000 workers; NUM with 100 000; GWU, 1200; FCWU, 25 000; CCAWUSA, 50 000; Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, 12 000; eleven unions directly affiliated to the UDF representing 40 000 workers, the largest of these unions being SAAWU; and the 9 (generally small unions) comprising the 12 000-strong National Federation of Workers (Lewis 1985:29; COSATU 1985:43-44). The previously intense registration debate had become "a non-issue" and this greatly facilitated moves towards unity (Lewis 1985:29).

It was hoped that the new federation could also incorporate the AZACTU and CUSA unions, but both these bodies withdrew from unity talks during early 1985 (Lewis 1985:33). It was stressed that a central goal of unity would be to unite workers into industrial unions for each of the main industrial sectors within South Africa (FOSATU 1985a:n.p.). This policy decision would ensure that the unions continued to focus on shopfloor and industrial concerns, and thus continued actively to support, or encourage, strikers. Certainly, there was little evidence that

the unions were tending towards a role of ultimately constraining strikes (see Hibbs 1976:1051).

In 1986, CUSA merged with AZACTU to form CUSA/AZACTU, with a total membership of 35 000, and with Piroshaw Camay as General Secretary (Izwilethu October 1986). In May 1987, the new federation's name was changed to the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) (Izwilethu May 1987)²¹. By 1990 NACTU's biggest affiliates included the SA Chemical Workers Union (SACWU), with 45 000 members, followed by the 35 000 strong Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (Ngwenya 1990:77-80). However, these unions were generally never as well organized as the COSATU unions, and there is little evidence of NACTU unions being involved in documented strikes to the same extent as the COSATU unions. Thus, whilst generally the NACTU unions were smaller than the COSATU unions, not only size but also the type of union should be borne in mind in exploring the linkages between unions and industrial conflict. These limitations were recognized by NACTU leadership and steps were taken in 1990 to make NACTU-affiliated unions more responsive and worker orientated (Pillay 1990:55-59).

Meanwhile, in mid-1986 Inkhatha launched its own trade union, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), at a rally attended by 60 000 Inkhatha supporters at Kings Park Stadium, Durban (Green 1986b:73). In practice, UWUSA concentrated on attempting to establish a presence in Northern Natal. In this region, the unions had been seriously weakened by a wave of detention of union officials. Twenty-two COSATU shop stewards and union officials had been detained in the

region, seriously disrupting COSATU's organization, in contrast to Southern Natal, where only two officials had been arrested (Green 1986b:79). UWUSA officials then visited factories where unionists had been detained and asked for recognition from management (Green 1986b:79). In addition, UWUSA supporters violently ousted NUM workers from the Hlobane Colliery and Matla Power Station in the region.

There is little doubt that UWUSA's activities in northern Natal in combination with state repression somewhat reduced the capacity of independent unions in Northern Natal to mount collective action. Thus, again, in assessing the relationship between trade unions and industrial conflict, not only the strength of the union, but also the type of union, and its underlying strategy and orientation should be borne in mind. UWUSA's activities seem to have had the effect of constraining rather than enabling industrial conflict.

16.0

Revival and Unity

During 1986, the long dormant SA Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) was revived under the umbrella of SATS and soon began the process of building up an organization through recruitment in the hostels (Matiko 1987a:2). SARHWU's rapid expansion soon brought it into conflict with management, leading to the 1987 SATS strike (see chapter 7). However, even in this instance, the strike was attributable not only to the rapid growth of the union, but also to the extremely conservative industrial relations strategy of SATS management and deeply

entrenched racial segregation.

In 1987, six unions operating in the metal industry, MAWU, NAAWU, GAWU, MACWUSA, UMMAWOSA and MICWU, merged to form the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), enabling a greater degree of co-ordination of activities. Despite the workerist origins of many of its founder unions, NUMSA adopted the Freedom Charter as policy, but stressed the need for a workers' charter and "worker leadership in the struggle for socialism" (SALB 1987c:11). This strategy represented the combination of a commitment to shopfloor organization with unprecedented political involvement. Earlier, the Freedom Charter had been adopted by the National Union of Mineworkers and it was soon to be adopted by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union. Both these unions stressed that the Charter only represented minimum demands (Ramaphosa 1987:45; CWIU 1987:9). Elsewhere, the CWIU argued that trade unions formed part of the extra-parliamentary opposition and thus could not be divorced from political battles (CWIU Phalaborwa 1989:65). Webster (1987b:217) refers to this broad trend as "social movement unionism" and sees it as the product of the state's inability to incorporate the unions politically, as a result of its then commitment to the total political exclusion of blacks. This would result in industrial conflict being even more clearly linked to political participation (Shorter and Tilly 1974:335), with unprecedented numbers of both strikes and stayaways taking place.

An interesting development was the rise of disciplinary strikes and strikes where the causes remained unclear in the

years 1987-1988, possibly reflecting an increasingly repressive political environment, perhaps encouraging a reversion to more spontaneous strikes, undertaken independent of union officials. However, there seems to have been a return to a more conventional pattern by the early 1990s (see figure 15).

Another important organizational development in the late 1980s was the disbandment of the increasingly ineffectual TUCSA. Some of its former constituents, such as the Garment and Allied Workers Union, formed out of two TUCSA affiliates, became revitalized, engaging in strike action (such as the successful 1988 Rex Trueform strike) and re-establishing a presence on the shopfloor (Garment and Allied Workers Union 1988:87). Again, this provides evidence that the linkages between trade unions and strikes do not solely concern total membership or financial resources, but also the type of union and the strategies employed by its leadership. The revitalization of certain former TUCSA affiliates led to increased strikes within the relevant sectors as a result of a total rethink in union strategies.

17.0

The Unions: 1987-1990

Whilst increasingly political, the unions remained committed in the post-1987 period to shopfloor organization and the use of strikes to improve material conditions. The number of strikes dropped sharply in 1988, but this could have represented more a response to the very mixed results and traumatic experiences of many of the 1987 strikes, as well as to state repression and the effects of the LRA amendments (see chapter 6), than a diversion

of organizational energy into the political arena.

Despite the effects of the Labour Relations Act amendments, strike patterns in the 1988-90 period are not very different from the years before 1987. Indeed, the total numbers of strikes taking place rose again sharply in 1989 and 1990 (see fig. 1). The unions still did not constrain the incidence of strikes (Hibbs 1976:1051) as a result of their increased political involvement (although in 1988 the resultant state repression may have). However, the unions were affected by one of the same key causal variables of strikes, the subjective understandings of members of the possibilities of collective action and/or organization. Whilst there seems inadequate evidence to conclude that the unions alone caused strike action, there is some indication that they determined its nature, particularly if the frequent but short strikes of the 1970s are contrasted with the larger and more sustained disputes of the mid-to-late 1980s. The implications of the rise of corporatist arrangements in the early 1990s, against a backdrop of rapid political change, representing the start of a new era in union organization, are assessed in a subsequent section of this thesis.

18.0 Theoretical Implications

The relationship between the changing fortunes of the South African trade union movement and the incidence of strike action has a number of important theoretical implications. It seems there is additional supporting evidence for Cronin's (1979:17) assertion that strike action follows upsurges in trade union

organization. A statistically-significant relationship exists between the rise of the independent trade unions in the late 1970s and 1980s and the incidence of strike action. Indeed, the rise of the independent unions did not result in their incorporation (Webster 1987b:217), but has been marked rather by continuing militancy, by strong shopfloor organization, and by an attendant willingness to make use of the strike weapon as a means of enforcing demands.

The survey of COSATU workers (see method section) revealed that the average respondent first joined the independent unions in 1982. This average is somewhat skewed, on account of a minority that joined trade unions in the early 1970s (or even before). However, it seems that at least half of COSATU members had belonged to a trade union prior to that federation's formation. In other words, COSATU represented the organizational consolidation of the unionization drives of the 1970s and 1980s and the culmination of moves towards unification that had begun with the formation of FOSATU and CUSA. Figure 31 depicts when individual COSATU members first joined a trade union. As can be seen, unionization does seem to come in waves. There was an important rise in union membership in the early 1970s, again in the closing years of that decade, and in the early to mid-1980s. Finally, large numbers of workers joined the unions in 1990, when a large number of strikes took place, most notably in the public sector. This provides some corroboration of the relationship between trade union activity and strike action.

Many respondents changed unions around the time of COSATU's launch, reflecting the decision to unite workers in industrial,

as adverse to general, unions (figure 32). As is apparent from chapter seven, it was the industrial unions that had the highest strike records and proved the most capable of mounting sustained strikes. This tendency towards industrial unionism implies that the union movement has, in the formal sense at least, increased capacity to mount sustained strikes.

It seems that the relationship between the unions and strikes is a reciprocal one. Whilst the rise of the unions did result in an increased capacity and willingness to engage in strike action, it seems that, in many cases, instances of strike action provided considerable impetus for union organization. For example, although the General Factory Worker Benefit Fund (GFWBF) may have given invaluable behind-the-scenes advice to workers involved in the 1973 Durban strike wave, there is little doubt that the strikes in turn resulted in the rapid expansion of the Fund's successor unions (Maree 1987b:3).

The nature of this relationship seems to be partially a result of the fact that the rise of both union membership and strike action are inherently bound up with the subjective understanding and interpretations of workers of previous attempts at union organization and strike action. The failure of some previous attempts at unionization (for example, the ICU in East London, or the bogus "briefcase" unions of Natal in the early 1950s) may have constrained later unionization efforts²².

In many respects, the period under review was one of sharp discontinuities. Six distinct periods of union organization can be identified during this period. Firstly, there is the period

leading up to the launch of SACTU. Secondly, there were the SACTU years. Whilst the SACTU unions were geographically confined, and operated in an extremely constrained environment, they gave a broader organizational coherence to demands from the workplace, and offered moral, and, in some cases, material assistance during a number of key strikes. Thirdly, there are the mid-to-late 1960s - a period of organizational inactivity, when industrial conflict tended to be spontaneous and of short duration. Fourthly, the 1970s saw the re-emergence and rapid expansion of an effective union movement, representing both a complete break with the past, and a revitalization of earlier traditions of unionism. The rapid growth of the unions was matched by a commensurate increase in strike action. In the late 1970s and 1980s, a fifth distinct discontinuity may be discerned, in which the new unions successfully consolidated their organization, resulting in the formation of a number of successful union federations. Reflecting this greatly enhanced organizational capacity, longer and larger strikes took place, although, as is apparent from chapter 7, the internal dynamics of strikes also changed. Sixthly, South Africa's process of political transformation has been paralleled by changes in the position of the union movement (see chapter 8).

The very existence of earlier unions and their success in delivering a message of hope to their constituency seems to have greatly facilitated later unionization initiatives. For example, the SACTU unions, despite the ultimate collapse of that federation, seem to have greatly facilitated later, and more sustained unionization drives. Furthermore, the experiences of

strikes had the effect of "raising consciousness", which would, again, facilitate unionization (Maree 1987b:3). Thus, subjective factors (such as remembered experience) affect both unionization and trade union strength.

The relationship between trade unions and wage levels is a complex one, but of considerable importance for an understanding of the causes and internal dynamics of strikes. For example, the pressures trade unions could bring to bear to force wage increases could include strike action. Secondly, it is possible that increased aspirations following pay rises could not only result in more strikes, but also in the expansion of the trade union movement.

To return to Burkitt's (1975:49) original thesis:

$$S = f(P)$$

S being standards of living, P being trade union power.

There does not seem to be a direct relationship between membership of the independent trade unions and overall black real wages (see table 11). In other words, while the unions may have improved the material conditions of their members (see LRS 1990:n.p.), there is no evidence that they had a significant impact on those who remained un-unionized and on the peripheries.

This could be the result of a new form of segmentation emerging in the South African labour market, between unionized, relatively privileged workers, and an un-unionized majority. This segmentation could be based on one of two criteria. Firstly, there could be a skill differential. In other words, as black workers increasingly entered semi-skilled categories of employment, the unions began to reflect primarily the needs and

aspirations of semi-skilled workers. Secondly, it is possible that the principal segmentation could be between insiders (who had permanent or semi-permanent employment) and outsiders. The latter could be defined as an underclass which would include "the growing unemployed, the expanding informal sector and an impoverished peasantry" (Webster 1991:60). Although there have been serious attempts by COSATU to organize workers in both these categories, they have had little success (Baskin 1991:452-3). In effect, this division would represent a contemporary extension of the segmentation first noted by Hindson (1987a:73), between town dwellers, who had legal rights of urban residence, and the rural poor. Although this distinction is no longer statutorily enforced, it is possible that some divisions may remain between those with some security of employment and accommodation in urban areas, and the rural poor and the informally and semi-employed.

Blacks have indeed gained increasing skills over the past two decades. Accurate data is available on the changing ratio between the semi- and unskilled for a crucial component of the industrial sector, the metal industry (DOM 1990a:71-8), as well as the mining industry (DOM 1981a; 1984a). As can be seen from figure 26, increasing numbers of Africans were entering semi-skilled categories of employment in the metal industry by the late 1980s. A similar (albeit less pronounced) trend is apparent in the mining industry in the early years of that decade (fig. 29).

It was in the metal industry, a sector characterized by a high degree of unionization (SALDRU 1991:n.p.), that the unions were the most successful in closing the wage gap between skilled

and unskilled operatives, with only a 27.9% differential by 1990 (LRS 1990:2). In contrast, in the local authorities sector, where the unions were comparatively weak, a differential of 142.1% remained (LRS 1990:2). In general, the average wage increases in 1990 for unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers were 19.7%, 19.1% and 17.3% in those companies that had a union presence (LRS 1990:5; see also LRS 1988; figure 28).

Thus, it is evident that whilst the unions may have incorporated increasing numbers of semi-skilled workers, they continued effectively to pursue the interests of their unskilled constituents - even more effectively than those of their semi-skilled members in certain highly-unionized sectors. While further segmentation in the labour market cannot be ruled out, it is evident that a more important division than skill remains that which exists between the unionized urban employed as a distinct grouping, and the broad underclass defined earlier²³.

Wage increases gained by union members would have little impact on the general income levels of the other grouping, resulting in an incoherent relationship between shifts in union membership and overall black real wages. In this scenario, the unions could, through both strike action and negotiations, successfully press for increased wages for their membership, although at the possible cost of heightening divisions within the black workforce.

There is considerable evidence of this occurring. For example, as Webster (1991:61) notes, it seems that the composition of COSATU leadership has changed, being increasingly

"drawn from the better educated and more skilled urban-based stratum of the working class", entailing "a failure to address the grievances" of members of groupings such as hostel dwellers. It is unclear what the employment consequences of such a union strategy would be. On the one hand, pay rises for unionized workers could result in greater overall unemployment. On the other, in the 1980s, individual unions succeeded in slowing the retrenchment process (Sitas et al. 1984:46). Rises in unemployment are also traceable to non-union factors. These include the 1980s recession, with, as Webster (1991:60) notes, "the capacity of the economy to employ the emerging labour force crumbling". However, as Martin (1981:110) notes, wages in highly unionized sectors will show less sensitivity to fluctuations in the unemployment rate.

Unfortunately, it is not feasible to provide a detailed assessment of the overall relationship between the rise of the independent unions and the wages of unionized versus non-unionized workers, owing to the possibility of incomplete causality (Parsley 1980:3) and to inadequate supporting evidence. As Schmidt and Stragus (Parsley 1980: 3) note, high wage levels often occur when particular industries are geographically concentrated, which will also facilitate union organization.

As can be seen from the above, trade union behaviour is not altogether based on economic criteria and unions will, at various times, respond differently when faced with decisions concerning both wages and employment (see Hipkin 1986:19). In the case of unions, this will be affected by the nature of the union's constituency, as well as by the composition and accountability

of its leadership. The nature of a union's constituency will affect its capacity in that certain categories of workers are more easy to organize or mobilize than others. Both the ICU and SACTU were considerably weakened by having, among their membership, workers from marginal categories of employment.

The relationship between wage aspirations and trade union membership is similarly unclear. There is no statistically significant relationship between rises in real wages (and hence aspirations) and the membership of the independent unions. However, there is some evidence that in individual cases rising aspirations contributed to both strike action and the growth of the unions (see above).

Furthermore, in understanding the relationship between the independent unions and strike action, it is important to note that a union's propensity to engage in strike action is not just a product of its membership, but also of the type of union that it is. As noted earlier, it seems that particular unions regularly encouraged and supported strikes, yet others rarely did so (e.g. the SATUC/TUCSA unions). It seems that there are two distinct poles in union organization. Firstly, there are those unions which readily make use of strikes and any other weapon they might have at their disposal in order to maximise the benefits of their members (e.g. the FOSATU unions).

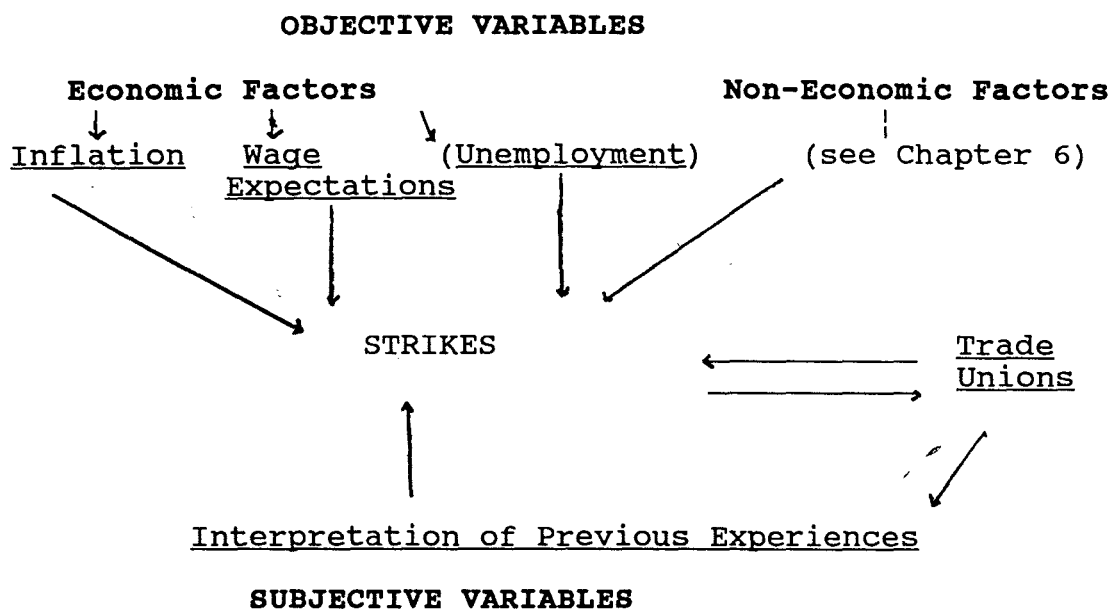
Secondly, there are those somewhat more bureaucratic unions, where decision-making is concentrated in the hands of an elite grouping of officials (e.g. the TUCSA unions). Whilst also seeking to benefit their members, such unions do so only through negotiations or other low-risk strategies that will not

jeopardize the union's established status, nor its continued access to funding (often such funding is obtained by means of stop orders, a mechanism dependent on the good will of managers). Union strategy can alternate between these two poles, a good example being the Garment Workers Union's shift towards a more militant strategy in the late 1980s. It is also possible that a union federation may have a limited shopfloor base, yet retain its militancy (e.g. most of the SACTU unions), although at the ultimate cost of their capacity to mount collective action.

Consequently, a union's ultimate propensity to engage in strikes is determined not only by the needs and aspirations of its membership, nor only by its strength, but also by its strategy with regard to striking at a given point in time. Contrary to the views of the PPE School (see Alt and Shepsle 1990:1-2), these factors do not only represent the relationship between individual desires and organizational constraints, but also intersubjective relations and interpretations. Indeed, decision-making concerning collective action need not be founded on a fixed rational decision-making process (Ordeshook 1990:10), but could indeed be the product of a variable rationality, of different responses to the same basic economic structure, including the possibility of "acting otherwise". As Offe (1985:173) notes, labour (particularly when organized) is not like any other commodity, and may react differently under different sets of circumstances. In other words, unions may have varying responses when faced with the same strategic questions. This, again, supports Arrow and Hankopilja's (1985:24) assertion that rationality may indeed be variable, and in attempting to

understand causal relations, it is necessary to take cognizance of this possibility.

The relationship between trade unions and the causes of strikes, then, remains a complex one. It is a dualistic relationship determined not only by union strength, but also by union strategy. Both are affected by subjective experiences. The relationship can be summarized in the diagram below:



Furthermore, it seems that unions may affect not only the incidence of strikes, but also their duration. For example, archival evidence indicates that the SACTU unions found it extremely difficult to provide financial support for strikers, to the extent of having to approach rival unions for funding (see above). In contrast, the independent unions in the 1970s and the 1980s seem to have been in a generally far stronger position.

There is evidence that several of the independent unions suffered financial difficulties or were severely weakened by instances of state repression. However, most seemed capable of recruiting large numbers of (mostly) paid-up members and of erecting resilient shopfloor organizational structures. This would enable larger and longer strikes to take place, as is evident from the rise in strike volume in the 1980s.

Furthermore, by the 1980s, the unions seemed to have also succeeded in affecting the nature of the demands expressed by striking workers. This is borne out by increases in the number of recognition strikes (see figure 15). In addition, strikes over issues such as retrenchments (as opposed to wages) at certain periods could be in part a reflection of long term union strategies for protecting membership.

19.0

Conclusion

The relationship between trade unions and strikes is a complex one, a product not only of the relative strength of the union, but also of the composition of its membership and ultimate union strategy. The period under review is indeed one of sharp discontinuity with regard to the role played by trade unions, ranging, inter alia, from the SACTU experience to the period of organizational inactivity in the 1960s, and to the formation of the independent union movement in the early 1970s. Although the unions played radically different roles in each of these periods, a number of common trends are apparent throughout. For example, it seems that the attitude of workers to both unions and strikes

is partially a product of subjective interpretations of past experiences of both. Furthermore, the relationship between unions and strikes is reciprocal. An increase in unionization might provide the necessary organizational support and conscientizing for workers to engage in strikes, but unionization initiatives seem to have been greatly advanced in the aftermath of a successful strike wave or general upturn in collective action (e.g. the independent unions in 1973). In other words, strike action will be, at the very least, greatly facilitated by a trade union presence, whilst unions may have the capacity to build more permanent organization structures following the successful mobilization of workers on an informal basis during a strike.

Strikes are thus a product of certain economic forces, the subjective experiences of workers and, in some cases, trade union factors. However, other factors which could affect the propensity to strike include the prevailing political climate (including the effects of any socio-political "unrest"), the legal status of strikes, the effects of statutory and non-statutory bargaining structures and the incidence of stayaway action. The effects of these forces on the nature and incidence of strikes are evaluated in the following chapter.

Endnotes

1. Which may be affected by a range of union strategies, including collective action.

2. Although the 1946 miners' strike falls outside of the period under review, it reveals something of the nature of trade union organization at the time. The AMWU had expanded rapidly, without a period of consolidation to build a resilient shopfloor organization, and thus was effectively destroyed by a single strike (Hirson 1989:186). Whilst there is little doubt that the 1946 strike would not have taken place without the AMWU, it demonstrated the limited capacity of unions to support and initiate strikes at the time. A union could cease to exist as a result of a single strike, whilst few CNETU unions had anything near the AMWU's capacity to mobilize large numbers of workers (see Sunday Express 23/11/1947). The AMWU had an impressive membership, but lacked the capacity either to provide strategic direction or to sustain a protracted strike. Thus, a union's propensity to repeatedly and/or successfully engage in strike action is not simply a product of membership and militancy, but also of organizational limitations and the effects of external factors such as state repression.

3. In essence, this encapsulates Giddens's (1984:25) notion of duality of structure - structures frame social action, whilst action will affect the nature and reconstitution of structures.

4. Types of Unions Organizing African Workers

As Ringrose (1950:271) notes, four categories of unions were involved in organizing African, coloured and Indian workers. Firstly, there were bona-fide unions with black officials. Secondly, there were parallel unions, which may or may not have had separate executives. Thirdly, there were those unions which concerned themselves solely with political issues. Fourthly, there were "briefcase" unions, where an individual, claiming to represent a fictitious union, would undertake to write letters of complaint to employers in return for set fees (Ringrose 1950:271).

5. Effectively, this means that wages and unemployment are not only a potential causal factor of strikes, but also that they may be a factor determining union strength. In other words, trade union power and assertiveness may itself be partially a product of the same economic forces that directly impact on the incidence of strikes.

6. For example, trade unions for Africans were unusually weak in the East London region in the early 1950s. The ICU had enjoyed an unexpected revival in the late 1940s (see Kadalie 1970:217-219). This revival proved short-lived owing to union leader Kadalie's ill-health, creating a leadership and organizational vacuum. Lodge (1978: 112) asserts that this vacuum was filled by the ANC Youth League. As noted earlier, it seems that workers' subjective understanding of previous instances of strikes and trade unions may affect their future propensity to strike or engage in union activity. Negative experiences of the ICU splinter in East London, its lack of accountability and ineffectiveness, may have resulted in workers seeking alternatives to unions in the form of political

organizations. This would represent a similar phenomenon to the increased influence of Communist Party leaders in Natal following the ICU's splintering in that province in the late 1920s (see Marks 1986:108).

7. This number soon expanded to seventeen and then thirty-one, as a number of defunct trade unions revived and new unions were founded (Horrell n.d.:5).

8. For example, the FCWU frequently offered messages of solidarity, praising the "unity and strength" of strikers, and the potential of strike action (FCWU 1955:n.p.).

9. The only other union federation overtly claiming to represent black workers was the smaller FOFATUSA, the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa. There is little evidence of any link between this federation's changing fortunes and the incidence of strikes. The federation's ultimate allegiances were somewhat contradictory. FOFATUSA enjoyed a close relationship with TUCSA, yet many of its leaders had links to the PAC (Feit 1975:150), whilst there were periodic allegations that the federation received covert assistance from the American CIA, in order that it might serve as a counterbalance to SACTU (see Lewis 1984:176). From its original nine member unions, FOFATUSA expanded to twenty unions, with an claimed total membership of 20 000 (Feit 1975:151). There is little evidence of any connection between the growth of FOFATUSA and the incidence of strike action. Again, the relationship between unions and strikes is not only in terms of union membership (Cronin 1979:17), but also the union policy and strategy.

10. see endnote 8.

11. The organizational vacuum was partially filled by a host of private firms offering to represent workers. Whilst these firms were collecting R300 000 per annum by 1967, many of the benefits were only paid out on a discretionary basis, whilst none of these firms assisted strikes (see Financial Mail 4/8/1967). Whilst this could have possibly resulted in workers having negative experiences of collective organization, it seems to have had little impact other than in, perhaps, highlighting the potential of benefit funds, if the success of the later General Factory Workers Benefit Fund in Durban is considered.

12. Ostensibly, the Fund's function was to provide funeral benefits for members, although under this cover, the Fund began the process of organizing workers into trade unions. This guise did not fool the authorities, however - police raided the GFWBF's offices, confiscating most of their records, whilst organizer David Davies was banned. During the 1973 Durban strikes, the GFWBF seems to have provided valuable behind-the-scenes assistance to strikers, although there is little doubt the strike wave was a spontaneous reaction to non-union related pressures

(see Wood 1992:19-24).

13. The Growth of the GWU

During the first years of its existence, the Bureau made rapid gains, boasting 5 000-6 000 members from fifty companies by 1976 (Horner 1976:77). The Bureau's modus operandi was to encourage workers to establish factory committees and seek their registration as Works Committees in terms of the Bantu Labour Regulation Act. Whilst this policy reaped handsome dividends, it also had serious disadvantages - factory committees often dropped out of "active involvement" in the Bureau, only seeking its assistance when serious problems arose (ibid.:77).

14. For example, during 1974, the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union was established, with UTP help, by 200 workers (SFAWU 1983:n.p.).

15. Founded on 30 August 1973, this union boasted a membership of almost a thousand (organized across 55 factories in the Natal region) by 1974, despite interference from both the police and Department of Labour officials (Ensor 1974b:50).

16. The Unions and KwaZulu Politics

Relations with the KwaZulu authorities soon soured, with Buthelezi dismissing the popular Dladla. Buthelezi quarrelled with Dladla ostensibly over a land issue (SALB, 1974d:3). However, it seems that the real cause of tensions was Buthelezi's perceiving that the popular Dladla represented a threat to his position. Buthelezi dismissed Dladla from office. This seems to have marked the start of tensions between the unions and Buthelezi, although at the time TUACC hastily denied that they were involved in a campaign aimed at undermining Buthelezi (see ibid.:3). By 1976, KwaZulu workers were told to have nothing to do with trade unions and to join Inkhatha (TUACC 1976b:n.p.). Meanwhile, TUACC deleted all references to homeland governments from its constitution, and urged its members to be extremely cautious in any dealings with Inkhatha (TUACC n.d.:n.p.).

17. The representation of BAWU overseas by a Black Consciousness exile, Drake Koka, resulted in tensions between Black Consciousness elements and non-racialists (Maree 1987b:32). The former were concentrated in BAWU's Newcastle and Johannesburg branches and the latter in the East London and Durban ones (ibid.:32). At the 1979 national conference, the Black Consciousness elements were expelled and BAWU's name changed to SAAWU, the South African Allied Workers Union.

18. SAAWU and Ciskei Politics

SAAWU remained heavily committed to political involvement, claiming that there could be "no normal trade unionism in an abnormal society" (Rand Daily Mail 31/10/1980). The authorities soon began to harass SAAWU members. Mr. Gweta was arrested twice, whilst after one strike, the police called on every worker involved, exhorting them to return to work (ibid.).

Despite this, the union retained considerable support, albeit often from those not in formal employment. For example, 3000 dismissed strikers attended a SAAWU rally in East London in October 1976 (ibid.). There is little doubt that SAAWU's outspoken political stance at a time when Ciskeian "independence" neared, provided a powerful means of mobilizing support. Whilst SAAWU did become involved in a number of political campaigns, it also pressed for wage increases at individual factory level. This could well have, in turn, helped build increased support for its political campaigns.

19. The rapid growth of the unions was paralleled by a massive increase in strike action. This is particularly evident in the case of the East Rand, where MAWU's rapid expansion was followed by struggles to gain both recognition and pay increases (see Baskin 1982:21-44). However, it should be noted that strikes rose even in centres where there was little union presence, such as Rosslyn near Pretoria (Rand Daily Mail 11/3/1981). Thus, whilst some connection can be drawn between the growth of the unions and strikes, there does not always seem to be a direct linkage, even in a time of rapid expansion of the unions. However, there is little doubt that similar factors contributed to both. This would include subjective factors, such as the previous experiences of both strikes and collective organization.

20. Sitas et al. (1984:46) argue that a profound change in the balance of power had taken place at the workplace, with the unions now being free to extend their activities into dealing with community and non-pay-related issues, "tempering the retrenchment process in industries undergoing restructuring". This provides further evidence of the relationship among retrenchments, unemployment and collective action more fully explored in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, according to surveys, the "most explosive strikes" continued to concern recognition, wages and pensions, with unions gaining the power to "change the philosophy of wage determination" (Sitas et al. 1984:46). Thus, whilst strikes were generally triggered off by non-union factors (see fig. 15), it can be argued that the unions had some impact on the range of demands expressed as well as the course and frequency of strikes. The organizational support unions could offer could result in longer and larger strikes, as borne out by the rapid rise in strike volume in the mid-1980s.

21. NACTU, Black Consciousness and Africanism

In 1988, tensions came to head between Africanists, with Black Consciousness leaders such as Steward Moletse and Piroshaw Camay being replaced with Africanists such as Cunningham Ngcukana (Ngwenya 1990a:77-80). This led to a period of disarray within that federation, with a number of Black Consciousness-orientated unions such as the 20 000 strong Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers Union (BAMCWU) and the Black Domestic

Workers Association being forced out (Pillay 1990:54-57).

22. One worker interviewed by Webster (1987a:26) in 1975 claimed that "many people have had their monies collected by people who later disappear. This has led to mistrust of them who form unions".

23. Whilst migrants are in a somewhat less favourable position than settled urban workers, it can be argued that such subdivisions are less important, particularly given the tendency for migrants to come semi-permanent workers without necessitating the transformation of the remains of the migrant labour system (see Crush et al. 1991:151). However, it should be noted that migrants are themselves divided between South Africans and those from neighbouring countries. The latter represent a more marginal grouping. Although formal recruitment of the latter slowed in the 1980s (ibid.:118-121), it should be noted that illegal immigration has continued apace into the 1990s. Illegal immigrants can contribute greatly to the informalization of employment practices, as employers seek to bypass formal labour regulation machinery. It is unclear to what extent this has happened, although it seems apparent that illegal immigrants have largely gained employment in segments of the agricultural sector, and within the informal sector.

CHAPTER 6

**CONSTRAINT AND ENABLEMENT: THE EFFECTS ON STRIKE ACTION OF
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
STRUCTURES AND POLITICAL PROTEST**

This chapter explores the effects of industrial relations legislation, informal and formal bargaining mechanisms and political protest, on the incidence and nature of strike action. Particular attention is accorded to whether political or legislative developments contribute to greater numbers of strikes taking place, or if they primarily affect the course and duration of such disputes.

1. Legislation of Relevance to Strikes

1.1 Industrial Relations Legislation

As can be seen from table 14, strikes by black workers were technically illegal from 1943 to 1973. Meanwhile, black trade unions were denied access to the Industrial Council system (SALB 1977b:1-3). The effects of the Wage Acts are discussed in chapters 3 and 4. A number of legislative changes took place during these years, most notably, a series of amendments to the Industrial Conciliation Act and the introduction of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act. However, there seems to have been little temporal connection between cyclical shifts in the incidence of strikes (modest increases in the early 1950s and 1960s) and the passage of the various bills governing Industrial Relations.

Nonetheless, it is possible that the legislation had the general effect of constraining strike action, the amendments intended to head off new challenges from the workplace. In the 1954-1960 period large numbers of blacks were prosecuted for striking illegally, which must have served as a major deterrent

(see below). In addition, the intervention of the police in many strikes had the effect of terminating the dispute, facilitating the dismissal of workers (see TWIU 1956:n.p.; SACTU 1961c:n.p.). Thus, the legislation, whilst not contributing strike action, may have had the effect of constraining collective action and shaping the form it assumed¹. That strikes tended to be of short duration (see figure 1) reflected the frequent intervention of the authorities, whilst in several cases, the impracticality of striking led to conflict assuming a rhizomatic or hidden form, manifesting itself in violent outbursts. A good example of the latter would be the wave of violence which swept the mines during the early 1970s, in response to widespread dissatisfaction over pay (Isebenzi 1974).

The numbers of blacks prosecuted for participation in "illegal" strikes is depicted in the table below:

Blacks Prosecuted for Illegal Striking 1954-1972

Year	No. Prosecuted	No. Convicted
1954	?	?
1955	340	314
1956	?	524
1957	539	274
1958	588	453
1959	823	221
1960	365	294
1961	364	294
1962-65	?	?
1966-67	187	181
1967-68	4	2
1968-69	57	50
1969-70	34	1
1971-72	2	2
1973	244	116
1974	96	44

(Hendrie & Kooy 1979b:23; Horrell n.d.:102; SAIRR 1960-1:265).

As can be seen from the above table, the number of convictions in proportion to the total number of strikes taking place (figure 1), declined by the early 1970s. In other words, the prohibition on strikes by black workers was no longer so widely enforced. Although the Black Labour Relations Act of 1973 made provision for legal strikes by black workers (SALB 1974b:11-18), its complexity meant that very few legal strikes by black workers took place. Indeed, the first legal strike by black workers, the Armourplate strike of 1976, led to the entire black workforce being arrested (Glass & Allied Workers Union 1977:60-72). The second legal strike by black workers, the Turnwrights strike, which took place in the early 1980s, also produced mixed results. Thus, in many respects, industrial conflict in the 1970s took place with only limited rules and constraints. Whilst workers could increasingly resort to illegal strike action without fear of prosecution, management retained the right to dismiss strikers, or, even, draw on the coercive arm of the state (see, for example, Keenan 1981:5-10). Indeed, in many cases, both management and workers had only limited exposure to and experience of collective action (see IIE 1974a: 16-18).

The Wiehahn reforms, embodied in the 1979 Labour Relations Acts, removed racial restrictions from the earlier Industrial Conciliation Act machinery, enabling unions to register and participate in statutory collective bargaining structures (Wiehahn Commission 1979:31-42). The right of migrants to participate in the system, as recommended by the Wiehahn Commission (1979:31), was phased in two years later². This led to a major debate within the union movement over the advisability

of registering and of participating in the Industrial Council system (see SALB 1981:29-38; Jouvelis 1983:53-6). CUSA and TUCSA accepted the reforms unequivocally, whilst FOSATU was divided over the issue (Fine, De Clercq and Innes 1981:40). In contrast, a number of unaffiliated unions, including the GWU, SAAWU and FCWU, opposed registration (ibid.:43). Those in favour of registering argued that the reforms were somewhat contradictory, and contained genuine concessions (ibid.:59). Trade unions were already subject to many restrictions, and taking advantage of the "timid concessions", forced out of the state by mounting economic and overseas pressures, would ultimately prove beneficial (ibid.:62). Meanwhile, opponents of registration, such as the GWU, branded the reforms as unnecessarily divisive, facilitating further state action against unions which chose to opt out of the system (GWU 1982b:33). In addition, the reforms did not entail any substantive changes in the structure of the Industrial Councils (ibid.:33).

In practice, increasing numbers of unions chose to register. During early 1984, the Metal and Allied Workers Union decided to join the Industrial Council for the metal industry. This decision was prompted by sustained employer resistance to bargaining at factory level, as well as by the role of the craft union caucus, the Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU) on the Council (Webster 1984:15). It was believed that CMBU often hijacked and distorted MAWU's demands, necessitating MAWU representation on the Council (ibid.:16). Eventually, even the GWU chose to register.

Ultimately, many Industrial Councils became a source of

strength to the union movement. NUMSA, the successor to MAWU, had succeeded in becoming the principal union on the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry, gaining a position of considerable leverage in the process (Tourien 1989:76). The growing strength of the unions on the Councils resulted in many employers calling for deregulation, and in some cases withdrawing from the Councils (ibid.:86). It should be noted that the number of Industrial Councils in fact declined during the 1980s (see below).

INDUSTRIAL COUNCILS: 1975-1988

Year	Councils	Wage Agreements	Employers	Workers
1975	102	92	39146	1046105
1980	105	98	41280	1095472
1986	99	77	47032	961302
1987	97	88	45941	964881
1988	95	N/A	N/A	N/A

(SAIRR 1988-9:474).

Thus, the Industrial Council system failed to reduce the incidence of strike action. Webster (1987b:217) suggests that this general failure to preclude increasing numbers of strikes from taking place was the result of the state's inability to politically incorporate the unions. In other words, workers and the unions which represented them were excluded from representation in wider political structures, greatly constraining the state's powers of co-optation.

However, although the "trials of strength" of 1987 represented an important counter tendency, strike action became increasingly formalized, ritualized, and bound by a series of formal and informal rules (Hyman 1975b:193). Increasingly,

management acceded to the inevitability of negotiations, without automatically firing all strikers, whilst increasingly fewer workers were prosecuted for striking illegally (Bonner 1987:60). In other words, the Wiehahn reforms may not have affected the incidence of strike action, but rather the form and outcome of individual instances of strike action (see chapter 7).

The legislative situation changed dramatically following the 1988 Labour Relations Act (LRA) amendments. These amendments resulted in "Unfair Labour Practices" being statutorily defined (IPSA Research 1988:68). In addition, a Labour Appeal Court was established as a division of the Supreme Court (ibid.:68). Presumably, this was intended to serve as a counter-balance to the Industrial Court, which had made a series of progressive decisions. Indeed, it was argued that the amendments diluted the right to strike, with disputes over dismissals being branded an "unfair labour practice" (CRIC 1989:41).

Sympathy strikes and secondary stoppages were outlawed, and unregistered trade unions were forced to hold strike ballots prior to engaging in collective action (IPSA Research 1988:68). Trade unions, union officials and employer associations were now liable for damages in the case of any "interference in the contractual relationship leading to a breach of contract" (ibid.:68). Although it has been argued that the amendments did not result in a decline in the incidence of strikes, nor make the unions less militant or more legalistic (CRIC 1989:39-42), the number of strikes fell dramatically in 1988. However, the amendments also sparked an unprecedented wave of protests, mostly taking place in late 1989 and early 1990 (see below), and failed

to preclude an upsurge in strike action in 1989 (Van Zyl 1990).

Indeed, it can be argued that the drop in strikes in 1988 was largely due to other factors, such as state repression, shifts in wage levels, inflation and damage to union organization following a series of major defeats in 1987. Finally, the Labour Relations Act amendments were effectively rescinded in the early 1990s. Rather than constraining strike action, it is possible that these amendments represented an important counter-tendency in the gradual ritualization of industrial conflict, also reflected in the violent South African Transport Services (SATS) and Mines strikes of 1987. Nonetheless, by 1990, the process of ritualization and formalization resumed, ultimately reflected in the contemporary social contract debate (see Callinicos 1992:64-7).

Three distinct legislative periods or discontinuities can be recognized. Firstly, there is the pre-Wiehahn era, a period when black workers enjoyed few legal rights with regard to strike action. Legislative changes during this period ranged from limited concessions to further restrictive measures. In contrast, the Wiehahn reforms represented the start of a process of ritualization of industrial conflict, although they failed to reduce strike levels. Thirdly, there is the period immediately following the passage of the 1988 LRA amendments, representing an important, albeit temporary, reversal of this process. Industrial relations legislation seems to be a contingent factor affecting strike action; in the case of two of these three discontinuities, a shaping or constraining factor rather than a

causal factor, although the 1988 amendments did lead to a wave of workplace-based protests.

1.2 Industrial Relations Legislation in the Bantustans

The process of homeland independence further segmented South Africa's industrial relations system. Not only were blacks excluded from the Industrial Conciliation machinery, but blacks in the homelands were subject to additional constraints. Many of the homelands failed to fully implement the Wiehahn reforms. Indeed, a little-known 1970 proclamation suspended the Industrial Conciliation Act in the homelands (Lawyer 1983:67). The same proclamation also removed the applicability of wage determinations to the bantustans (ibid.:68). Meanwhile, throughout the 1980s, Transkei continued to be governed by the Transkei Labour Relations Act of 1977. In terms of this act, trade unions were not recognized, Liaison Committees and/or magistrates being entrusted with the business of resolving strikes (Howe 1985:25). Industrial relations in Venda were governed by similar legislation (Lawyer 1983:70). Kwazulu had accepted the Wiehahn reforms in 1984, but they may have had no legal force, owing to contradictory earlier legislation that was never rescinded (Howe 1984:25). Meanwhile, the Bophuthatswana Industrial Conciliation Act of 1984 required trade unions which wished to operate in that homeland to have their head offices there, effectively excluding "foreign" (i.e. South African) trade unions (Howe 1984:25; Lawyer 1983::72).

In addition to restrictive labour relations legislation, several homeland governments frequently employed security

legislation against unionists. This was particularly the case in KwaZulu (Lawyer 1983:73), Ciskei and Bophuthatswana. In Ciskei, many members of SAAWU, GWUSA (General Worker Union of South Africa) and AFCWU were detained under proclamation R252, which permitted three months' detention without trial (WIP 1981b:50). The Bophuthatswana Defence Force went so far as to "establish a military camp in the middle of the four Impala platinum mines near Rustenburg, in an effort to combat 'unrest' and counter National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) activity" (Mills & Wood 1992:2). It should be noted that the political and legislative environment did not constitute the only constraint on collective action in the homelands. Extremely low wages prevailed in these territories, often attracting as investors those who sought to pay the lowest possible wages, and who would be likely to adopt conservative industrial relations policies (see Stultz 1979:90-3).

Throughout the period under review, relatively few strikes took place in the homelands. However, the homelands were by no means strike-free. During 1966, 700 African workers struck at Veka (near Charlestown) for increased pay (Beeld 28/8/1966). A series of strikes took place in border industries surrounding the Ciskei homeland in the 1980s, following the rapid expansion of SAAWU in that region (Star 15/6/1981, see also chapter 7). Another major incidence of industrial conflict was the near-general 1981 Richards Bay strike, following the dismissal of striking Alusaf workers, followed by large scale arrests and prosecutions (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). However, there is little doubt that repressive legislation in the homelands made striking less

feasible. Following the coups in Transkei and Ciskei, proclamations updated labour relations legislation in both homelands. In the case of Ciskei, Conciliation Boards and an Industrial Court were introduced, whilst in Transkei, the Industrial Council system was also established. However, these reforms seem to have had little impact in reality, prior to the reincorporation of these territories into South Africa.

1.3 Security Legislation

In addition to the above legislation governing industrial relations, security legislation, embodied in measures such as the Internal Security and Suppression of Communism Acts, led to many leading trade unionists being listed and/or banned (see ANC n.d.:n.p.). Meanwhile, the Riotous Assemblies and Trespassing Acts were frequently invoked against striking workers engaging in picketing and sit-in actions, two strategies that had become increasingly popular in the 1980s (Rand Daily Mail 30/4/1984). The effects of bannings and detentions on union organization and of overt police intervention in strikes are fully explored in chapters 5 and 7 respectively.

2. Negotiation/Mediation and Strikes

2.1 Formal Mechanisms of Arbitration: The Industrial Court

In addition to the other reforms, the 1979 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act established an Industrial Court to adjudicate over disputes where "unfair labour practices" had possibly taken place (Benjamin, Cheadle and Khoza 1981:23). A

lengthly procedure had to be followed to gain access to the Court, including a thirty-day "cooling off" period (ibid.:58).

Following on its inception, the Industrial Court made a series of landmark decisions pertaining to the general rights of employees, including the right to strike. In the case of United African Motor & Allied Workers Union versus Fodens, it curtailed the right of employers to make retrenchments without adequate consultation (Cheadle 1984:31). The case of Ngobeni and Others vs Vetsak (Co-Op) Ltd (1984) constrained the powers of management to fire and selectively re-hire strikers (Finance Week 11/12/1986). Although the Witwatersrand Local Division had, one year later, ruled that employer's common law right to dismiss workers for refusing to work was not inhibited by the Labour Relations Act (SA Law Reports 1987c:272), it was subsequently ruled, in the case of Marievale Consolidated Mines vs the President of the Industrial Court (1986), that lawful suspension or termination of employment may still constitute an Unfair Labour Practice (SA Law Reports 1987b:486).

However, the Court tended to have a record of inconsistency. In the case of NUTW vs Jaguar Shoes (1987), it was ruled that the Court had the power to interpret its own judgements (SA Law Reports 1987a:39). In MAWU vs Sarmcol (1987), it was ruled that employers were able to dismiss strikers if they had engaged in collective bargaining in "good faith". "No matter how legitimate the reasons for strike action were, it had to be responsible" (quoted in Thompson 1989b:426). The Court's operations were somewhat circumscribed by the 1988 Labour Relations Act amendments (see above), as well as by the appointment of

conservatives, such as AM Erasmus, to the Court. Erasmus proceeded to reverse a number of the Court's earlier and more progressive decisions (Thompson 1989b:620R). The Industrial Court was not legally deemed a Court of Law, and consequently there was no right of appeal to normal Courts of Law up until 1988 (SA Law Reports 1987c:269). In terms of the 1988 Amendments, a separate Labour Appeal Court was established as a Division of the Supreme Court.

Throughout the 1980s, the independent unions made increasing use of the Court, as reflected in figure 23. Nonetheless, strike action greatly increased. It would seem that the Industrial Court's role as a arbiter was no more successful than the entire Industrial Council system in reducing the incidence of industrial conflict. In many cases, disputes were only referred to the Industrial Court after strike action had already taken place (Wakfer 1993: 45-7). Indeed, in several cases the Court simply gave approval to agreements that had already been reached in the period leading up to the hearing (Cheadle 1984:33). However, it can be argued that the Industrial Court contributed to the gradual ritualization of industrial conflict and its binding in terms of a series of rules.

2.2 Informal Mechanisms: The Case of IMSSA

In addition to the Industrial Councils and Industrial Court, increasing use was made of non-statutory and informal bargaining and mediating mechanisms by the early 1980s. For example, the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa offered both mediating and arbitration services (IMSSA n.d.). Increasing use

was made of IMSSA services, with that organization mediating in over 70 disputes during the first half of 1985 (IMSSA 1985:n.p.). Levy, Piron & Associates (1989-90) assert that the rise in IMSSA activity following the 1987 LRA amendments was the result of management's opting out of the legally-established collective bargaining structures and reaching independent agreements with unions. Although this trend continued into 1990, industrial conflict also began to rise (following the drop in 1988). Nonetheless, the emergence of bodies such as IMSSA can be seen as symptomatic of the formalization and institutionalization of strikes noted above, a process which began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, signalling the start of a new discontinuity paralleled by changes in legislation governing industrial relations.

3. Political Protest and Strikes

3.1 Stayaways and Strikes

A stayaway can be broadly defined as a general work stoppage affecting a number of factories, and not directly concerned with factory floor issues (WIP 1983b:29). Between 1950 and 1961, eight major stayaways took place (ANC n.d.:n.p.; ANC 1958; WIP 1983b:29). The tactic then fell into disuse, but reappeared in 1976, and again following the outbreak of the mass insurgency of the 1980s. The major stayaways to take place during the period under review are summarized in table 13. As can be seen from the above, all stayaways in the 1950s lasted no longer than one day. Although a three day stayaway was called in April 1958, it was

called off after one day (WIP 1983b:31). An indefinite stayaway called following the banning of the ANC and PAC was totally ignored.

In terms of general trends, there seems little direct relationship between stayaways and strike action. Relatively few strikes took place in the 1950s and 1960s, although many stayaways took place in the former decade, and relatively few in the latter. Whilst strike totals in 1976 were substantially lower than in 1973 and 1974, stayaways reappeared during that year. Meanwhile, record numbers of strikes and stayaways took place during the mid-to-late 1980s.

However, there are a number of parallels between stayaways and strike action. Firstly, there is the spatial dimension. Most of the stayaways were concentrated in the PWV region and Eastern Cape, important centres of strike action (see figure 21). However, relatively few stayaways were successful in Natal. This is of particular significance in the 1970s, when this region was characterized by a high concentration of strike action. It can be argued that this was the result of the unique micro-politics of the region, and the role of Buthelezi in promoting populist solutions, as opposed to collective action in the workplace in support of political demands, in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Marks 1986 121-4).

Secondly, there is the organizational dimension. Most of the stayaways followed waves of political activism, consequent on the increasing assertiveness of the ANC in the 1950s (see Rand Daily Mail 31/3/1960), the rise of student movements in the early 1970s (Kotze 1975:184), and the rise of civic and community

groupings in the early 1980s (Lodge & Nasson 1991:36-37). In other words, whilst many South African strikes followed unionization drives, stayaways tended to follow the rise of popular political organizations.

However, despite these parallels of organizational activism, trade unions only played a limited role in stayaways prior to the late 1980s. Although many of the 1950s stayaways incorporated the popular pound-a-day demand and had SACTU backing, most were primarily ANC initiatives. The most successful stayaway of the 1950s took place on June 26 1957. The ANC called for countrywide demonstrations for freedom and a minimum wage (Star 26/6/1957; Bohmer 1987:903). On the day, a heavy police presence was noticeable at bus stops and railway stations (Star 26/6/1957). It was confidently predicted that the stayaway would not be widely observed. In fact, the stayaway was to prove the largest June 26 stayaway ever (Karis & Carter 1977a:277). Most employers believed the stayaway was the result of intimidation and hence were reluctant to fire or take disciplinary action against their employees (ibid.:278). The stayaway was 50% effective in Johannesburg, but significantly less successful in the greater Witwatersrand region and the East Rand (Star 27/6/1957). The stayaway was well observed in Port Elizabeth and Vereeniging (Rand Daily Mail 27/6/1957). In Johannesburg, there was only 30% of the normal traffic on the trains (ibid.). However, the stayaway was a failure in Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein and East London (Star 27/6/1957).

A somewhat different situation obtained in the case of the June 26 1958 stayaway. The 1958 general election led to the

"Nats must go" campaign. In reaction, a day of "prayer and defiance" and of "dedication to the freedom cause" was called. It was argued that "the mad career of the Nationalists must be halted" (National Consultative Commission 1958:n.p.). A list of demands was put forward. Significantly, two of the demands were entitled "asinamali" and dealt directly with the wage issue. The stayaway proved a dismal failure and was called off after one day. Karis and Carter (1977a:283) argue that this was largely due to the fact that the campaign seemed too political, with not enough attention being given to the economic plight of workers. In addition, it could be argued that there was not adequate consultation before the decision to stayaway was reached (see ANC NEC 1958:441). Ironically, the campaign was apparently popularly perceived to be more a SACTU than an ANC initiative, which further limited its impact (Lambert 1981:283; Dorabji 1984:160). The following year, a "Day of Self-Denial and Sacrifice" was called (Star 26/6/1959). This was not a stayaway, although a boycott of "Nationalist-controlled" products was called for (Rand Daily Mail 26/6/1959). Although apparently unsuccessful, a potato boycott, in protest against labour conditions on potato farms, produced tangible results (see *ibid.*). This represents an important forerunner of the consumer boycotts in support of worker demands in the 1980s.

Similarly, Lambert (1981:117) asserts that the anti-pass protests of 1960 represented the blurring of conventional union issues (including demands for more secure employment) and political issues. Following the Sharpeville shootings, Chief Luthuli called for a "day of mourning" (Rand Daily Mail

29/3/1960). The resultant one-day stayaway extended into a series of strikes. The stayaway was 95% successful amongst Africans in Cape Town (although it was ignored by coloureds), 85-90% successful in Johannesburg, 85-90% in Port Elizabeth and 20-25% successful in Durban (SAIRR 1959-60:61). The stayaway was followed by further protest action, culminating in the 30th March protest march by 30 000 Africans led by Philip Kgosane to Caledon Square in Cape Town, the declaration of a State of Emergency and the banning of the ANC and PAC (see Rand Daily Mail 2/4/1960;4/4/1960). This led to a totally political week-long stayaway in Cape Town. The townships were surrounded by police, with large numbers of suspected instigators being arrested (Rand Daily Mail 1/4/1960). As noted earlier, after being re-formed underground, the ANC called for a general strike, a call that was largely ignored (SAIRR 1959-60:197). However, a 1961 stayaway, called by the umbrella "All-in-All African National Council" received substantial support (Mandela 1961:n.p.;SACTU 1961a:n.p.).

Whilst the stayaways of the 1950s and early 1960s yielded mixed results, they incorporated demands such as a minimum wage, which also manifested itself in individual instances of strike action (see chapter 7). In this sense, the stayaways did reflect certain key workplace grievances. In contrast, the stayaways of 1976 (see table 13) were wholly political. In many cases, workers were not consulted in advance (Kane-Berman 1978:112-114), and, in at least one instance, the demands expressed were unclear (Cillie 1977: 297). However, during the 13-15 September stayaway, scholars succeeded in mobilizing hostel dwellers around

opposition to the pass laws (Kane-Berman 1978:112-4).

Similarly, many of the stayaways of the early 1980s did not involve the trade unions and revolved around political demands such as the black local authorities system. Indeed, the March 1985 Port Elizabeth stayaway, called by PEBCO (Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization), was widely observed, despite the opposition of the FOSATU unions (LMG 1985a:87;FOSATU 1985b:83). However, following rising state repression, the unions increasingly began to support stayaway action. For example, the wholly political June 16 1986 stayaway, observed by 1.5 million workers, enjoyed the full support of COSATU (Green 1986a:95). Meanwhile, a successful stayaway was called in the Pietermaritzburg region in support of striking Sarmcol workers (LMG 1985b:108).

But while the unions began to play a more active role in the stayaways, they still had little say in formulating demands (Adler 1987:73). At the time, it was argued that this was the product of a central contradiction - whilst the trade unions had won the right to exist and organize at the workplace, a fundamentally repressive state remained in place (LMG 1985a:87). It was only in the late 1980s that the unions became the driving force behind stayaway action. This process culminated in the June 6-8 1988 stayaway, one of the biggest in South Africa's history, in response to the Labour Relations Act amendments (Von Holdt 1988:51). This development was probably a reaction to increased state repression, and the sudden political vacuum following the banning of the UDF.

Yet although the unions may have captured the stayaway

weapon, in no manner did it become employed as an alternative to striking. Rather, stayaways were used to press for economic and workplace demands that had a national significance (e.g. the VAT and LRA stayaways) or as a weapon of last resort, following unsuccessful strike action (e.g. the BTR Sarmcol/Pietermaritzburg stayaway). Thus, stayaways should not be viewed as causally linked to strikes, but rather as representing a parallel development. However, as was the case with the increasingly large strikes of the mid-1980s, they reflected the increased organizational power of both formal union structures and informal workplace relations and militancy. Significantly, the June 1988 stayaway was totally unsuccessful on the mines, where union organization had been severely damaged during the 1987 strike (Von Holdt 1988:53). From mid-1988 to 1990, when the unions were the predominant organizing force behind stayaway action, stayaways tended to be less frequent yet better organized (LMG quoted in SAIRR 1989-90:233). During 1991 and 1992, other popular political organizations resumed their involvement in stayaway action. This resulted in stayaways becoming more common, albeit often poorly organized and for a wide range of demands (SAIRR 1991-92:323-5).

3.2 Political Protests and Strikes

Three major waves of political protest took place during the period under review, in 1960, 1976, and 1984-1987. Although stayaways took place in both 1960 and 1976, neither year was marked by unusually large numbers of strikes (see fig. 1). Neither does industrial conflict seem transferable. Whilst far

fewer strikes took place in 1976 than in the 1973-1974 period, strikes had begun to decline by 1975, probably owing to shifts in wage levels and inflation (see chapter 4), some time before the June 16 Soweto uprising. Meanwhile, the official commission of enquiry into the uprising (Cillie 1977:135-488) found little connection between the rise of conventional strike action in the early 1970s and the Soweto uprising. This is also reflected in the cases of individual disputes (see chapter 7). Thus, it seems that there is no causal relationship between political protest and strike action in the pre-1980 period.

It should be noted that political protest, as was the case with strike action, could be in part the product of heightened aspirations, reflected in the parallel growth of organizations in both community and workplace. This would include the ANC, PAC and SACTU in the late 1950s, and the emergence and rise of student organizations and the independent trade unions in the early 1970s (NUSAS 1980:39). However, there seems to have been little contact between the student organization and the union in the 1970s (see Cillie 1977:135-297), other than in the case of the relatively small Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU).

Of somewhat greater importance is the relationship between strike action and the mass insurrection of the 1980s. Figure 22 depicts "unrest-related incidents" during the peak of the insurrection, from May 1985 to May 1987. As noted in chapter 1, there is no statistically significant relationship between political "unrest" and strikes. The totals of "unrest" incidents represent a summary of newspaper reports, themselves based on official releases. White (1993:583) asserts that such newspaper-

strikes. Following the 1960 and 1976 disturbances, a wave of repression took place, severely weakening both political and workplace organizations (Financial Mail 26/11/1976). Whilst the 1987 repression was marked by record numbers of strikes taking place, the more open political climate of 1990 did not result in a proportionate reduction of strike action. Indeed, the incidence of strike action dropped in 1988 when, perhaps, the repression of the Botha era peaked. However, this does not imply that industrial conflict may, as noted earlier, be "rhizomatic" in form. In other words, dissatisfaction at the workplace may manifest itself in violence or sabotage instead of overt strike action, should the former prove more feasible (see, for example, Prior 1977:68; SAIRR 1978:160).

Nonetheless, it remains possible that political protest could have some impact on the nature of strikes, and, indeed, may be the product of the same forces that led to the rise of strikes. As noted in chapter 5, both community organizations and trade unions experienced rapid growth in the 1980s. This facilitated increased contact and co-operation between the two. In certain instances, particularly in the 1975-1985 period, the relationship was an uneasy one. This was reflected in, inter alia, the rivalry between the FOSATU-affiliated UAW and the community organization, PEBCO, in the Port Elizabeth motor manufacturing plants in the late 1970s (see Maree 1980:13-30; FOSATU 1985b:n.p.). In other cases, contact between community organizations and unions was very limited, making co-ordinated action extremely difficult. An example of the latter would be the failed red meat boycott of 1980 (see WPGWU 1980:79-80).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, FOSATU believed that it was essential not to get over-involved in popular politics at the expense of organization (FOSATU n.d.a.), whilst it was thought that an independent pro-worker political line was possible (Forster 1982:67-86).

However, certain unions, for example SAAWU, had, since their inception, adopted an overtly political stance (Maree 1987c:34-49). Subsequent developments, such as the work stoppage which followed the death in detention of FCWU organizer Neil Aggett in 1982 (FOSATU 1982b:n.p.), increased the links between even "workerist-orientated" trade unions and community organizations (see SALB 1982a:5-28).

By the mid-1980s, unions and community organizations were co-operating around consumer boycotts and similar campaigns (see FOSATU 1984:27), as well as, increasingly, stayaway action. Thus, while there is insufficient evidence to conclude that political developments led to increased numbers of strikes taking place, it can be argued that the mass mobilization in community and workplace greatly strengthened the position of striking workers, enabling longer, more protracted strikes to take place (see chapter 7). Indeed, as can be seen from figure 1, strike volume (which incorporates strike duration and size) dramatically increased in the mid-to-late 1980s.

In the 1950-1972 period strike action was relatively uncommon, geographically confined, and mostly of short duration. During the years 1973-1979, the incidence of strike action increased greatly. Both the old constraints on collective bargaining and action and the limited concessions granted by the state failed to forstall the rise of strike action. In many respects, this can be seen as a period without rules. On the one hand, workers increasingly resorted to "illegal" strike action with impunity. On the other, management sometimes denied unions even the right to exist, whilst in many cases the police intervened (see, for example, MAWU 1977:49-59), sometimes exceeding their authority. Although the numbers of arrests of striking workers declined by the early 1970s, the effects of state repression in constraining strike action should not, however, be ignored. In particular, the November 1976 bannings of trade union activists severely weakened trade union organization, limiting the capacity of the unions to support collective action.

Despite the greater availability (and increasing use of) both informal and statutory mechanisms of collective bargaining in the 1980s, industrial conflict also continued to rise. As noted earlier, Webster (1987b:217) suggests that this general failure to prevent increasing numbers of strikes from taking place was the result of the state's inability to politically incorporate the unions. In other words, whilst the unions made use of the statutory collective bargaining system, they had no stake in the wider political order, or interest in being co-

opted.

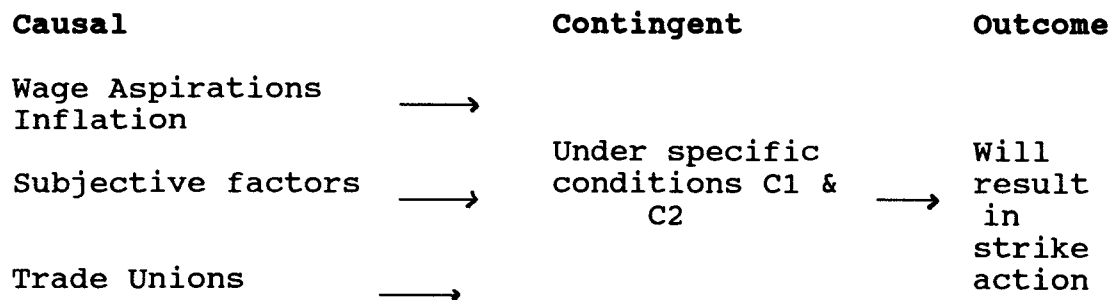
However, it should be noted that, with the important exception of the "trials of strength" of 1987, strike action became increasingly ritualized, bound by a series of unwritten rules (Hyman 1975b:193), a discontinuity with the experience of much of the 1970s. This process included decreased police intervention, reduced levels of violence and, increasingly, an acknowledgment by management of the right of the independent unions to exist (see, for example, Heffer 1982:80-92). As noted above, the role of the Industrial Court vis-a-vis strike action was, in several key cases, post hoc. As was the case with the Industrial Council system, the Industrial Court contributed to this gradual ritualization of industrial conflict.

Thus, as suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (1988:424-425), the emergence of a new order, in this case the contemporary South African industrial relations system, can be seen to have two distinct phases or discontinuities. Firstly there is a phase of conflict without formal rules, and, secondly, a process of binding through unwritten laws, even if conflict continues. The former was the case in the 1970s (see chapter 7), whilst the latter situation became increasingly prevalent in the 1980s. Thus, it can be argued that although the Industrial Court failed to reduce the incidence of strikes, it had far-reaching effects on the course, internal dynamics and outcomes of such action.

Political protests also seem, in certain circumstances, to have a contingent effect on strikes. This seems particularly evident during the 1980s, when the mass protests and general mobilization of communities facilitated in the organization of

consumer boycotts and similar non-workplace protests in support of striking workers. It was in the second half of that decade that trade unions assumed the major role in organizing stayaway action shaping both the form of that action, and its course.

Therefore, whilst legislative and/or political conditions may not cause strikes, they may constrain (in the case of a rigidly enforced ban on strikes) or facilitate (in the case of mass political mobilization) strike action. Political mobilization may enable longer and more sustained strikes to take place, whilst a more open industrial relations system, with effective statutory and/or non-statutory collective bargaining structures, will result in the greater formalization and institutionalization of strike action. The relationship is depicted in the diagram below, loosely based on Andrew Sayer's (1992:108) model of social causality:



- where C1 represents the prevailing political climate in terms of the capacity for social protest and political mobilization, and C2 represents legislation governing industrial relations.

It seems evident that the relationship between political institutions on the one hand, and strikes on the other, is somewhat more complex than that proposed by the Positive

Political Economy Paradigm. In attempting to move away from an analysis that is based on assumptions of an unequal distribution of wealth and power in society (see Alt & Shepsle 1990:1-2), too much attention has been accorded to the rational acts and decisions of individuals. While it is acknowledged that social institutions may entail some indivisibilities which may obscure individual preferences, the ultimate basis is individual rational choice (Ordeshook 1990:10).

In contrast, it can be argued that the relationship between action and social structure is rather a dialogue, whereby individual action (not always with consistent rationality) and social structure, change, yet are changed by each other (Giddens 1984:282). Thus, the reformed industrial relations system, ushered in by the Wiehahn reforms, represented the result of an unprecedented challenge from below. In turn, the reforms had considerable impact on the nature of subsequent strikes. The routinization of industrial conflict reflects this duality. Systems, including the industrial relations system, are being constantly reconstituted (Giddens 1984:282). Thus, whilst the Wiehahn reforms ushered in a new phase in industrial relations, the exact nature and impact thereof was under a constant process of adjustment, as a result of, inter alia, the changing nature of individual strikes, shifting unions strategies, and the varying decisions of the Industrial Court.

Given this contingent relationship, certain key discontinuities can be identified. During the 1950-1972 period, strikes were relatively uncommon, against the backdrop of a highly repressive legislative environment. Nonetheless, a wave

of political protests took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, some of which impacted on the prevailing industrial relations environment. During the years 1972-1979, industrial conflict rapidly increased, with many of the old legal constraints seemingly losing their efficacy. Strikes were often, however, marked by police intervention, and by the unwillingness of many employers to recognize the role of trade unions. In the 1980s, strikes became increasingly ritualised, albeit with some important counter-tendencies, including the mass strikes of 1987 and the coercive LRA amendments of 1988. This process was greatly facilitated by the rise of formal and informal bargaining mechanisms. Meanwhile, the insurrection of the 1980s resulted in the mass mobilization of communities, which, in many instances, strengthened the position of striking workers. This tendency is less identifiable in earlier waves of protests, of the early 1960s and 1976. Nonetheless, the unions only assumed a dominant role in stayaway action in the late 1980s.

5. Conclusion

It seems evident that industrial relations legislation as well as overt political protest provided something of the framework in which strikes took place. Whilst it is unlikely that changes in industrial relations legislation contributed to increased numbers of strikes taking place, it can be argued that key reforms, such as the Wiehahn report, initiated a gradual process of the institutionalization of industrial conflict. In other words, industrial conflict, while increasingly prevalent, was

becoming bound by formal and informal rules of conduct. In terms of these rules, employers were gradually forced to acknowledge the legitimacy of collective worker organization and workers the necessity of adopting consistent bargaining positions.

There seems no evidence to conclude that conflict was directly transferable between workplace and community, although it is evident that the rise of stayaway action in the 1980s, following surges of political activism in the townships, mirrored increasing numbers of strikes and unionization initiatives at the workplace. This increasing mobilization in both areas would greatly facilitate stayaway action in support of political demands and consumer boycotts in support of strikers. However, it was only in the late 1980s, following the unprecedented repression of the late Botha era, that the unions were able independently to make use of the general stayaway weapon. This was employed in pursuing those demands of general interest to the union movement which were inappropriate for workers to bargain for at factory level by means of localized strikes.

Endnotes

1. A further development was the gradual introduction of the influx control system. By 1955 most of the Transvaal and certain areas of Natal and the Orange Free State were already covered by the passbook system (Hansard 14, 1955:Col.5591). As Simkins (1981:24) notes, the black labour force was divided between "insiders", those who enjoyed Section 10 (1) rights, and those who could only stay in the urban areas if they could find and keep employment. "Illegal" workers in the urban areas, those who had not gone through the complicated process to obtain permanent and temporary residence rights, invariably ended up in extremely poorly-paying employment (ibid.:25). Legal

temporary urban residents faced the omnipresent threat of being "endorsed out" should they engage in "undesirable" activities such as strike action. Even "legal" urban residents were periodically "endorsed out" or sent to work on farms on a technicality (see SAIRR 1956-7:65).

2. It was as a result of widespread criticism from the union movement that this restriction on migrants was eliminated in 1981 (Nupen 1983:44), in terms of the 1981 Labour Relations Amendment Act. In addition, this act extended existing controls on registered trade unions, to also cover unregistered unions (Benjamin, Cheadle & Khoza 1981:18). However, the reforms also gave the minister sweeping powers to grant exemptions from the Act (SALB 1981:29).

SECTION 4: THE CHANGING FACE OF STRIKES

CHAPTER 7

COMMONALITY AND CHANGE: THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED STRIKES

This chapter consists of a detailed analysis of aspects of selected strikes throughout the period under review. The chapter has three basic objectives. Firstly, it is intended to provide further insights into the relationship between industrial conflict at the local level and general trends. Secondly, it is hoped that further light will be shed on the nature of strike causality, in particular in terms of the relationship between subjective and objective causes. Thirdly, the relationship between the causes, course and duration of strikes is explored, and the factors that may potentially determine the duration of a strike. Again, as an analytical tool, the method of difference is employed, based on logical juxtapositions of a limited number of cases (in this instance) or trends, assessing both continuities and crucial differences (Skocpol 1984b:379).

It can be argued that South African strikes during the period under review can be loosely divided into five distinct categories. Firstly, there are the fairly limited strikes over not always clearly stated demands, involving only single companies, with limited support in the wider community. Trade union involvement is also limited, with the union (if any) providing more moral than material support. Most strikes in the 1950-72 period fall into this category, which can be loosely termed "instantaneous" strikes. Whilst generally not characterized by prior planning on the part of workers, such strikes are not spontaneous outbreaks so much as the product of material factors. They involve relatively few workers and are of comparatively short duration, their demands are not clearly stated, and they have no obvious leaders and little union or

other outside support.

Secondly, there are strike waves, where there is evidence of considerable solidarity between workers in different factories and demands are more clearly stated. This manifestation of collective action was typified by the 1973 Durban, 1974 East London and 1981 East Rand strike waves. Thirdly, there are relatively well-organized strikes, generally with a trade union presence and clearly-stated demands pertaining directly to workplace issues, yet with organizational and other constraints resulting in their being of comparatively short duration. Nonetheless, these strikes, the predominant form of collective action in the 1970s, represented a new era in collective action.

By the 1980s, strikes of this nature tended to be longer and better-organized, reflecting the greater resources the trade unions had at their disposal, forming a distinctive, fourth category. Demands expressed during this more sustained form of collective action tended to be more multi-faceted, often extending beyond questions of pay and working conditions to broader questions of control at the workplace. Finally, there are "trials of strength" where both union and management set out not only to extract concessions from their opponents, but to totally defeat them. The relevance of the Hicks (1932:141-2) model and its modifications with regard to all these manifestations of strike action will be critically assessed. There are readily identifiable time periods when certain of these categories of strikes were most prevalent. As noted in previous chapters, there are a number of discontinuities during the period

under review, such as before and after the 1972 wage increases, and the pre- and post-Wiehahn periods. Strikes can be traced back to a number of readily-identifiable causal and contingent variables. However, these variables were themselves subject to important changes between 1950 and 1990, resulting in strikes assuming a number of distinct forms, with radically different internal dynamics and outcomes.

1.0 Instantaneous Strikes

A common feature of these strikes, the predominant manifestation of strikes in the pre-1970 period, seems to have been the importance of wage demands, as well as their generally short duration, a major exception being the Langeberg Koopratief strike of 1959 (see Rand Daily Mail 14/12/1959).

1.1 Wages and Strikes

All the strikes evaluated within this category represented responses to deteriorating material circumstances, or situations where there seemed some prospect of an increase. The former would include wage cuts and/or the effects of inflation, and the latter, situations where promised wage increases failed to live up to expectations. As noted earlier, it seems that low wages alone did not result in industrial conflict, but rather an alteration in wage levels. For example, the Langeberg Koopratief strike was the product of a reduction in wages, a move apparently supported by the government. It was argued that it was "dangerous" to express concern for the material conditions of

workers on purely philanthropic grounds (Rand Daily Mail 5/12/1959).

Many of the strikes in the 1950s and 1960s seem to have been characterized by demands for "unusually" high wage increases (although perhaps not all that high when the prevailing poverty datum line is considered). For example, the Flour Millers strike of the late 1950s took place when 1300 African workers demanded a very substantial pay rise (Horrell n.d.: 103). Management claimed the demands were excessive and offered a far more modest increase. It was only when the Native Labour Commissioner intervened, threatening police action, that workers accepted the offered pay rise.

As noted above, it was often in situations where there was some possibility of an increase that strikes took place. For example, during 1959, a wage determination was introduced, covering all ports in South Africa. The Durban dockworkers rejected the increase as being insufficient, with 3000 of them resorting to strike action (SACTU 1959:n.p.)¹.

In certain cases, workers could readily compare their wage levels with those of workers in similar categories of employment elsewhere. For example, the basic pay rate for stevedores in the Port Elizabeth docks during the mid-1950s, at 15 shillings a week, was substantially lower than that of Durban or Cape Town (SACTU 1957:n.p.). This led to stevedores refusing to perform overtime. Again, this represented a situation where aspirations that emerged when better material conditions seemed attainable led to strike action. During 1969, a new wage determination was announced for the stevedoring industry. Durban dockworkers

rejected the increase as inadequate (FOSATU 1983:n.p.). In particular, workers were displeased with the after-tax pay rates for overtime (Sunday Times 6/4/1969).

Furthermore, wage aspirations seem to have led to a series of strikes and violent protests on the South African mines in the early-to-mid 1970s. During April 1973, there was a brief stoppage at the East Driefontein mine near Carltonville, as a result of discontent surrounding overtime pay rates at that mine (SAIRR 1973:243). During August of that year, also at a Carltonville mine, 200 mechanical operators refused to go underground after they had not received pay increases awarded to workers in other categories of employment (McNamara 1985:297). When managers tried to explain that this was as a result of differences in job status, a violent confrontation took place (ibid.:297).

Between September 1973 and September 1975, a series of riots took place on a number of gold and coal mines, leaving 130 workers dead, and another 30 - 50,000 breaking their contracts and returning home (Plaut 1976:37). For example, on 11 September 1973, there was an outbreak of violence at West Driefontein (SAIRR 1973:243). In May 1974, a violent wage strike took place at an Orange Free State gold mine, reinforcing the precedent of resorting to collective action if wages were low (McNamara 1985:301). National pay increases were then granted, leading to a new minimum wage of 12 cents per shift, or R31.20 per month, in an apparent attempt to head off the possible spread of disturbances (Isebenzi 1974).

It seems evident that heightened aspirations following the

1972 pay increases sparked off this series of wage-related disputes (McNamara 1985:296). After many years of stagnant wages, the possibility of gaining rises seems to have spurred workers to seek further gains. In a survey of all conflict situations on the mines between 1972 and 1975, it was revealed that 36% of conflict situations were the result of dissatisfaction with wages (McNamara 1985:295)². In the late 1970s, black real wages had begun to increase, probably resulting in heightened aspirations (see chapters 3-4). Meanwhile, the deferred pay scheme was seen by miners as adversely affecting their material conditions, and thus could have had similar effects to those of sustained price rises.

Furthermore, certain strikes in this category seemed to be the result of inflationary pressures, including disproportionate increases in basic foodstuffs. This was typified by the Lion Match strike of March 1961. Inter alia, workers were mobilized around the slogan "Kwashiorkor is Killing Us" (Horrell n.d.:112). Similarly at Clayton Toys, during 1961, workers demanded more pay by writing "please we want more" on the back of their pay envelopes and stopping work (SAIRR 1961:80).

1.2 The Role of the Trade Unions

Despite serious divisions in the union movement and very limited membership, the SACTU unions supported many instances of collective action during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In response to a pay cut (see above), one thousand workers struck at the Langeberg (LKB) cannery in Port Elizabeth during 1957, under the leadership of both SACTU and FCWU (Lambert 1988:273).

In addition, SACTU's Congress allies called for a consumer boycott of Langeberg's products (Rand Daily Mail 5/12/1959). It seems evident that FCWU threats of a general stoppage at all eight LKB plants contributed to the workers' victory (Rand Daily Mail 29/12/1959). However, the FCWUs were unable to offer significant financial support to strikers during the dispute. Indeed, requests for financial support to other branches of the union met with very poor responses (Lambert 1988:273).

Similarly, the TWIUs were an active participant in a series of textile industry strikes in the early to mid-1950s. For example, during 1952, African textile workers struck at King Williams Town, following a pay dispute. This seems one of the few recorded instances where a trade union was in a position to offer strikers meaningful financial support, in this case L99 of strike funds collected from other SATLC unions (SATLC 1952:n.p.). The TWIU then successfully negotiated with management a new overtime deal (Du Toit 1978:96)³.

Less successful was the 1956 Hex River Textiles strike, following a breakdown in negotiations at Conciliation Board level. Workers at the company were among the lowest paid in the country, with pay rates being in the order of L1/13/5 per week (TWIU 1956:n.p.). All 1300 strikers were dismissed and convicted of striking illegally (ibid.). An even greater defeat was the Amato textiles strike, which resulted in a major defeat for the TWIU's (Bonner and Lambert 1987:339).

At Walter and Dean in Pinetown, 60 African workers, all members of SACTU, stopped work and demanded to discuss with management the possibility of a pay increase (SACTU 1961c:n.p.).

Workers seem to have acted on their own initiative, receiving little or no financial or organizational backing from that federation, reflecting its organizational and financial limitations⁴. In this case, the role of the union seems to have been purely advisory, with little material and organizational backing (ibid.:111).

In most strikes from 1962 to 1972, there was no evidence of a trade union presence. Major strikes where workers had no formal organization included the 1964 Consul Lancashire Cotton Corporation strike, the 1969 and 1971 Durban Dockworkers strikes⁵, and the spate of often violent protests and strikes on the mines during the early 1970s.

Thus, the support the unions offered strikers during this period seems to have been largely moral, often only after the strike had actually broken out. However, considering the limited penetration of the unions during the 1950s and 1960s, it seems that a disproportionate percentage of strikes were characterized by some form of union presence. It is possible that through simply enlisting workers, unions succeeded in unifying them and facilitating the emergence of some form of factory-level leadership. Whilst there is no evidence that the unions instigated strikes, it is conceivable that their very presence made many of the strikes during this period possible. However, it does not seem that any of the strikes facilitated subsequent union organization, and, in many cases, the union presence was simply removed through the dismissal of strikers. The unions involved in disputes seem to have been universally SACTU affiliates. Whilst the SATUC/TUCSA unions seem to have had

considerably greater financial resources, they seem to have generally opposed striking (see chapter 5). Again, the relationship between unions and strikes seems not only to have been in terms of union strength, but also in terms of the type of union, what categories of workers it represented and its strategy. In those disputes where SACTU had a presence, it often organized the unskilled and migrants (see Horrell n.d. 95-106), the latter representing a particularly vulnerable component of the labour market (see Hindson 1987a:99).

1.3 Rationality and Industrial Conflict

Thirdly, it seems evident that in most cases, the duration of disputes was not, as suggested by Hicks (1932:141-2), the product of a rational cost-benefit analysis by the main parties to a dispute, management and workers. In fact, industrial disputes rarely represented closed systems, characterized by the interaction of free agents, but also concerned broader social institutions, such as the state, and all the attendant power relationships.

For example, the duration of the 1957 Port Elizabeth stevedores strike was not the result of a rational economic cost-benefit analysis by the major parties to the dispute, but rather was terminated through state intervention. Whilst certain employers were willing to grant pay increases, the Chairman of the Native Labour Board dissuaded them, claiming it was contrary to state policy (SACTU 1957:n.p.). Similarly, both police and Department of Labour officials intervened during the 1961 Walter and Dean dispute. The latter persuaded management to grant no

concessions, while all strikers were arrested and criminally prosecuted (SACTU 1961c:n.p.)⁶.

There seemed little coherent pattern in the participation of the authorities, sometimes involving police, sometimes only Labour Department officials. Actions varied, ranging from the physical arrest of strikers, to officials supporting some form of a compromise. As Olson (1990:214) suggests, the relationship between and within distinct social groups such as business and the state may be somewhat obscured owing to the nature of indivisibilities, unseen commitments and relations. This may preclude the identification of simple cause and effect relations, in this case determining the duration of an industrial dispute.

Even stoppages by workers seem not to have always been planned in advance. For example, a transport delay at one of the gold mines during 1977 led to a series of violent disturbances (Prior 1977:68). There is little doubt that this dispute represented the culmination of considerable latent discontent. In other words, conflict assumed a hidden, latent, or what can be termed a "rhizomatic"⁷ form, which, depending on the course of events, would ultimately break out in the form of strike action or violent protests.

Furthermore, it should be noted that during many of the disputes, parties had imperfect knowledge of their opponent's intentions (see Arrow & Hankopolija 1985:24). This may result in parties being somewhat inconsistent in their responses to industrial conflict. For example, during the 1961 Clayton Toys strike, management first dismissed workers and summoned the

police, yet then re-employed all strikers, granting a significant pay increase (SAIRR 1961:80). During the 1971 Durban docks strikes, management oscillated between granting pay increases and threatening workers with dismissal (IIE n.d.a.:n.p.; SAIRR 1972:355).

1.4 The Subjective Causes of Individual Strikes

Finally, strikes should be seen not only as a product of objective, but also of subjective factors. Thus, the propensity of workers to resort to collective action is partially a product of previous experiences of strikes and subjective interpretations thereof.

For example, although the Amato strike of the late 1950s represented a major defeat for workers (Bonner and Lambert 1987:360), memories of the strike and subjective interpretations of it seem to have lead to the Benoni Textiles strike of 1964 (see Walker & Weinbron 1961:269). Following on the March 1961 strike at Lion Matches, a second strike took place during August of that year. As a response to the alleged victimization of strikers during the earlier strike, the decision to strike again seems, at least in part, framed by the earlier experience of collective action (SAIRR 1961:213).

Meanwhile, the Durban docks seemed unusually strike-prone during the late 1960s and early 1970s (SAIRR 1969b:112; SAIRR 1972:355; IIE n.d.a.). Although the 1969 strike represented a major defeat (Rand Daily Mail 7/4/1969), this did not preclude subsequent strikes from taking place. This does not seem to be a product of the technological environment (see Blauner 1966:176-

8). Whilst there were some indications of discontent amongst stevedores in East London during 1972 (Daily Dispatch 22/8/1972), other major ports, such as Cape Town, were relatively strike-free. The Durban stevedores strikes seem to have been consistently cumulative, with the later strikes being framed by workers' previous experiences of collective action and their subjective interpretations thereof.

2.0 "Man is Dead, but His Spirit Still Lives" - Strike Waves

Three major strike waves took place during the period under review - Durban in 1973, East London in 1974 and the East Rand in 1981. These strikes had certain common characteristics, including their duration and the generally specific and focused nature of demands expressed. Important differences include the role played by the trade unions and regional socio-political dimensions.

2.1 Wages and Strike Waves

All three strikes took place in periods when real wages had begun to rise, with, in the case of Durban and East London, wage levels lagging behind other major urban centres (see chapter 4). In other words, the strike waves took place in situations where some improvement in material conditions seemed possible, resulting in heightened wage aspirations.

Most of the Durban strikes revolved around the pay issue. The first strike, at Coronation Brick and Tile, was as a result of demands for a pay increase from R8.87 to R20 per day (FOSATU

n.d.b.:n.p.). In their analysis of the strikes, the Durban Chamber of Commerce found widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing pay levels, coupled with general rises in the cost of living, including train fare increases (Durban Chamber of Commerce 1973:n.p.; Daily Dispatch 16/2/1973). Indeed, between 1970 and 1972, the overall cost of living in the Durban region had risen by some 21%, with the cost of food rising 27% (FOSATU n.d.b.: n.p.). In other words, the strikes took place in a period of deteriorating material conditions, reflecting the general tendency for strikes to take place in periods of inflation. Significantly, 81% of the firms hit by the strikers paid workers less than R50 per month, compared to a regional average of R67 (Fisher 1977:344). Most of the strikes were about wages, with workers demanding unusually large increases (Wood 1992:12)⁸.

The East London strikes also seemed to be a product of wage aspirations and increases in the cost of living. Mare asserts that wages in the region were depressed by the government's decentralization policy (Mare 1974:26). At a meeting held in Duncan Village during the strike wave, workers claimed that they received too little money to cover the rising costs of food, clothing, or to cover other basic expenditure (Indaba 2/8/1974). Furthermore, nationwide pay rises could have had the effect of making further increases seem possible.

The East London strike wave began at CDA, where workers clocked in, then stopped work and demanded a 25% pay rise (Daily Dispatch 22/7/1992). At Cyril Lord (clothing) workers demanded pay increases of R10 per week for women and R15 for men (Daily

Dispatch 30/7/1992). Workers argued that they could not "live on these salaries...the cost of living makes it impossible" (ibid.), demonstrating the accuracy of Hibbs' (1976:1043) assertion that "workers do not suffer from any money illusion", but take the effects of inflation fully into account. Other pay strikes took place at Dunlop Flooring, Gentner Manufacturing, Everite, Consul Textiles and Kaffrarian Reinforcement (Daily Dispatch 30/7/1992). This was followed by a short bus drivers' strike, and a somewhat longer stoppage at Distillers (Daily Dispatch 1/8/1974).

Although many of the East Rand strikes concerned union recognition and collective bargaining structures, union sources indicated that the strikes also represented a response to declining material conditions and resentment against arbitrary actions by management (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). Indeed, there were disproportionate increases in the price of basic foodstuffs, with bread rising some 30-40% in August (Baskin 1982:22). Meanwhile, there had also been increases in both bus fares and township rents (ibid.:22). Thus, as was the case with the Durban and East London waves, the East Rand strikes were partially the product of inflation. Workers demanded a "living wage" of between R1 and R2/hour, reflecting rising aspirations and high levels of deprivation (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.).

2.2 The Role of the Unions in Strike Waves

The established unions, with the exception of the TWIU (which assisted workers during the Smith and Nephew strike), seem to have played little role during the strikes, although it seems

evident that the early worker service organizations played an important role in assisting and advising workers (Wood 1992:22). However, as noted earlier, during the aftermath of the strike wave, a number of independent unions were established in the Durban region. There was no evidence of trade unions playing any role during the 1974 East London strikes.

In contrast, trade unions played a central role during the 1981 East Rand strike wave. Although the strikes centred on the metal industry, the strike wave began at Colgate Palmolive⁹, organized by the CWIU. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) had rapidly expanded in the area, in the period leading up to the strike wave. The metal industry employers' association, SEIFSA, remained heavily committed to bargaining only at industrial council level, and this seems to have served as an additional source of tension (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). During the course of the year, MAWU's membership rose by 50% (Baskin 1982:24)¹⁰.

Thus, while the 1973 Durban strike wave gave considerable momentum to unionization initiatives, the East Rand strikes followed a unionization drive in the region. This provides further evidence that the relationship between unions and strikes is, as noted earlier, a two-way one. On the one hand, mobilization through collective action may facilitate union organizational initiatives. On the other, trade unions may provide the organizational and logistical support for strikes.

2.3 The Subjective Causes of Strike Waves

All three strike waves represented cumulative phenomena, with the decision to strike being partially based on subjective interpretations of earlier strikes. Following the march of striking Coronation Brick and Tile workers, strikes spread rapidly across the Durban region (see FOSATU n.d.c.:n.p.). In particular, the Frame Group of Companies proved particularly strike-prone (Financial Mail 2/2/1973). These strikes dramatically increased the numbers of workers who had been exposed to some form of collective action, and seem to have greatly popularized the idea of striking. Indeed, a limited number of "copycat" strikes took place in neighbouring Pietermaritzburg (FOSATU n.d.d.:n.p.). The East London strikes seemed similarly cumulative, with later strikes being partly framed by subjective interpretations of earlier disputes (see Daily Dispatch 30/7/1974).

On the East Rand in 1981, the Colgate dispute and consumer boycott was followed by a number of strikes in the immediate vicinity of that factory. These included Salcast, Hendler & Hendler, Bison Board, Langeberg Co-Operative and Vaal Metals (Swilling 1983:123). Again, the strikes seemed not only a product of objective circumstances, but also of subjective interpretations of previous strikes in the region. Indeed, the fact that several of the disputes which followed the Colgate strike were unsuccessful did not stem the wave. As one worker noted, "people saw the [Colgate] strike and were inspired" (quoted in Baskin 1982:31). As a result of increased pressures placed on workers by extended rural networks of support, as well

as subjective interpretations of the outcomes of the 1981 strike wave, a mini-strike wave took place in Germiston (the epicentre of the 1981 strikes) in 1982 (see Swilling 1983:120-134).

Thus, even if certain key strikes represented defeats for workers (e.g. the 1981 Telephone Manufacturers strike [Baskin 1982:33]), this does not seem to have deterred workers from resorting to collective action elsewhere. Even after the strike wave had subsided, both Durban and the East Rand remained important centres of strike action. In other words, workplace cultures now seemed to incorporate a certain understanding of the nature and possibilities of strike action, coloured by the inter-subjective interpretations of workers. Strike action no longer represented a journey into the unknown, but rather an inspirational mechanism for voicing grievances.

2.4 Rationality, Knowledge and Strike Waves

In the 1973 Durban strike wave, employers were confronted with a relatively unknown phenomenon, and were quick to grant significant pay increases. For example, Frame Group companies granted across-the-board increases of between R1.75 and R3 (Financial Mail 2/2/1973). It seemed evident that employers, and possibly workers, possessed imperfect knowledge of the opposing side's intentions.

Employer responses to the East London strikes were mixed. Most disputes were peaceful and were resolved after lengthy negotiations (Daily Dispatch 1/8/1992). However, heavy-handed police intervention occurred during at least three disputes. At CDA, police teargassed strikers (SAIRR 1974:329). Whilst

management indicated a willingness to negotiate, it gave strikers an ultimatum to return to work (IIE 1974b:n.p.). Some companies granted pay increases ranging from 10-15%, yet others refused to make any concessions (Mare 1974:26). Again, this provides evidence of varying responses to similar situations (see Arrow and Hankopolija 1985:24), providing further evidence that the duration of a strike and its outcome is not always the result of a consistently rational costs-benefits analysis. The 1981 East Rand strike wave yielded equally mixed results (see FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). Indeed, in this case the state seems to have played little role in constraining or directing individual behaviour (see Alt and Shepsle 1990:1).

Both the Durban and East London strikes represent extremely risky actions by workers, who had limited financial and organizational resources and no legal protection. In both these cases, employers had the resources to wage a protracted struggle, yet possessed imperfect knowledge of their opponents' strength and feared wider political instability (see Daily Dispatch 16/2/1973; 1/8/1974).

2.5 The Spatial and Temporal Dimensions of Strike Waves

All three strike waves were framed by relatively unique regional dynamics. In both Durban and East London, bantustan officials played prominent yet contradictory roles. Although it was alleged that KwaZulu officials were involved in the Durban strikes, it seems that they did not have any lasting impact on the course of events (see IIE 1974a). During the East London strike wave, representatives of striking bus drivers were taken

to Cambridge police station, where they were confronted by the Ciskeian Chief Minister Lennox Sebe, who persuaded them to return to work (Daily Dispatch 1/8/1974). Hailed in the white community as a peacemaker, Sebe called on South African factory owners to notify homeland leaders if confronted by strike action (ibid.). However, Sebe's choice of venue when meeting with the strikers, his failure to negotiate any increases for workers, and his late record of anti-union activity made his role in the East London strikes hardly one of an honest broker.

Many of the workers involved in the East Rand strikes were hostel dwellers. Such workers often performed the most difficult and dangerous jobs, whilst the hostel system facilitated contact between strikers (Baskin 1982:22-32). The predominance of the metal industry may have made it easier for workers to compare conditions. However, it should be noted that the strikes involved both hostel dwellers and township residents, encompassing firms involved in very different areas, ranging from electronics to scrap metal (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). In other words, contrary to Kerr and Siegel (Kerr 1964:193) and Blauner (1966:176-8), there seem to have been no clear linkages between the propensity to resort to collective action, and community structures or technology.

Temporally speaking, the Durban and East London strikes preceded the 1976 Soweto uprising and the 1981 East Rand strikes followed it. It seems evident that the Colgate boycott, which had far-reaching implications in terms of mobilizing East Rand communities, would not have been possible without the mushrooming of civic and local organizations in the late 1970s (see FOSATU

1982a:n.p.). As can be seen from table 17, most major consumer boycotts over workplace issues took place during the early-to-mid 1980s, a period when community organizations had enjoyed an extremely rapid expansion.

3.0 In the Age of the Independent Unions: The New Era Strikes

These strikes were characterized by clearly articulated demands and effective trade union involvement. However, in the 1970s, the independent unions were relatively weak and lacked legal recognition. They had limited resources at their disposal, contributing to these disputes being of relatively short duration, often yielding mixed results. Having identifiable leaders, and over clearly stated demands, these strikes resemble more closely North American and European strikes than many of those discussed above, making Hicks's model (1932:141) (and Ashenfelter and Johnson's) of seemingly greater relevance. Strikes in this category constituted the predominant form of industrial conflict from the early 1970s to the early 1980s.

3.1 The Role of the Unions

These strikes were characterized by a trade union presence. However, this often remained moral and advisory, only manifesting itself after the dispute had broken out. During the two Turnwrights strikes, workers demanded that BAWU be given the right to negotiate on their behalf (Hudson 1974:47). During August 1974, 1200 workers struck at Frame Textiles, Newbury Park and Pinetex, all members of the Frame Group (FOSATU n.d.e.:n.p.).

During the strike, workers received some assistance from the newly-established NUTW, whilst the Kwazulu "urban ambassador" agreed to negotiate on their behalf. In contrast, the TWIU, which had an organizational presence at the plant, was seen as having "an overly close relationship with management" (NUTW 1977:n.p.). Again, the relationship between the unions and strikes was a product not only of the size of unions, but also of union policy. During the 1980 Putco strike, the bus drivers union, TAWU (a CUSA affiliate), negotiated on behalf of workers once the stoppage had taken place (Financial Mail 11/6/1980). The agreement reached to end the strike included recognition of that union (ibid.).

In certain cases, a trade union was present at the company prior to the strike. For example, during August 1978, the Food and Canning Workers Union had begun to organize in the United Macaroni Group (Fattis) factory. By the beginning of 1979, workers asked the union to negotiate a pay increase (McGregor 1980:122). At the time of the 1981 strike, male workers earned R32/week and women R19.27; the union demanded a general increase to R40/week and improvements in working conditions (FCWU n.d.a.:n.p.). This sparked off a strike in the milling section¹¹, ultimately culminating in a major strike and consumer boycott¹².

Thus, the relationship between unions and strikes was, essentially, a dualistic one. In certain cases, the union only came to prominence during a strike, the collective action greatly facilitating the subsequent growth of the union. However, in other cases, it was the presence of a union and its expansion,

that contributed to the strike taking place.

3.2 Wage Aspirations and Strikes

Again, the incidence of strikes in this category is strongly linked to wage aspirations. For example, both the 1974 Turnwrights strikes were over worker demands for pay increases, after negotiations at Liaison Committee level failed to produce the desired results (Rand Daily Mail 22/8/1974). A similar case arose when over 4000 workers from three different motor manufacturing companies in the Eastern Cape were involved in strike action during June 1980. Most hit was Volkswagen, where 3500 African workers had struck for more pay (Financial Mail 20/6/1980). Although management had offered an increase to R1.15/hour, workers demanded a rise to R2/hour, an increase of almost 100% (ibid.)¹³.

3.3 The Duration of Strikes

Strikes in this category remained of relatively short duration. This reflected the limited resources at the disposal of workers, as well as prevailing managerial cultures and the role of the authorities. Again, this demonstrates the limitations of Hicks's economic costs-benefits model, without including factors such as power networks and prevailing cultures at the time of the dispute.

The strikes at Frame textiles during 1974 resulted in the director of the relevant plants, flanked by police, informing workers that the strikes were illegal and ordering them to return to work (Ensor 1974d:44). Two hundred and fifty strikers were

arrested, while 217 workers were convicted of striking illegally and fined R5 each (SAIRR 1974:329). Thus, contrary to Hicks' (1932:141-2) prediction, the dispute did not solely represent the interaction between free agents, but also reflected the involvement of the state on behalf of employers¹⁴.

The 1975 Union Whaling Company strike in Durban resulted in workers gaining a pay increase. However, after the strike management collected the names of those involved, who were shortly thereafter charged with illegal striking (TUACC 1975a:n.p.). They were given the option of paying a R50 admission of guilt fine, which management offered to deduct from their salary. When workers decided to contest the matter in court, which could have resulted in a drop in production, the charges were mysteriously dropped (TUACC 1975a: n.p.), reflecting the close manner in which the authorities co-operated with management in many instances of industrial conflict at the time. Similarly, in the case of the dispute at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills during 1975, a general strike by African workers resulted in a lockout, with workers paid off under a heavy police presence and then selectively rehired (Financial Mail 14/11/1975).

The 1979 Fattis and Monis strike was to last seven months, culminating in the above-mentioned consumer boycott, supported by a wide range of organizations, ranging from the Labour Party to trade and student groupings (Financial Mail 15/11/1979). The boycott led to protracted talks between management and workers, resulting ultimately in a pay increase and the reinstatement of all strikers. Significantly, the agreement was jointly signed by the Food and Canning Workers Union and the Parallel African

Food and Canning Workers, which management had hitherto insisted on negotiating with separately (McGregor 1980:125). This strike was of particular importance in that it revealed both the growing strength of the unions and links with community structures, making it increasingly difficult to "solve" wage demands through arbitrary dismissals. Again, the strike did not constitute a closed system, and should be seen in terms of a very specific time and space, of prevailing managerial cultures and state strategies, and in the context of the rise of community organizations.

The outbreak of the 1980 Volkswagen strike was followed by sporadic incidents of "unrest" in neighbouring townships (see Financial Mail 20/6/1980). Whilst this did not necessarily prove that industrial conflict is transferable, it does seem that collective action at the workplace could have broader social implications in situations where organizational mobilization was proceeding apace in both factory and community. After the Volkswagen strike, Eastern Cape motor manufacturers conceded the principle of paying a "living wage" (FOSATU 1981b:n.p.).

In contrast, the 1980 Putco strike was called off without management making any significant concessions. The union argued that the strike had caused "considerable suffering" in the black community, and thus could not be sustained (Cooper 1981:10). Workers (and the union) had very slender resources to fall back on, placing further pressures on already over-extended informal mechanisms of support.

3.4 The Effects of Subjective Factors on Strikes

Few of the strikes in this category resulted in clear victories for workers. However, even those dispute which resulted in either defeat or very limited gains for workers, seem to have served as an encouragement to resort to collective action again. This reflected the emergence of a new workplace culture, in contrast to the continued conservatism on behalf of management in many firms (see above).

For example, the 1975 dispute at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills, consisting of first a strike and then a lockout, ended in all African workers being dismissed, a move that was to prove extremely costly to management (Financial Mail 14/11/1975). Again, the causes and duration of a dispute were not determined by a rational economic costs-benefits analysis, but rather by subjective interpretations of the implications of industrial conflict. Whilst this would seem to invalidate Hicks's model, it should be noted that broader rational choice models that include such subjective factors could have a relevance in such contexts (Ordeshook 1990:10).

Conversely, despite the failure of the first Turnwrights strike during July 1974, workers resorted to strike action one month later in pursuit of the same demand (Hudson 1974:43), a decision presumably framed by the previous experience of collective action. In response to this second stoppage, all strikers were dismissed (Rand Daily Mail 22/8/1974). The major strike at three Frame plants during August 1974 followed on three strikes in the same factories during the preceding eighteen months (NUTW 1973:n.p.).

The 1980 Eastern Cape motor industry strikes led to outbreaks of industrial conflict at two major motor component manufacturers, Hella and SKF bearings, over the issue of union recognition and wages. Following the unusually large Volkswagen strike and the "unrest" in neighbouring townships, these conflicts seemed partially the product of subjective interpretations of earlier happenings.

Meanwhile, the major June 1980 Putco strike, as noted earlier, had led to protracted negotiations with management. This was to lead to a second strike in December of that year (Cooper 1981:10). The willingness to resort to collective action a second time seemed in part a product of the earlier experiences of collective action. The second dispute resulted in strikers being fired and selectively rehired (ibid.:10).

Thus, strikes can be seen to be a partly cumulative phenomenon - centres where workers had some familiarity with the nature and effects of striking were likely to see further strikes taking place. Indeed, in spatial terms, most of the strikes of the 1970s and early 1980s were concentrated in the Durban and PWV regions. This reflected the growth of the independent unions, which were concentrated in these two centres during the 1970s. In addition, in the case of Durban, the experience of the 1973 Durban strikes and subjective interpretations of them could have greatly popularized the idea of striking.

4.1 Wage Aspirations and Strikes

Again, the causes of many of the strikes in this category can be directly traced to wage aspirations. In other words, strikes did not take place as a result of poor material conditions per se, but rather when there seemed some prospect of an improvement. For example, in October 1980, the UAW and WPMWU had merged to form NUMARWOSA (later to become NAAWU). This led to greater contact between workers at different manufacturing firms, enabling workers readily to compare service conditions (SALB 1982b:19). Shortly before a major strike took place at Leyland, workers at Volkswagen had been granted increases of R2/hour (ibid.:29). In addition, Leyland workers had faced significant increases in the cost of basic goods and services in the Western Cape (see SALB 1982b:26)¹⁵.

A rather different case was the 1985 BTR Sarmcol strike. This strike followed a period of downscaling and retrenchments (SALB 1985:33-41), representing an instance where the prospect of a change in material circumstances (in this case, a deterioration) led to strike action. During March 1990, a major strike had taken place at CPA Hospitals for increased pay, union recognition, and permanent employee status for black workers (SALB 1990:7). Here, workers demanded an increase in the minimum wage from R260 to R500 per month. This strike is of particular significance in that it reflected the growth of the unions within the state sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although many of the demands were similar to those in the private sector,

others, such as the lack of permanent employee status for black workers, reflected deeply entrenched discriminatory practices in the public sector.

4.2 The Institutionalization of Strikes

It seems evident that, by the mid-1980s, strike action had become increasingly institutionalized. Whilst important exceptions remained, the general tendency seemed to be towards negotiated settlements and diminishing police involvement. Even where police did intervene, such as in the case of the 1986 Adcock-Ingram strike, this did not preclude subsequent negotiations and the reaching of a mutually acceptable settlement (see Izwilethu 1986). Indeed, although the rise of statutory and informal bargaining mechanisms had not led to a reduction in industrial conflict, it may have had the effect of altering the outcomes thereof.

Unlike many earlier state sector strikes, the police did not intervene in the March 1990 CPA Hospital workers strike. Indeed, there was considerable sympathy from other hospital staff (SALB 1990:8). Workers were not dismissed, and a negotiated settlement was reached (ibid.:8). It seems evident that even industrial conflict in the state sector had, as predicted by Hyman (1975:193), become somewhat ritualized.

However, it should be noted that there were limits in the process of accommodation. The 1983 Natal Threads strike represented the second legal strike by black workers (WIP 1983c:45). Despite its legality, the dispute was characterized by a heavy riot police presence. Nonetheless, the dispute was

eventually resolved through protracted negotiations, with management offering an increase of 8% (WIP 1983c:45).

Furthermore, throughout the 1980s picketing remained illegal (see WIP 1990:73). In addition, management was readily able to secure the eviction of workers engaging in sit-in action by means of Supreme Court orders. A good example of this would be the 1990 Southern Sun/Holiday Inn strike (see Argus 10/7/1990). The homeland public sector strikes of the early 1990s were, in terms of immediate political objectives as well as the widespread damage to property as a means of expressing demands, representative of another important counter-tendency in the process of institutionalization.

4.3 The Changing Role of the Unions

The unions became increasingly established during this period, and in most cases, played a major role in mobilizing workers and organizing solidarity action both in related factories and the community. However, the relationship continued to be a two-way one, with the outcome of several strikes having far-reaching implications for the union concerned, ranging from increased support to the total loss of an organizational presence at the relevant firm.

Whilst the 1980 Leyland strike failed to result in the desired pay increases, through its international contacts NUMARWOSA succeeded in getting British workers to block goods destined for Leyland's South African factories (SALB 1982b:39). This seems to have had considerable impact in persuading management to re-hire dismissed strikers with a modest pay

increase (ibid.:40)¹⁶. The 1984 Simba and 1985 BTR Sarmcol strikes both culminated in consumer boycotts co-ordinated by the relevant unions. Whilst the latter proved unsuccessful, the former forced management to reach a settlement (see FOSATU 1984:27; WIP 1985:43)¹⁷.

Despite the growing strength and assertiveness of the unions, it should be noted that they still only represented a very specific segment of the labour market, and had a limited capacity to prevent management from recruiting alternate labour supplies from the ranks of the unemployed. Management seemed to have little difficulty in recruiting strikebreakers during the 1981 Leyland strike (see SALB 1982b:4). BTR Sarmcol was situated in the Pietermaritzburg region, and was readily able to recruit strikebreakers from the rural poor, following the mass dismissal of workers during the May 1985 strike (MAWU 1985:32). When trade unionists tried to persuade local chiefs to block recruitment, they were arrested for intimidation (ibid.:31).

4.4 Subjective Factors and Strike Action

Furthermore, strikes were not only about objective circumstances, but also concerned the subjective interpretations of previous events. In particular, several of the above strikes were cumulative affairs, following on a series of smaller disputes at the same plant. Although previous strikes had often yielded mixed results, workers seem generally to have interpreted such experiences in a positive light.

The CPA hospital workers strike of March 1990 was followed by two more hospital strikes. During May 1990, CPA hospital

workers held a brief stoppage in support of striking health workers at twelve Transvaal hospitals (Cape Times 4/5/1990). This was followed by a third industrial dispute, in August 1990, when 6000 health workers in CPA hospitals struck for 16 days (Argus 23/8/1990). The principle aim of the latter strike was for union recognition, although workers also managed to negotiate a cut in the working week and to secure an undertaking from management to release details of a new pay package by April 16 (ibid.). Again, these strikes were demonstratively cumulative, with the later strikes being partially the product of earlier experiences of collective action¹⁸.

Workers can also be deeply divided as to whether the strike could have been considered a success or not. For example, after the (May 1992) strike at the SABC, involving the NACTU affiliated MWASA, some workers believed that they had succeeded in extracting genuine concessions from management:

"I got a lot of money after the strike which I used to buy three cattle at home in the rural area. I always wanted to buy cattle, but I could not do, because I was not paid enough. Now I bought them and gave them names which I like most. The first is Mzabalazo (struggle), the second toyi-toyi, and the third is MWASA¹⁹".

On the other hand, many believed that they had gained little from the strike. Certain workers, who occupied leadership positions in the union gained promotion in the aftermath of the strike, in an obvious management attempt at co-optation:

"Our leadership got promotions, good salaries, and they forgot us. The only benefit we got was related to general wage increments which (help) you survive under the present economic climate. By taking our leadership and giving it managerial positions, management ensured that those people will never be our leaders (again) because they have their own unique interests different to ours. As I am talking to you now, they have forgotten about us²⁰".

It is these different subjective interpretations of the strike that shaped the willingness of workers to resort to striking again. Workers attitudes to the union also changed as a result of the strike. Several workers alleged that union leadership paid little attention to the concerns of workers, and were slow in passing on money raised to support the strike to workers.

"...our leadership treated us like kids. We received money from sympathetic organizations and individuals and we could see when the money was coming in...even today we do not know what happened to those donations...²¹"

Similarly, another worker alleged:

"They were only interested in making money and tended to ignore us"²².

Thus, again, the course and duration of a strike was affected not only by a rational costs-benefits analysis, but by shifting attitudes during the course of a dispute. However, dissatisfaction with the union did not soften attitudes towards management,

"...when you are out there on strike, there is war, it is really war...there is one thing on your mind, are we going to win the strike or not"²³.

4.5 Time and Space and the Duration of Strikes

Finally, it is important to consider temporal and spatial issues²⁴. Most strikes in the 1980s were relatively peaceful affairs, despite unprecedented political protest actions in the townships. Whilst major stayaways took place in the 1980s, it does not follow that conflict was directly transferable between community and workplace. However, there had been a massive growth in both workplace and community organization and mobilization in the early-to-mid 1980s, facilitating contact

between the two and community support for instances of strike action, most notably in the form of consumer boycotts.

For example, in the early 1980s, the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) succeeded in establishing an organizational presence and gaining recognition at Simba Quix's Isando plant. During early 1984, three workers were dismissed in an apparent violation of an earlier agreement (WIP 1984c:40-41). Management refused to negotiate over the issue, leading to strike action. All 464 strikers were dismissed (FOSATU 1984:27).

In reaction, a consumer boycott was called by the dismissed workers, supported by FOSATU and a range of community organizations (FOSATU 1984:27). There is little doubt that the rise of community organizations in the townships greatly contributed to the success of the boycott. On 1 November, a settlement was reached, whereby the dismissed workers were re-employed and granted R6000 compensation (ibid.:27). The dismissal of strikers at BTR Sarmcol in 1985 similarly led to a limited consumer boycott of white-owned businesses in neighbouring Howick (WIP 1985:43).

Thus, the mass mobilization in the townships provided considerable support for strikers, most notably in the form of consumer boycotts. Those workers who were hostel dwellers also increasingly benefitted from their spatial situation, the confined hostel environment seemingly facilitating organization and unity. Despite the alleged difficulty of organizing migrant workers, migrants formed the majority of strikers in such major disputes as the 1980 Johannesburg municipal strike (see Keenan 1981:4-60). Indeed, it can be argued that, by the early 1980s,

two of the main spatial components of the apartheid system of control, the hostel and the geographically-distinct township, ironically served to strengthen the position of workers resorting to strike action.

However, community support can vary greatly from situation. In many cases, striking workers face persistent financial difficulties, which may result in family pressures to return to work. For example, during the 1992 SABC strike, most workers experienced persistent financial difficulties during the strike. For example, as "C" remarked²⁵:

"At home my wife was not working, and I could not buy food for the family. Imagine how bad the situation becomes when we are not without money. Firstly, you cannot afford to buy bread, I am not talking about many things. When you open the fridge, there is nothing inside".

Many of the interviewees had heavy hire-purchase obligations, which greatly added to the difficulties experienced²⁶.

"When we were on strike, payment of all accounts stopped. The furnishers people came to collect the furniture from my house, which I was still paying despite all the efforts of going to them and explaining my plight but all the seeds fell on barren soil".

In contrast to what seems to have been the case with many other strikes which took place during the period under review, workers could not necessarily rely on the support of families and communities. Again, it seems evident that the locale of a dispute, and when it took place may in some manner determine its duration, and the ability of workers to prolong the dispute.

Thus, as one interviewee remarked²⁷:

"All my friends were no where to be found because these were tough times and nobody wants to associate with someone who is not working. My wife could not understand because there was nothing to cook at night and the children were always crying".

Similarly, another interviewee said:

"My wife found the idea of going on strike very repugnant, and she was forcing me to cross the picket line and therefore go back to work"²⁸.

In a few cases, workers were able to draw on extended informal networks of support. However, families were, in most cases, divided over the issue of supporting the strikers. Thus,

"My younger brother who is also married helped me a lot during those times of hardships by stealing (sic) a small portion of his salary and giving it to me so that I could be able to buy pap, and some vegetables, especially cabbages, to eat at home".

It is possible that the limited community support was in some manner related to the organizational links of MWASA. Again, it is not only the relative numerical strength of the union that may determine its capacity to resort to collective action, but also its affiliations, and the strategy it chooses to adopt.

5.0 "I Saw a Fist Fly": Trials of Strength

Trials of strength can be defined as those disputes where one party seeks not to extract limited concessions from its opponents, but rather to inflict a major defeat on them, so as radically to alter the existing balance of power at the workplace. Such disputes are relatively rare, and, in the South African case, have only taken place on a handful of occasions.

These included the 1984 Dunlop strike, the 1987 Miners, Railways and Post Office Strikes, and the 1990 Mercedes-Benz strike. In this section, primary attention is focused on the latter four disputes.

5.1 The Unions and Strikes

All four trials of strength to be evaluated were characterized by rapid union expansion in the period leading up to the dispute. For example, the origins of the 1987 Post Office strike lay in the expansion of the non-aligned, yet predominantly black Post and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA), as well as dissatisfaction with deeply entrenched racism (see SALB 1987b:29). This led to four hundred post office workers in the Transvaal stopping work on 8 April 1987 in protest against racial discrimination and poor working conditions (WIP 1987a:38). The strike, which rapidly spread, resulted in a victory for workers, with most of their demands, revolving around an end to racist practices (particularly with regard to the transport of workers), being met (SALB 1987b:26). It was the longest strike ever in the history of the post office and represented the culmination of long-standing dissatisfaction with unequal employment practices (SALB 1987b:29). When, as a result of the rise of union activity, collective action became more feasible, it resulted in this rhizomatic discontent manifesting itself in overt strike action. However, despite these gains, the unregistered POTWA failed to secure official recognition from management through the strike (Financial Mail 8/5/1987). Again, not only did the rise of a union have implications for strike action, but the outcome of the strike affected the future status of the union.

The 1987 Railway Strike, one of the largest and most traumatic disputes ever involving the independent trade unions, started on 13 March, 1987, over the dismissal of a truck driver, Andrew Nedzamba, for a minor financial irregularity (Financial

Mail 3/4/1987). The strike followed the recent revival of SARHWU. This union had been formed in 1936, but had only been revived in the mid-1980s (Argus 23/4/1987). By 31 March between 13000 and 18000 workers had joined the strike (Cape Times 24/4/1987).

The SATS General Manager, Dr Bart Grove, claimed that Blatu, the official black trade union, had over 61 000 members (Argus 23/4/1987). Grove claimed Blatu acted "in a positive fashion", and "we cannot talk with another [union] who begins recruiting among our people" (ibid.). Management were not prepared to negotiate with SARHWU, but were prepared to discuss "Andrew's case" with Blatu (Financial Mail 24/3/1987). Again, membership proved not to be an adequate indicator of union strength, with other factors, such as union policy and relations with management, being of equal importance. Despite Blatu's seemingly impressive membership figures, it failed to have any impact on the course of the strike whatsoever. Indeed, Blatu proved incapable of enforcing its no-strike agreement with management (Matiko 1987c:7).

After twelve weeks, a settlement was reached. All the strikers who had been fired (26000 in all) would get their jobs back, at the original pay rate, but with an annual bonus, in addition to management's undertaking to bargain in good faith with SARHWU (Argus 26/1/1990). Furthermore, blacks were to be granted permanent employee status, whilst the Delmore and Kaserne hostels were to be upgraded (SALB 1987a: 30). However, it was only in 1991 that SATS were to accord full recognition to SARHWU (Cape Times, 1/8/1991).

Similarly, the 1987 Miners' strike followed on the rapid expansion of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Following on a sustained period of political protest, the NUM seemed capable of making significant gains at the workplace. The Chamber of Mines' interpretation of the strike was rather different. Anglo-American Chairman Gavin Relly claimed it reflected a shift towards a "normal" society, with a normal industrial relations environment (Financial Mail 28/8/1987).

In practice, management were determined to demonstrate their capacity to resist strike action (Markham & Motikeli 1987:63). In addition, it seemed evident that management sought to test the extent and depth of NUM support in such an environment (Ruiters 1987:59). The Chamber proved inflexible, consistently refusing to make any significant compromises. Again, the duration of the strike was not the product of an economic costs-benefits analysis, but rather of different interpretations of the relative strength of the opposing side. At least 50 000 NUM members were fired, with union recognition being withdrawn in certain mines (Ruiters 1987:62). Whilst employers implemented their original pay offer of a 17-23% increases, NUM offices were closed at certain mines, with shaftstewards being denied time off for union business (Ruiters 1987:61).

In assessing the nature of "trials of strength", there seems further evidence of a new segmentation of the labour market between unionized insiders and unemployed outsiders. For example, following the outbreak of the strike, long lines of prospective strikebreakers formed outside TEBA (labour recruiting for the mines) offices in the rural areas (Ruiters 1987:61).

This again demonstrated the extent of divisions in the labour market, the unions representing those in (generally permanent) employment, having little leverage over, or means of preventing competition from, the unemployed and rural poor. This ready availability of alternative labour sources contributed to the NUM's major defeat. A similar, albeit less widespread, trend was noticeable in the 1987 Railway Workers strike, although in this case the strikebreakers were primarily recruited from amongst the white unemployed (see Matiko 1987c:7).

The role of the unions proved somewhat more complex in the case of the 1990 Mercedes-Benz strike. This strike revolved around the rejection by certain NUMSA members at Mercedes-Benz of the National Bargaining Forum (NBF), despite that union having called for its establishment at national level (Argus 3/9/1990). This seems to have been a product of divisions within NUMSA at that factory, reflecting tensions between long-standing members of the former mainstream motor unions and newly integrated SAAWU members (Tom 1990:35-7; Kopke 1990:39-44), as well as fears that their traditional pay advantage vis-a-vis other motor firms would be eroded (Financial Mail 31/8/1990). The dismissals of certain workers and other factors were referred to arbitration, although by that stage, community sentiments and the ANC had come out in support of the NBF (Argus 9/10/1990). Again, union strength was a product not only of the physical size of the union, but also of its policy and internal dynamics.

5.2 Wages and Strikes

Most of the "trials of strength" to take place in post-war South Africa can, in some way, be linked to wage aspirations. Again, they represented not a response to low wages per se, but to those situations where there seemed some prospect of a change. In the case of the Mercedes-Benz strike, many workers believed that the National Bargaining Forum would result in their traditionally relatively high pay levels being eroded as a result of pressures from more conservative manufacturers also party to forum negotiations (Financial Mail 30/8/1990).

Thus, the strike represented, in part, the product of fears that relatively favourable wage levels could be placed in jeopardy in the future (see Financial Mail 31/8/1990). The Mines, Post Office, and Railways strikes followed a period of general sustained increases in real wages. Furthermore, significant increases in the cost of living had taken place in 1987.

The case of the mines was of particular importance. Although significant pay increases had taken place in the mining sector over the preceding five years, the average pay of black miners remained one-fifth of white miners, despite very limited skill differentials. Thus, once again, an improvement in pay seemed possible, which - coupled with poor material conditions - led to a situation of rising wage aspirations. The strike followed a breakdown in negotiations, with the Chamber offering 17-23% increases on gold mines, and the union demanding an across-the-board 30% pay rise (Markham & Motikeli 1987:63). The miners' strike represented the biggest legal strike in South

Africa's history, with 20 out of 37 collieries and 26 out of 36 gold mines being hit (Financial Mail 7/8/1987). In all, as many as 340 000 workers could have resorted to collective action (Markham & Motikeli 1987:61). The strike was centred on the major gold mines (Financial Mail 14/8/1987), and lasted from 9 to 30 August.

5.3 Strikes and Subjective Factors

The causes and duration of the disputes seemed to be a further product of both subjective and objective circumstances. The former encompassed the inter-subjective relations among both workers and management (Sayer 1992: 22), and included the experiences (or lack thereof) of management and workers of earlier disputes and their subjective interpretation of them. For example, many in the Chamber of Mines believed that a strike might be a "necessary experience" prior to the 1987 Miners' Strike (see Ruiters 1987:59).

Events during disputes, such as the two sieges of COSATU House during the 1987 railways strike, were interpreted in a number of very different ways, which affected the subsequent stances of both management and workers. SATS General Manager Grove charged that the aim of the strike was revolutionary, to disrupt transport (Argus 23/4/1987), yet offered no evidence to support his assertion. However, it seemed evident that other members of SATS management favoured a more conciliatory stance.

Indeed, the inter-subjective relations between members of management or workers might themselves be a source of

contention, as borne out by these divisions in management during the SATS strike, and between workers during the Mercedes-Benz dispute. In the case of the SATS strike, it seemed that an increasingly divided management ultimately granted major concessions to the union in view of the increasing costs, considerable unity amongst strikers, and pending court action (SALB 1987a:30). In addition, certain members of SATS management appeared to have inadvertently violated their own disciplinary code (WIP 1987a:39)²⁹. In addition, both the Post Office and SATS strikes were distinctly cumulative affairs, the decision of workers to join the strike being presumably framed by subjective interpretations of earlier events³⁰.

5.4 Violence and Strikes

As noted earlier, there is a general tendency for industrial conflict to become ritualized, governed by certain unwritten rules of conduct (Hyman 1975: 193). However, in the South African case, whilst such a general trend seemed apparent in the 1980s, the major trials of strength of 1987 represented an important counter-tendency. In particular, the 1987 Miners' and Railways strikes were characterized by high levels of violence on both sides. Furthermore, the role of the authorities seemed more reminiscent of industrial disputes in the 1950s (see, for example, Bonner and Lambert 1987: 336-365), than of the increasingly sophisticated industrial relations environment of the late 1980s.

For example, the 1987 SATS strike was characterized by a high level of police intervention, most notably in the form of

two bloody sieges of COSATU House, on 28 March and 22 April (WIP 1987a:38) where SARHWU, which represented most strikers, had been meeting. Over 300 trade unionists were detained for participating in an illegal gathering at Ogies (Matiko 1987c:7). In addition, several strikebreakers were allegedly executed by strikers. On April 21, management had issued workers with an ultimatum to return to work in the next 24 hours or be dismissed. The strikers defied the ultimatum and the following day 16 000 workers were dismissed, a day marked also by pitched street battles between workers and police in which six strikers perished (ibid.).

These events should be seen in the context of when the strike took place, at the peak of an unprecedented wave of state repression, following at the close of a period of widespread resistance to the prevailing political order. As was the case with the SATS strike, the miners strike was characterized by high levels of violence. Management alleged that widescale intimidation was taking place in the hostels, whilst workers claimed that, in some cases, strikers were being forced underground by security staff (Financial Mail 14/8/1987). Certainly, many of the informal norms governing industrial conflict by the late 1980s had been suspended³¹.

5.5 The Spatial Dimension

In addition, these developments highlight the importance of the spatial dimension in terms of understanding the duration of strikes. The highly regimented and confined hostel environment on the mines made it, ironically, substantially easier to enforce

worker solidarity during the 1987 Miners' strike (see Markham & Motikeli 1987:64-5). Meanwhile, the closed environment of the mines, often some distance from the major urban centres, made it relatively easier for security staff and police to resort to excessive force (ibid.:64). Meanwhile, SATS workers had received considerable support from neighbouring township communities, facilitated by the mass political mobilization of the 1980s (see WIP 1987a:39).

5.6 Rational-Costs Models and the Duration of Strikes

It seems evident that Hicks's model of the internal dynamics of strikes is again of limited relevance. In the trials of strength evaluated (with the possible exception of the Post Office strike), the benefits of victory soon became outweighed by the economic costs of the dispute. Rarely did it seem that either party was fully guided by an objective rational costs-benefits analysis. Indeed, parties seemed to have an imperfect knowledge of the opposing side's intentions and of their relative strengths.

There is little doubt that SATS management underestimated the relative strength of workers, and NUM that of the Chamber of Mines (see Ruiters 1987:59-61; Argus 23/4/1987). There was considerable uncertainty as to the opposing side's relative strength in all four disputes, resulting in significant changes in strategy during all four disputes evaluated. Even rational choice models which include the effects of both uncertainty and the role of distinct social groups (e.g. Olson 1990:210-214) may have little relevance in these contexts. In several cases,

parties chose to "act otherwise", to prolong the dispute for ideological purposes or on account of cultural factors, a good example being the stance of sectors of SATS management during the 1987 Railways strike (see Argus 23/4/1987). In other words, rationality may indeed be a variable feature of social life (see Arrow and Hankopolija 1985:24), framed by cultural orientation.

6.0

General Trends

Based on the method of difference, of assessing commonalities and crucial differences (Skocpol 1984b: 378), this chapter has essayed an evaluation of individual instances of strike action over the entire period of review. Above all it is evident that the internal dynamics of strikes reflect not just commonalities, but also discontinuities and change. Although there are certain general tendencies, significant changes in causal and contingent variables resulted in strikes assuming a number of radically different forms. Indeed, during the forty-year period under review, strikes can be divided into five distinct categories.

6.1 The Causes of Strikes

It is evident that, as suggested in chapters three and four, wage aspirations constitute a major cause of strikes. Poor material conditions alone do not engender strike action: rather, it is in situations where some improvement seems possible that strikes are likely to take place. Also, as predicted by Hibbs (1976:1043), workers are highly conscious of the effects of

inflation. Indeed, the three major strike waves to take place during the period under review were all preceded by price rises in basic goods and services. Likewise, any other erosion of material conditions, such as a reduction in pay levels, is equally likely to result in strike action.

The relationship between trade unions and strike causality is essentially two-way. Whilst rapid union expansion can be linked to strikes (e.g. the 1981 East Rand Strike wave and 1987 Miners' strike), strike action can also facilitate unionization initiatives (e.g. the 1973 Durban strikes). Indeed, the latter can provide something of a legitimating authority for earlier, more spontaneous instances of collective action. The exact role played by the unions proved to be a variable one, composed of trade union strength, policy and structure.

Furthermore, strikes should be seen as the product of both objective and subjective factors. As noted earlier, the latter encompassed interpretations of previous experiences of industrial conflict. Even strikes which, in objective terms, represented defeats for workers, often led to subsequent strikes at the same factories. Strike action, firstly in Natal and Transvaal in the 1970s, and then in all major urban centres in the 1980s, has become an integral part of workplace culture, of the inter-subjective relations between workers in South Africa.

It should be noted that subjective factors affected not only the stance of workers, but also of management. A predominantly conservative managerial culture in the 1950s and 1960s was reflected in generally hard-line approaches towards instances of collective action. Conversely, strikes in the

1980s had generally become accepted as a feature of the industrial relations environment, and were interpreted in a very different manner. Even events during disputes were open to a range of alternative interpretations which invariably affected subsequent managerial and worker strategies (e.g. the 1987 Railways strike).

There seemed to be little link between communication, technology and strikes. Although mechanisms for negotiation and mediation had dramatically improved by the 1980s, this did not prevent a dramatic increase in strike action. This seems bound up with both objective wage interpretations, and more subjective factors, such as the incorporation of striking into workplace culture, as well as the political dimension. Whilst industries that involved dangerous and unpleasant working conditions were hit by major strikes in the 1980s (e.g. the metal industries and mining), other sectors (e.g. textiles) seemed no less strike-prone.

As borne out by the case of the mines in the 1970s, strikes can potentially have a rhizomatic character (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988:1-10). In a repressive environment, dissatisfaction, as a result of wage aspirations or other factors, can assume alternative forms, such as violence, "faction fighting" or destruction of property, breaking out into more orthodox forms of industrial conflict at a later stage, should circumstances more conducive to such action arise.

6.2 The Internal Dynamics of Strikes

It seems evident that the duration of strikes is not, as predicted by Hicks (1932:141-2) and Ashenfelter and Johnson (Kennan 1986:1101), the product of a rational cost-benefit analysis by the major parties to the dispute. Instead, the reasoning of both parties to a dispute often proved to be variable, a product of both cultural factors and imperfect knowledge. The latter represented uncertainty of opponents' intentions, or, as was the case with the 1973 Durban strikes, limited experience of collective action.

Whilst more recent rational choice models (e.g. Milogram and Roberts 1990:58-63) do include the issue of uncertainty as well as the role of wider organizations vis-a-vis individual transactions, they nonetheless see rationality as embodying a certain consistency and give only limited attention to cultural factors. It can be argued that accepting the variable nature of rationality and the importance of the cultural dimension are essential to understanding the duration of South African strikes during the period under review.

As noted earlier, previous experiences of industrial conflict and subjective interpretations thereof did affect the propensity of workers to resort to collective action, as well as both managerial and worker strategies during disputes. Thus, strikes can be seen to be a partially cumulative phenomenon. In the 1980s both workers and management had considerably more experience of collective action than in the 1950s. Consequently, insights into both the causes and duration of strikes can be gained through temporally locating individual

instances of industrial conflict in terms of the events that preceded them, taking account of the possibility of subjective interpretations of past events.

A further issue of importance in understanding the duration of strikes is the spatial dimension. More specifically, strikes should be viewed in terms of a particular geographical context. This would include broader regional dynamics (e.g. political mobilization in surrounding communities) and the specific living space of workers. Hostels often provided a powerful mechanism for mobilizing workers and for enforcing solidarity during strikes (e.g. the 1980 Johannesburg Municipal strike [Keenan 1981:4-60], the 1981 East Rand strikes).

Community organizations and structures within the townships could also assist strikers (e.g. the 1980 Red Meat strike [WPGWU 1980:77-84]). This relationship is a complex one. While there seems no linkage between community structures and strike causality, variations in spatial dynamics between disputes can provide insights as to the duration of strikes. Although strikes did not seem to be directly transferable into community struggles, it was evident that communities could be mobilized around workplace issues. Ultimately, this dynamic was the product of subjective factors, most notably a culture of resistance emerging in both community and workplace in the 1980s. Thus, the erosion of the migrancy system will not necessarily result in a reduction of strike action. Of considerable greater importance is worker and community perceptions of the efficacy of collective action (see chapter 8).

The political dimension is two-fold, and concerns both the causes and the duration of strikes. Strikes do not represent isolated interactions between free agents, based on rational profit maximization, but also concern social structures. The changing role of the state had important effects on the duration of strikes. Most of the strikes evaluated above that took place in the 1950s and 1960s were terminated through the intervention of the authorities on the side of management. Strikes not only represented a contest in power terms between agents, but also concerned wider social systems, in particular the state and the considerably greater power it was capable of exercising.

Furthermore, it seems evident that the nature, relative strength and internal dynamics of trade unions affected not only the propensity of workers to resort to strike action, but also the internal dynamics of strikes. In the 1950s, most trade unions did not favour the use of strike action as a means of pressing their demands. Those which supported strike action (i.e. the SACTU unions) had very limited organizational and financial resources. This generally resulted in workers resorting to collective action with little outside financial and organizational support, which contributed to strikes being of relatively short duration. In the 1980s, trade unions were far more broadly-based and had considerably more resources at their disposal, which facilitated larger and more sustained strikes. However, unions continued to represent a particular category of the labour market, employed urban workers. Whilst in many cases they successfully pursued the interests of their members through strike action in the 1980s, they could not prevent the

recruitment of labour market "outsiders", the unemployed rural poor, as strikebreakers. This was, inter alia, to contribute to the major defeat of the miners in 1987.

7.0

Conclusion

Thus, assessing the dynamics of selected instances of strike action provides additional substantiation for the broad trends in strike causality noted earlier, with regard to the role of trade unions, the effects of wage aspirations, inflation and more subjective factors. The duration of strikes seems to be inherently bound up with their causes, particularly insofar as these are shaped by subjective factors, the role of the state and the role of the trade union movement. This contributed to strikes assuming a number of distinct forms during the period under review, which can be divided into five distinct categories, reflecting discontinuities in both causal and contingent variables.

The unions proved capable of providing increasing organizational and logistic support to strikers throughout the 1980s, resulting in more sustained strikes during that decade. However, they were generally unable to prevent the employment of strikebreakers from a segment of the labour market they did not represent, the unemployed, particularly those on the rural periphery. In addition, the role of the state impacted on both the incidence and duration of industrial conflict. A final dimension affecting the duration of strikes was the spatial one, including the extent of mobilization in communities, the

internal dynamics of both hostel and township, and the relationships between community and workplace organizations, at both formal and informal levels.

Endnotes

1. Similarly, during 1960, 4500 leatherworkers went on strike in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, in defiance of the officially-recognized National Union of Leatherworkers (Horrell n.d.:3).
2. Furthermore, a 1978 government commission of enquiry into violence on the mines revealed that a sizable proportion of cases evaluated were caused by the wage issue, and an additional seven by the delayed pay scheme (SAIRR 1978:160), whereby Lesothan miners had a percentage of their pay deposited in the Lesotho Central Bank, only to be accessible on their return home.
3. One of the few recorded instances where SACTU managed to successfully intervene on the behalf of workers was the Clayton Toys strike. SACTU successfully interceded with management to have dismissed strikers reinstated, with a pay increase (SAIRR 1961:80). However, it was more often the case that workers who had become too closely identified with that federation would face dismissal.
4. The same was true during the 1961 Lion Match strike, where all 360 strikers were members of the SACTU-affiliated African Match and Timber Workers Union (Horrell n.d.:111).
5. An extensive report on the Consul dispute is contained in Rand Daily Mail 25/1/1964, and on the 1969 stevedore's strike in Rand Daily Mail 74/1969.
6. Similarly, during the 1969 Durban stevedores strike, officials from the Department of Labour and Bantu Administration intervened, as did both uniformed and special branch police (FOSATU 1983:n.p.). After being given an ultimatum, almost 1500 workers were dismissed. Some 400 were allowed to return to work after undergoing a screening process, whilst 1100 were "endorsed out" and given four hours to leave Durban (SAIRR 1969b:112).
7. The term "rhizomatic" denoting concealed conflict, contradiction, or resistance, is widely used by Deleuze and Guattari (1986).

8. In a survey conducted shortly after the strike wave, Mare (1975:21) found that 98% of strikers claimed they had struck for wage increases. Significantly, most of the firms that were not hit by strikes had built-in schemes to review pay through an ongoing programme of job evaluation (NDMF 1973:4).

9. Negotiations between Colgate management and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union deadlocked over the question of bargaining outside of the Industrial Council (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.). Workers refused to bargain only at Council level, as Colgate was already paying more than the Council sub-minimum wage rate. This led to FOSATU calling a consumer boycott, and starting the lengthy procedure for a legal strike to take place. The boycott proved highly successful, and was widely supported in the Eastern Cape, Transvaal and Natal (FOSATU 1982b:n.p.). In reaction, Colgate agreed to renew talks. However, negotiations broke down again, and a two-day illegal strike took place. Talks were then resumed leading to a settlement (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.).

10. Indeed, of the 78 strikes that took place on the East Rand, 40 took place in factories where MAWU was represented (FOSATU 1981a:n.p.).

11. Forty-five workers in the milling section of the factory signed a petition outlining their demands, which they forwarded to management (McGregor 1980:122). Management did not initially respond to the petition, but subsequently informed workers of "problems" if they continued to negotiate through the union, as opposed to making use of the Liaison Committee (FCWU n.d.a.:n.p.). Subsequently, five workers who signed the petition were dismissed, as were five others who had queried the dismissals (Financial Mail 15/11/1979). All were active FCWU members (FCWU:n.d.b.:n.p.), triggering off the strike.

12. Similar is the case that took place from 27 October to 9 November 1975 at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills. At the time of the strike, two trade unions represented workers. One hundred and seven workers were members of the registered TWIU, whilst the 200 African workers were members of the NUTW (1977:8). Workers were unhappy with the existing Liaison Committee and demanded a Works Committee (ibid.:9). Management proved reluctant to talk to either union, prompting a series of strikes around the wage issue (Nxasana 1974:44).

13. Other Strikes Over Wage Aspirations

During 1974, 400 Reckett and Coleman workers struck for more pay as a result of their dissatisfaction with a limited increase management had offered (Ensor 1974c:55). It seems that it was the prospect of an increase that heightened aspirations, leading to strike action. Similarly, it was considerable disappointment surrounding a new minimum wage order that led to 1200 workers striking at the three Frame textile factories in the Durban region (FOSATU n.d.e.:n.p.), evidence again of the tendency for strikes to take place in those situations where there seemed some prospect of an improvement.

On 21st April 1975, 300 workers struck for more pay at Union

Whaling in Durban. Prior to this dispute, workers had negotiated through the Liaison Committee, which failed to win the desired increases (Abasebenzi May 1975). The lowest pay level at the time was R58 per month, which workers derided as "ice cream money" (ibid.). This seemed once more to reflect rising aspirations in a period when significant pay rises were taking place nationally. Management granted the desired increases, resulting in a return to work (Mawbey 1975:44). The November 1975 dispute at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills was partially a result of a promised wage increase failing to materialize (NUTW 1977:10).

During June 1980, 250 Putco bus drivers at eight depots struck in reaction to an offered 15% pay increase, over which workers felt that they had not been adequately consulted (Financial Mail 11/6/1980). This represented another situation where workers struck after some improvement in material circumstances seemed possible. The strikers were all dismissed by management. However, in subsequent talks management agreed to reinstate the strikers, and, as noted earlier, recognize TAWU (Financial Mail 11/6/1980). However, workers claimed that the dispute was not over and they demanded a R35 increase over and above what was granted. During subsequent negotiations, they reduced this demand to R25 (Rand Daily Mail 21/10/1980). The desired R35 increase, whilst more than doubling pay, would have brought workers up to the Household Subsistence Level (HSL) of R67.50 per week (ibid.).

14. The strike led to a march by 5000 workers on Frame's main factory, followed by a rally where both Halton Cheadle and KwaZulu official Barney Dladla addressed strikers (SAIRR 1974:329). An MP persuaded workers to return to work, in return for an undertaking by management that they would not be victimized (Ensor 1974d:48). The strike revealed the generally vulnerable position of workers - they returned to work without gaining the desired improvement in material conditions.

15. Similarly, the 1983 Natal Threads strike had followed a bout of wage negotiations, in which the firm offered a limited increase of 6% (WIP 1983c:45). This offer was rejected by the union, which began the lengthy process of instituting a legal strike (SALB 1983:16). Again, a situation where there was some prospect of an increase led to further strikes.

On 10 March 1986, four hundred SACWU members struck at Adcock-Ingram. Whilst management had offered a rise of R17/week, the union pressed for an increase of R38/week (Izwilethu 1986). During July 1990, between three and six thousand Southern Sun and Holiday Inn workers struck at eight hotels and resorted to sit-in action (WIP 1990:73; Argus 10/7/1990). The strikers demanded a R160 per month increase, whilst management had offered R100 and a minimum wage of R590 (Argus 10/7/1990).

16. Even less successful was the Sigma strike. On 9 April 1981, 4000 workers came out on strike at the Sigma plant. Workers demanded wage increases and recognition of their trade union, the National Union of the Motor Association and Rubber Workers (NUMARWOSA), a FOSATU affiliate (NDMF 1981:n.p.). Ultimately, the strikers were fired and selectively rehired, seriously weakening union organization (ibid.; see also WIP 1981b:41).

17. A similar case was the 1986 Adcock-Ingram strike, which followed protracted negotiations between management and the CUSA-affiliated SACWU. SACWU successfully gained recognition from management, although failed to secure the pay increase it desired, leading to strike action (Izwilethu 1986). This strike is particularly significant in that the CUSA unions generally had a far lower strike profile than FOSATU affiliates. However, SACWU was one of the largest and most vigorous of the CUSA unions and was also involved in a major strike at AECI's Newcastle plant (see Golding 1985:39-42).

The March 1990 CPA Hospitals strike had followed the rapid expansion of the Hospital Workers Union, which later held unity talks with NEHAWU. Although the union failed to gain recognition, as a result of the strike, it managed to extract pay concessions (SALB 1990b:8).

18. Similarly, the 1984 Simba strike and consumer boycott followed on two short successful strikes during November and December 1983 (WIP 1984a:21-22). Meanwhile, the strike at BTR Sarmcol during 1985 was preceded by a series of short, largely unsuccessful, strikes during 1984 (WIP 1985:41). These strikes were the result of unsuccessful negotiations, in the wake of a court order forcing BTR management to bargain in "good faith" with MAWU (Bendix 1984:28).

19. Interview, MWASA member "A", June 1992.

20. Interview, MWASA member "B", June 1993.

21. ibid.

22. Interview, "C", MWASA worker, June 1993.

23. see endnote 20.

24. The concepts "time" and "space" are employed in the tradition of Anthony Giddens. Underlying the use of these terms is the assumption that social action is framed by context, within which individuals and groups constantly monitor and adjust their actions (see Giddens 1984:3-17). In the end, time and space represent a "locale" within which "systemic aspects of interaction and social relations are concentrated" (Giddens 1983:19).

25. Interview, "C", June 1993.

26. Interview, "D", MWASA member, June 1993.

27. see endnote 21.

28. Interview, "E", MWASA member, June 1992.

29. In the case of the 1990 Mercedes-Benz strike, different sections of workers had reached conflicting interpretations of developments, as a result of such differing inter-subjective relations (see Sayer 1992:23). In this case, these splits were the product of traditional organizational divisions. The former SAAWU members claimed that their views on the NBF were ignored, whilst NUMSA loyalists claimed that the former SAAWU members had refused to discuss the matter (Von Holdt 1990:17).

In confusion, NUMSA appealed to Mercedes-Benz to consider temporarily leaving the Forum until the dispute between its members and the national union could be resolved (Argus 3/9/1990). It was only following a protracted and bitter dispute that the wage agreement reached at the National Bargaining Forum was accepted by majority of the Mercedes-Benz workers (Argus 9/10/1990).

30. In fact, the 1987 Post Office strike represented two concurrent strikes, on the Witwatersrand and in East London. Ultimately, eight thousand workers struck for five weeks in the Transvaal (SALB 1987b: 29), whilst 4000 joined the strike in East London (Argus 28/7/1987). The latter strike spread to Cape Town, involving postal workers in Langa, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha (ibid.). In addition to expressing their solidarity, the Cape Town strikers demanded pay increases for unskilled workers. Shortly thereafter, solidarity action also took place in Natal (Argus 28/7/1987).

31. The Mercedes-Benz strike was similarly marked by violent confrontations, albeit at lower levels than the SATS and Miners' strikes. On 16 August, the strike commenced with a general sit-in at A and F sections of the factory. Two NUMSA officials who visited this section were assaulted. The strikers barricaded themselves in, although some workers who favoured the NBF forced their way out to join others outside (Von Holdt 1990:18). The pro-NBF faction held meetings at Gompo Hall in Duncan Village, their numbers ever-swelling with defectors from the SAAWU grouping (Von Holdt 1990:20). Finally, the rump of protesters at the factory were forcibly evicted by police and dismissed (Von Holdt 1990:20-21).

CHAPTER 8

STRIKES IN THE 1990s: BEYOND SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM

A period of dramatic political change, the early to mid-1990s represent in many respects a new era or discontinuity. This chapter assesses the relevance for the 1990s of the theoretical constructs developed in earlier chapters, particularly with regard to shifts in the labour market, the exact nature of worker aspirations, the future of stayaway action, political changes and the altered focus of the union movement. This chapter is largely based on a nation-wide survey of COSATU members conducted during early 1994 (see method section). Although this survey yielded considerable non-perceptions-based data (such as prevailing skill levels of union members and trends in union membership), a large proportion of the findings consists of workers' attitudes, beliefs and values, concerning the possibilities of strikes and stayaway action. Thus, a sizable component of this chapter focuses on essentially subjective issues, on workers' understandings of the possibilities of collective organization and action, framed by previous experiences. It is hoped that this will shed new light on the nature of this important variable, as well as on possible overall future trends in workplace relations.

1.0 Unionization, Aspirations and the Labour Market

1.1 Trends in Strikes in the 1990s

Following the drop in the incidence of strikes in 1988, the number of strikes rose again during 1989. The diagram below depicts trends in strike action in the early 1990s:

Year	Total Strikes	Mandays Lost
1990	885	2 729 844
1991	600	1 339 333
1992	789	1 727 375

(NMC 1992).

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, comprehensive figures were not available for 1993. It is evident that whilst the total number of strikes taking place has declined somewhat in the early 1990s, a far more pronounced trend has been the reduction in the size and duration of the average strike. It seems that by mid-1994, strike totals had begun to rise again, although most strikes still seemed to be of a shorter duration than in the mid-1980s (Daily Dispatch 18-25/7/1994). This could be the result of more effective bargaining structures not always reducing the incidence of strikes, but possibly affecting their internal dynamics and outcome. Most of the above strikes took place in the manufacturing sector, there being a decrease in strikes on the mines, a statistic of considerable importance given the trend towards corporatism in the latter sector. There was a rise in strike action in the public sector in the homelands in the period leading up to re-incorporation, but regrettably there are no accurate statistics for these areas. In general, it seems evident that although the incidence of strike action has declined somewhat, industrial conflict remains widespread.

1.2 Patterns of Unionization: Current Trends

The survey revealed that most COSATU members fall into the 35-56 age group (fig.33), partially reflecting the greatly reduced availability of job opportunities over the last 15 years. Those

within the formal economy would be less inclined to even temporarily withdraw from it, whilst those entering the labour market for the first time would be most unlikely to gain formal employment. To some extent this reflects the degree to which an entire generation has not been integrated into the formal economy, and its members probably condemned to remain "outsiders" for the bulk of their working lives. The ultimate consequences of segmented labour markets are divisive, as a result of radically different options for those with different endowments (Przeworski 1985:97).

As Haines and Wood (1993:65) note, members of the latter grouping face greatly diminished options, having to rely on extended networks of support and on the informal sector as an employer of last resort. In terms of the "insiders", the effects would be two-fold. Firstly, the continued operation of vigorous extended networks of support would place ongoing pressure on workers to seek to improve their material conditions, through mechanisms such as striking, even if, in the long term, their own employment could be jeopardised in the process. However, these pressures could also result in "insiders" being reluctant to voluntarily withdraw from this segment of the labour market, even on a temporary basis. A separate survey conducted by the author during mid-1994 of the economically active population in the Albany district of the Eastern Cape, revealed that relatively few respondents had changed jobs since entering the labour market. This would contribute to the shift away from "pure" migrancy to semi-settled and settled employment, even if the appearances of migrancy are retained in key sectors such as the mining industry

(see Crush et al 1991:209-210). However, as noted in Chapter 7, it seems evident that both hostel and township environments may facilitate collective action at the workplace.

It should be noted that union recruitment in the industrial and mining sectors seems to have tailed off in the 1990s. In view of the tendency for unionization initiatives to follow strikes, and for newly-unionized workers to resort to collective action, this trend may provide some explanation for the decline in strikes in many sectors in the early 1990s. Most notably, it is in the public sector where the unions have continued to expand, a sector where relatively large numbers of strikes still take place. Unfortunately, owing to access problems, the survey did not reach a sizable number of these workers, especially in the former homelands. Traditionally, the independent unions were concentrated in mining and manufacturing. Although there is little evidence to support claims that technology and the nature of work directly affect the propensity to resort to collective action (see Blauner 1966:176-8), public sector workers enter the union movement with a rather different body of previous experience from other categories of worker. Furthermore, public sector workers are less likely to have had any direct previous experience of the limits and possibilities of union organization. It is as yet uncertain what impact these new unionists will have on established union practices with regard to shopfloor democracy, or on the broader trend towards accommodationism.

1.3 Union Membership and Segmentation of the Labour Market

Figure 45 reflects the current skill levels of COSATU members. Of particular importance is that the majority of COSATU members are semi-skilled or skilled. This represents the culmination of the trends noted in chapter 5. Meanwhile, the survey also revealed that COSATU workers, as a proportion of the labour market, have better-than-average education levels, another dimension of the skill/unionization nexus¹.

There is little doubt that in terms of security of tenure and wage levels, trade union members represent a relatively privileged grouping. However, the question arises as to whether the line of segmentation is determined by skills, or by the fact of union membership, the latter underpinned by the recruiting focus of the unions and the limits of trade union expansion. In favour of the latter is that in those sectors where the unions are the strongest, they have been most successful in compressing the pay gap between semi-skilled and unskilled workers (see chapter 5). In other words, although the unions mostly represent those who are in some form of skilled category of employment, they remain highly effective in representing the interests of members who are in a less favourable position. However, this may well change in the future, if the proportion of unskilled union members continues to decline. A disturbing trend is that it is the workers with the highest skill levels that participate the most in trade union meetings, and thus have the greatest impact on union decision-making and policy formulation (see tables 15 - 16)², making the future position of unskilled workers in the union movement somewhat uncertain. In this sense, it is indeed

possible that strikes will increasingly tend to be the action of those in relatively privileged categories of employment, an option denied those on the periphery.

1.4 Understanding Worker Aspirations

As is evident from chapters 3-4, wage aspirations are an important cause of strike action. Although aspirations, as noted in previous sections, are closely linked to real movements in wages, their exact nature and scope remains unclear. Whilst largely an objective variable, based on actual material conditions, aspirations can encompass not only the wage issue, but also workplace and community issues. The survey revealed that most workers believe that the new South African government will improve wages (fig. 40) and working conditions (fig. 41) within the next five years, in addition to basic community services.

Wage aspirations can be understood to mean hopes and desires for a noticeable improvement in material conditions. Most workers believed that if their wage aspirations are not met, collective action will be needed (figure 42). Nonetheless, aspirations should not necessarily be seen as overly high, or impossible to meet. As noted earlier, wage aspirations are founded on actual material conditions and on what is realistically achievable. Workers remained cautious as to the capacity of the RDP to improve living conditions (fig. 34). In addition to wages and working conditions, other areas where workers hoped to see an improvement were supply of clean water, and the availability of enough food and electricity - all rather

modest demands and relatively easy to meet. Although there is little doubt that wage aspirations will remain a major cause of strikes, by no means does South Africa seem to be locked in a high wage-high strikes spiral, particularly if the fluctuations in the incidence of strikes in the 1990-4 period and moves to corporatism are considered.

2.0

Stayaways in the 1990s?

2.1 Stayaways: A Historical Curiosity?

As is apparent from chapter 6, the 1980s were marked by a high incidence of stayaway action. However, the question emerges as to whether stayaways merely represented one of the many resistance strategies to apartheid, or whether this form of collective action will persist. By the early 1990s, the unions no longer had to actively defend themselves at national level against state attacks (Von Holdt 1993:45).

The survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of workers favoured renewed mass action, should the new government fail to deliver on its promises (figure 43). Very few (figure 44) said that they would do nothing. Although union leadership may constrain such action, they cannot prevent it. Union leaders have in the past been unsuccessful in opposing local and community-based stayaways (e.g. the November 1985 Port Elizabeth stayaways). Within the union movement there remain strong structures of accountability, which limit the capacity of leadership to defy shopfloor sentiments (see below). Thus, it remains possible that stayaways may continue to occur in the

post-apartheid South Africa, perhaps following a "honeymoon" period, making the conclusions reached with regard to the relationship between stayaways and strikes in chapter 6 still of relevance.

3.0 Beyond Social Movement Unionism

3.1 Change and Incorporation

It was noted earlier that during the 1980s, whilst the unions had participated in the statutory collective bargaining machinery, as well as formal and informal channels of mediation and negotiation, this had not led to a decline in strike action. Rather, strikes had become institutionalized, bound by a series of unwritten laws, although counter-tendencies, such as the 1987 Trials of Strength, remained possible. This continued militancy was a product of the social movement nature of the unions, which had not been politically incorporated because of racial fordism (Joffe, Maller & Webster 1993:5; Webster 1987b:217). This social movement role resulted in increasing consensus between formerly "workerist" and "populist" elements in COSATU. For example, there was unprecedented co-operation between NUM (generally identified with "populist" unionism") and NUMSA (which had strong "workerist" roots) in the period leading up to the 1991 COSATU Congress (Von Holdt 1991:14). In view of South Africa's political transformation of the 1990s, the question emerges as to whether the unions still retain this role, and what the implications are for industrial conflict.

It is evident that the political involvement of COSATU

within the tripartite alliance remains extremely popular (figure 35). Moreover, most respondents favoured the retention of the alliance in the period leading up to, and during the 1999 elections (figure 36). However, 17% of respondents favoured an independent COSATU, although it should be noted that this group could be composed of both those who would favour an independent working-class political stance, and those who would be opposed to any political involvement by the unions. Many in this latter grouping were from the Western Cape (table 19) and were National Party supporters. Most members of this latter grouping favoured COSATU forming a new political alliance in 1999. Bearing this in mind, the number of workers who would potentially be supporters of an independent workers' party is rather small.

Thus, the political stance of the unions remains extremely popular amongst their membership. The COSATU unions have now, at least at the formal level, left the discourse of opposition politics and are allied to the new South African government. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988:425) note, it is the state that ultimately sets the scene for institutionalization, it is the state that binds through both coercion and consent. Thus, should the alliance persist, it may seem that the process of institutionalization will be accelerated.

3.2 The Rise of Corporatism

Parallel with this process has been a trend towards corporatist arrangements. The need to service the needs of a large membership in a time of economic restructuring led to a shift away from plant level to industry wide bargaining. Unions faced increasing retrenchments as well as difficulties in winning wage increases. In return for concessions in these areas, management increasingly demanded productivity deals, deals which were often related to industrial restructuring, necessitating bargaining at sectorial forums (Von Holdt 1994:304). Good examples of this shift to corporatism in the early 1990s were various profit-sharing and productivity deals on the mines. Following the ground-breaking Ergo deal, the NUM negotiated a more comprehensive profit-sharing/productivity arrangement with many of the major mining houses during 1991 (Nichol 1992:37). A measure designed to protect employment on mines, it entailed performance bonuses and the linkage of a proportion of salaries to the gold price. Although the NUM later voiced its displeasure with the manner the former scheme was implemented, it called for the scheme to be expanded and improved (Nichol 1992:44). Some mining houses, such as Goldfields (Goldfields 1992:46-7), opposed the scheme, while there was a groundswell of resistance from those NUM members who had not been properly informed of its workings (Nichol 1992:44). It remains unclear whether, given the degree of membership opposition and the intransigence of some of the major mining houses, such arrangements will persist or whether there will be a return to the industrial relations environment of the mid-1980s. However, given the tendency for

industrial relations to become institutionalized, and the number of marginal mines, it is likely that broadly corporatist arrangements will continue for the foreseeable future.

Both corporatist deals and the tripartite alliance effectively involve union leadership and, indeed, the upper levels of union organization, being drawn into a complex web of agreements with both the state and employers. Often negotiations at industry level were extremely complex, not always yielding visible results to those on the shopfloor (Marie 1992:20-26). Indeed, it proved increasingly difficult always to have policies subject to grassroots control (ibid.:23). Deals reached could deepen any cleavages which might exist between leadership and rank-and-file. As events rapidly unfolded, it proved difficult to develop a coherent perspective on the implications of participation in the National Economic Forum (NEF) and other forums. Some argued that this process reflected increased working-class power and influence, and others that it represented a tacit acceptance of the economic status quo, weakening shopfloor influences (Von Holdt 1994:304).

Indeed, it seems that most COSATU unionists have not even heard of such crucial policy-formulating bodies as the National Manpower Commission (figure 37), or even the ANC's own Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Table 18 compares those who knew of the RDP (cd 50) versus those who had any say in its formulation (cd 51). As can be seen, few had participated in any manner in the drawing up of the RDP. Similarly, table 20 compares those who had heard of the National Manpower Commission, with those who had been to a report-back

from that body. Of those who knew about the Commission, only 31.5% had attended a report-back. Thus, not only is there limited knowledge of such central policy-making bodies, but there is also limited direct accountability to the shopfloor concerning decisions made on such bodies. Even if largely on the unions' terms, deals made at the centre constitute part of the binding and institutionalization process, and will challenge the unions' capacity for effective representivity and collective action at the local level.

Such trends are of particular importance in that they highlight the disjuncture between the shopfloor and national level deals and policy proposals which are ultimately based on the assumption of worker support. Workers do not seem to be always properly informed about national level agreements and/or bargaining structures. However, it should be noted that the independent trade unions have had years of practice of participation in centralized bargaining mechanisms, and that the principles of radical reformism are deeply embedded in the unions' organizational culture (Adler & Webster 1995:28). In other words, whilst participation in such bodies may have adverse organizational implications, this need not imply demobilization, or an inability to go beyond an elite-centred bargaining process (ibid.:29).

3.3 Shopfloor Democracy in the 1990s

Despite these trends, at the base of the unions a vigorous shopfloor democracy remains. Not only have most COSATU members taken part in shop steward elections during the preceding twelve

months (figure 38), but many also have direct experiences of shop stewards being dismissed by workers for not carrying out the wishes of workers (figure 39). In other words, not only are shopfloor structures marked by regular elections of officials, but there is also a high level of accountability. Thus, the independent unions' democratic organizational base, painstakingly constructed in the 1970s and early 1980s, has persisted.

There is a statistically significant relationship between the attendance at union meetings and methods of electing shopstewards³. This is of particular importance in that it reflects the relationship between participation and democracy within the union movement. In those workplaces where there is a high level of attendance, there are also likely to be democratically-elected shop stewards. In other words, high levels of participation also result in high levels of union democracy. It is indeed possible that the relationship may be a two-way one⁴. Workers would be more motivated to participate in union structures should democratic practices be the norm, and when it is possible for them to have a real impact on union structures. Similarly, high levels of attendance at union meetings would make it easier to call shop stewards to account and greatly facilitate the holding of regular elections.

Most workers surveyed reported, in general, high levels of shopfloor democracy. The unions seem indeed fortunate in being in a high participation-high democracy cycle. New recruits socialized into such an environment would ultimately contribute to its reinforcement. Such an environment, characterized by commitment and participation, forms the basis for effective

collective action at grassroots level. However, the democracy-participation cycle is always vulnerable to external pressures, such as changes in the wider socio-political context, as well as the need for continuity.

The formation of the breakaway transport union, Turning Wheels, and the 1994 truckers' strike⁵ highlighted the need for the unions to retain organizational efficiency as well as contact with their constituencies (Bulungu and Von Holdt 1994:54). Union unity could not be taken for granted if leadership proved slow in responding to pressures from the rank-and-file. There is little doubt that the unions faced an need to upgrade the skills of shopstewards, and improve organizational efficiency (Marie 1992:25). Although in most cases union representatives had been democratically elected, in some instances the pressures experienced by the unions as a result of being squeezed between the need for accommodation with management and grassroots militancy issued in bitter conflicts between workers on the shopfloor (for example, the 1990 Mercedes-Benz strike; see Chapter 7). Shopfloor organization was further weakened by the "brain drain" of union leaders to central government and management in the early- to mid-1990s. However, there has been considerable debate as to how necessary organizational restructuring may be brought about. On the one hand, it has been argued that it was imperative to upgrade the professional skills of leadership and to streamline organization, in order to respond effectively to the rapid political and economic changes of the early 1990s. National collective bargaining won impressive gains for the independent unions in the 1980s (see Bird & Schreiner

1992:25). On the other hand, it has been suggested that the unions needed to place increased emphasis on grassroots concerns, most notably in building solidarity in support of striking workers and the dismissed (Rees 1992:56-7), as well as in taking into account the demands of marginalised groupings outside of the COSATU federation (Bird & Schreiner 1992:29). It can be argued that this need became particularly pressing following the disbandment of the UDF, and the general demobilization following the formation of the Government of National Unity.

Despite these organizational challenges, the independent unions centred on COSATU retained their mass following, and seemed capable of mobilizing support around issues of broad concern (as opposed to the specific needs of a relatively privileged constituency) a good example being the Anti-VAT (Value Added Tax) Campaign of the early 1990s. The unions still possess the strong internal democratic structures that made possible many of the large-scale strikes of the 1980s. A vibrant grassroots democracy has the potential to impel the unions in either a workerist or a populist/community-political direction. However, as was noted above, only a minority of workers was opposed to COSATU's political alliances. Most of this latter grouping were National Party supporters from the Western Cape, and do not seem to be the same group as the old workerist constituency. It seems that both workerist and populist traditions have merged at the shopfloor in the form of a common commitment to grassroots democracy. The real disjuncture within the union movement is between a democratic base, broadly manifest in the form of social movement unionism (see Webster 1987b:217), and an

accommodationist summit.

As Schreiner (1994:44) notes, the independent unions were facing increasing pressure by the early 1990s to refocus on immediate industrial issues, particularly as, in future, they would be subject to government pressures to ensure labour stability in the interests of social reconstruction programmes. Indeed, COSATU faced a tension between the role of national level partner in the transition process, and a broadly based social movement (Bulungu and Von Holdt 1994:54). Already in 1991, that federation recognized the importance of situating the tripartite alliance's programme in terms of the needs of those on the shopfloor (COSATU 1991:34). Nonetheless, critics have argued that, in practice, COSATU often seemed more concerned with delivering their supporters around the needs of the transition, than with genuinely articulating the needs of the grassroots, as borne out by the lack of emphasis placed on the Living Wage and Stop Retrenchments Campaigns (Horwitz 1992:59).

The results of these conflicting tendencies are by no means certain. However, one is likely to see a persistence of strike action, most probably concentrated in those recently unionized sectors (notably the public service⁶), as well as further corporatist and related deals. However, the unions have retained their shopfloor capacity for collective action, and the relationship between trade union organization and strikes, noted in chapter 5, is likely to persist, albeit in perhaps a modified form.

3.4 Coterminous Unionism

In response to the needs of transition, and shopfloor realities, the possibility of what Von Holdt (1994:306) refers to as "strategic unionism" emerged, "a strategic vision of a labour-driven process of strategic change". This would involve an ongoing commitment to radical reform "based on independent labour and popular organization" (ibid.:306). Such a commitment could only be realised through the building of alliances between different labour federations⁷, and through forming coalitions with mass-based organizations (ibid.:307). On the one hand, COSATU has demonstrated an impressive capacity to mobilize its followers through stayaway action. On the other, possible allies such as civic and youth organizations have become increasingly marginalized, whilst there is little doubt that the post-April 1994 government is increasingly sensitive to pressures from trans-national organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank.

As Przeworski (1991:182) notes, in a time of socio-economic transition, a reformist government is faced with the choice of mobilizing support for the new political order from the unions, opposition parties, and other broadly based organizations, or actively seeking to undermine them. The latter will have adverse consequences for new democratic institutions (ibid.:183). In addition, the senior governing party, the ANC, itself represents a broad coalition of interests, and any recourse to the latter option would jeopardise its own viability.

Przeworski (1991:181) identifies the trade union movement as a crucial partner in an accommodationist transition, as it is capable of mobilizing its constituents behind the government, and

persuading its members to exercise wage restraint. However, as Adler and Webster (1995:13) note, transition theory assumes that mass-based social movements will become demobilized, and discounts the possibility that the trade unions can play an active role throughout the transition period and thereafter. The presence of an effective union movement is one of the major features distinguishing South Africa's transition from the struggle against colonial rule in tropical Africa (Joffe, Maller & Webster 1993:16). However, the trade unions are only in a position to participate in pacts if they are relatively strong, broadly based, and politically influential. This places a number of pressures on the unions. On the one hand, they have to mobilise their supporters around ensuring the success of the transition. On the other, they will only retain their unity through dynamically responding to the demands of the shopfloor.

The transition has allowed the unions to shape institutions and policies to an extent that was not possible in the apartheid era (Von Holdt 1994:311). Indeed, they played a central role in creating the conditions for transition, legitimizing the entire process (Adler & Webster 1995:2). Indeed, the unions have "shifted their emphasis from abstentionism towards assuming a central role and responsibility in shaping industrial strategy" (Joffe, Maller and Webster 1993:2). Specifically, strategic unionism calls for involvement in setting macro-economic policies, in particular low inflation and unemployment and increased emphasis on social development (ibid.:3). Indeed, the independent unions do have the capacity to influence the transition process, placing a range of pressures on moderates and

reformers alike (Adler & Webster 1995:21).

As Von Holdt (1994:306) notes, by 1994 strategic unionism was an emerging and somewhat uneven phenomenon rather than "a fully developed strategic vision." Furthermore, it entailed a complex combination of coercion and mass action on the one hand, and co-operation and negotiation with employers on the other (ibid.:311). However, although COSATU was one of the most effective and militant trade unions in the world, it possessed limited resources and faced severe organizational problems (Von Holdt 1994:311), as well as the need to overcome the abstentionist legacy (Joffe, Maller and Webster 1993:4).

As Joffe, Maller and Webster (1993:5) note, whilst the potential exists for a shift to full-bodied strategic unionism as a result of shifting patterns in industrialization, this outcome should not be seen as a foregone conclusion. The restructuring of work currently underway, as a result of industrial competitiveness and the restricted nature of the market, with a particular focus on labour, has forced management and labour to rethink traditional bargaining and shopfloor practices (ibid.:25). As labour seeks to influence macro-economic policy, management has attempted to improve communication on the shopfloor (ibid.:26). Whilst this restructuring has created certain opportunities, participative management techniques have often tended to bypass the unions. In addition, attempts by labour to seize the initiative in participative management programmes could result in labour neglecting, inter alia, the interests of unskilled workers, who would stand to lose by industrial restructuring (ibid.:30). In

the broader perspective, COSATU's smaller unions lack the organizational capacity to develop macro-level industrial policies and to keep abreast with COSATU's policies and negotiations with state and employers (ibid.:35). Despite these limitations, COSATU has begun to adopt a role in shaping industrial strategy, "confronting both the legacies of apartheid and the global challenge of the future" (ibid.:39).

Nonetheless, as Von Holdt (1994:312) notes, fully fledged strategic unionism, whilst offering hope for the unprecedented empowerment of labour, is unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future owing to the fluid and fragmented nature of the transition; rather, as noted above, strategic unionism represents a vision that needs to be developed. It can be argued that, in this transition period, the conflicting pressures facing the unions has led to what may be referred to as "coterminous unionism", a special type of unionism reflecting the realities of transition, yet which may ultimately evolve into fully-fledged strategic unionism.

Whilst the unions have at their base preserved many of the characteristics of a social movement, as well as shopfloor structures for democracy and factory-based collective action, they have also become in some manner tied to both the new political order and sectors of organized business. However, contrary to transition theory, their mass bases have not become demobilized (see Adler and Webster 1995:13). A possible scenario could be relatively large numbers of strikes taking place without the prior blessing of union leadership, yet making use of union grassroots organizational structures.

By no means does this imply that the unions will necessarily split between a militant base and an accommodationist leadership. These pressures are not necessarily dialectical or contradictory. Rather, it should be noted that such tensions do exist and may result in certain incoherencies in union policies and actions for the foreseeable future, even although aspects of strategic unionism are already present, and there may be a long-term tendency in this direction. The relationship between individual activists and their organizational structures may be marked by "both positive and negative feedback loops" (Sztompka 1990:166). A distinctive ideology "may amplify existing interactive networks", whilst internal organization may make initial structures more viable (ibid.:166). Conversely, however, negative feedback loops may arrest momentum, fuelling oligarchic and bureaucratic tendencies, with the survival of the organization being seen as more important than goal achievement (ibid.:166). Coterminous unionism represents a situation in which persistent grassroots democratic structures are combined with a tendency towards institutionalization at national level.

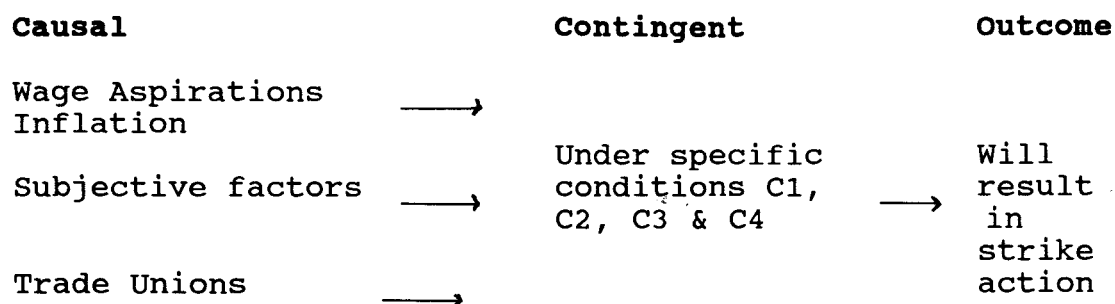
Those working for social change at the grassroots level may have little impact if "not connected to institutionally imminent possibilities" (Giddens 1990:155). Structures are not necessarily the enemy of the individual's autonomy. Rather, the major concern is co-ordination between individual and organizational action (ibid.:159), which may be marked by incoherence. Social relations represent structures within which individual and collective actors choose alternatives and select courses of action (Przeworski 1985:96), albeit with differing degrees of

knowledge of the alternatives. Whilst social relations constitute a structure of choices, what individuals and groupings choose will have a reciprocal impact on social relations (ibid.:96). The unions still represent coalitions of different types of workers, of different organizational traditions, and of both workplace and community activists. This broad bringing-together is reflected at the level of both grassroots and the "commanding heights".

Coterminous unionism accurately reflects the dilemma of mobilization and action versus the need to secure and institutionalize earlier gains. Nonetheless, participation in national level bargaining bodies may not always result in mass demobilization. Whilst grass roots demands may not always be compatible with the need to compromise in centralized negotiations, the real possibility of collective action at the workplace may add considerable weight to the unions' negotiating stances. Coterminous unionism thus not only reflects the existence of internal pressures within the union movement, but also raises the possibilities of the unions playing a dynamic role beyond the immediate transition.

3.5 Strike Causality in the 1990s and Beyond

The basic framework proposed for understanding strike causality hypothesised in chapter 1, and confirmed and developed in chapter 6, is outlined below⁸:



- where C1 represents the prevailing political climate in terms of the capacity for social protest and political mobilization and C2 represents legislation governing industrial relations, C3 spatial issues, such as hostel or township conditions, and C4 the amount of information opposing sides possess, including information about their relevant adversary's intentions, and other factors resulting in some variation in the reasoning process.

It is evident that although inflationary pressure has somewhat diminished in the 1990s, wage aspirations remain an important factor, particularly in view of recent political changes and the prospects for social upliftment. Drawing on previous experiences, workers seem to have, in subjective terms, a continued commitment to and belief in the possibilities of collective action, in the form of both strikes and stayaways. The prevailing political climate (C1) has shifted towards one of accommodationism, removing many of the barriers to incorporating the unions. Labour legislation (C2) will reinforce these tendencies toward institutionalization and corporatism. However, this will not necessarily constrain the incidence and form of industrial conflict, owing to the internal dynamics of the union movement. Although the number of strikes taking place is lower

than, say, in the mid-1980s, the overall incidence remains high in global terms. As noted above, a situation of coterminous unionism has emerged, the unionism of many faces.

Within the independent unions one finds two parallel tendencies, reflected in an accommodationist summit and a base founded on vigorous shopfloor democracy. Workers remain committed to strike and stayaway action, democratic practices and the strict accountability of union officials. These tendencies need not be seen as conflicting, but rather incoherent, particularly in the short to medium term. Furthermore, there remains a rich legacy of struggle, which, as noted in previous sections, will help to shape current actions. The relationship between strikes and unions is a reciprocal one, and any instances of strikes will impact back on the unions.

Thus, whilst the basic framework developed for understanding strike causality may still be employed, it must be recognized that fundamental changes have taken place in both causal and contingent variables. Not only has the political dimension changed, but so has the nature of the union movement. Some of these trends were evident in the late 1980s, but they have been greatly accelerated in the early 1990s. Despite these developments the policies and internal dynamics of the unions will still play a major role in determining the incidence of strike action.

A number of far-reaching changes have taken place in the industrial relations environment since 1990, most particularly with regard to the state and the unions, both key variables in comprehending the incidence of strikes. Indeed, the 1990s industrial relations environment is radically different from that of the 1980s. However, despite this new discontinuity, the basic framework for comprehending strikes developed in previous chapters is still of relevance in terms of overall trends, and the perceptions of workers themselves. The independent unions today are in a position I call "coterminous unionism". As noted above, whilst the unions retain their capacity for collective action over both workplace and political demands based on vigorous shopfloor democracy, they have also become increasingly institutionalized, bound by a range of alliances and agreements with both state and capital. Future industrial relations legislation will probably accelerate the move towards institutionalization. However, coterminous with this has been a continued shopfloor democracy and functioning grassroots structures of accountability. Workers remain committed to the weapons of strikes and stayaways, and have a clearly focused understanding of their limits and possibilities. Industrial conflict will not necessarily decline as a result of moves to greater accommodationism, but rather, in both causality and effects, reflect this altered reality.

Endnotes

1. Most COSATU members had at least Standard Five.
2. The chi-squared and lambda values depicted on table 16 demonstrate the significance of this relationship. It should be noted that the number of empty cells on table 15 necessitated the collapsing of certain categories on a matrix, prior to performing the necessary statistical tests.
3. This represents a direct comparison of elected/appointed shop stewards versus attendance at union meetings. Owing to the large number of empty cells, nonresponses/ other responses were eliminated prior to performing statistical tests. Chi-squared was 11.2976; significance 0.0234157.
4. Lambda values with rows dependent = 0.00; columns dependent = 0.02105; symmetric = 0.01798.
5. This strike involved the Workers Organization of South Africa (WOSA) linked Turning Wheels union. Turning Wheels was formed following a breakaway from the COSATU affiliated Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).
6. Przeworski (1991:181) identifies the trade union movement as a crucial partner in an accommodationist transition, as it is capable of mobilizing its constituents behind the government, and persuading its members to exercise wage restraint. However, the trade unions are only in a position to participate in pacts if they are relatively strong, broadly based, and politically influential. Przeworski (ibid.:185) argues that public sector unions are unlikely to enter into such an accommodation as they face neither the stick of unemployment nor the carrot of increased investment. Whilst some of South Africa's major public sector unions are affiliated to COSATU, and, as such, form part of the tripartite alliance, they lack the organizational strength of many other COSATU affiliates.

Shopfloor organization is, in many cases, still in its infancy, and it is doubtful if the public sector unions have the capacity to enforce alliance-level decisions on their memberships. Already, there are indications of internal divisions and wildcat strikes. Furthermore, there are numbers of major unaffiliated unions operating in the public sector - the COSATU public sector unions are not "all-encompassing". The unaffiliated unions may have different interests to the COSATU-aligned public sector unions. Although some form of co-operation between the public sector unions, and corporatist deals with central government, cannot be ruled out, it is clear that the Government of National Unity may face one of its major challenges from the public sector. A more detailed analysis of the current state of unionization in the public sector is contained in Wood (1995).

7. Although NACTU's membership declined significantly during the late 1980s, that federation still represents significant numbers of workers in several sectors, most notably the chemical industry (Baskin 1991:311). In addition, there are several more conservative unions that enjoy relatively large memberships, most notably in the public sector. An alliance between COSATU and such unions, although rather unlikely in the short term, would greatly strengthen the position of the labour movement as a whole.

8. Loosely based on Andrew Sayer's (1992:108) model of social causality.

CONCLUDING SECTION

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In view of the evidence and arguments presented in the preceding sections, it seems evident that South African strikes follow certain patterns with regard to both causality and duration. This is so in spite of dramatic changes in the industrial scene over the period under review. Whilst the period can readily be divided into a series of distinct periods, there are some general tendencies which enable the causes and duration of industrial conflict to be more fully explained, and facilitate in the identification of situations where there is a high propensity for strikes to occur. However, these patterns are by no means fully quantifiable, with subjective factors such as the previous experiences of parties to a dispute playing a key role, confirming the hypothesis expounded in Chapter 1. Although the South African experience is somewhat different from that of other developing or, indeed, developed states, it can be argued that the insights gained may have some utility in comprehending strikes elsewhere.

1.0

The Material Causes of Strikes

Firstly, it is evident that most strikes have a real basis in objective material circumstances. It should be noted that parlous material circumstances alone do not lead to strikes. Thus, whilst the material conditions of blacks remained extremely poor throughout the 1950s, relatively few strikes took place. In contrast, the 1980s were characterized by dramatic rises in both strikes and real wages. Indeed, it seems evident that strikes are mostly the product of wage aspirations. In

other words, strikes are most likely to take place in a situation where some improvement seems likely.

In situations where there can be said to exist a "climate of little hope" (Davies 1978:145), discontent may be manifest in more hidden forms, such as low productivity or outbreaks of violence. In other words, as Deleuze and Guattari (1988:424) assert, it is possible for industrial conflict to remain hidden or "rhizomatic". Such hidden resistance may assume a range of different forms (see Cohen 1994:138-149). However, discontent will only be expressed in the form of strikes for clearly articulated demands should a meaningful improvement seem possible. The regularity of the relationship between upturns in real wages after a period of stagnation and strike action render unlikely the possibility that this relationship is coincidental or spurious. Although there is little doubt that strikes had some impact on wage levels in the 1970s and 1980s, major upturns in real wages, such as in 1972, preceded outbreaks of strike action. The causes of these increases are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Furthermore, as Hibbs (1976:1043) notes, workers "do not suffer from any money illusion", but take the effects of inflation fully into account. Thus, a period of high inflation is one where strikes are likely to take place. Throughout the period under review, this indeed seemed to be the case. Significantly, all three major strike waves to take place, Durban 1973, East London 1974 and East Rand 1981, were preceded by disproportionate increases in the cost of basic foodstuffs and/or services.

The relationship between unemployment and strikes seems a complex one. Contrary to conventional wisdom, high levels of unemployment do not seem to have served as a deterrent to striking. Indeed, the rise of strike action in the 1980s was paralleled by increasing unemployment. This could reflect the complexities of informal mechanisms of support, and increasing segmentation of the labour market between unionized "insiders" and non-union members.

However, there are limitations in a purely economic explanation of strikes. Firstly, it seems evident that strikes are a cumulative phenomenon. In other words, if a number of strikes have taken place in a region, subsequent strikes are likely to occur. Secondly, while it seems possible to identify a situation where strikes are likely to take place, it is not always possible to explain regional variations, or why many firms remain strike-free in a situation where a high propensity to strike exists - in other words, why people act otherwise in a situation where a high propensity to strike can be said to exist. This could be the product of a range of other forces, including trade union organization and changes in the broader socio-political context.

2.0

Unions and Strikes

In addition to the economic causes of strikes, it seems evident that a dualistic relationship exists between the collective action of workers and the structures erected to represent them, the trade union movement. On the one hand, trade unions have a

far-reaching effect on the duration of strikes, as well as the on nature of workers' demands, and indeed, on their willingness to resort to strike action. This in turn is a result of trade union resources (in terms of membership, finance and organization) and policies. So, for instance, whilst many of the TUCSA unions amassed impressive membership and financial resources in the 1960s, these unions rarely resorted to strike action, on account of the conservative orientation of both union leadership and many members. A similar conservatism was evident in the terminal sclerosis that beset SACTU in the 1950s. Conversely, the more radical SACTU unions were unable to offer much support to striking workers in the 1950s and 1960s owing to very limited finances and membership. Meanwhile, the FOSATU and COSATU unions were far better equipped to support the sustained instances of strike action that characterized much of the 1970s and 1980s.

However, this raises certain inherent problems with regard to cause and effect. Did a vigorous union movement predate rises in strike action, or did an upsurge of strikes provide the basis for subsequent unionization initiatives? A comprehensive analysis of this relationship revealed a complex linkage between action and structure. This relationship seems to have similar characteristics to that described by Anthony Giddens in his Structuration Theory. Effectively, a two-way dialogue can be said to exist between individual action and social structure, whereby both change, yet are changed by each other: the "duality of structure" (Giddens 1984:282). Strikes may provide a fertile ground for unionization initiatives, but the presence or absence

of trade union organization may affect the duration of strikes, the nature of demands expressed, and the propensity to resort to collective action. The 1970s saw the emergence and rapid growth of a strong and effective trade union movement. At the same time black employment in the manufacturing sector increased. In the 1980s, large numbers of blacks began to move into semi-skilled occupations. Nonetheless, the unions continued to effectively represent the interests of their unskilled constituents. Indeed, the independent unions assumed a social movement role, representing a combination of effective shopfloor organization with mobilization against government policies (Webster 1987b:217).

Perhaps the most important distinction in the labour market came between unionized, urbanized "insiders", in relatively secure employment, and "outsiders", the non-unionized, including those in temporary employment, in rural areas, and the unemployed. Effectively, this would represent the extension of the earlier division Hindson (1987a:11-12) noted in the labour market, between urban "legals" and those lacking secure rights of urban residence.

In the 1990s, a special type of unionism emerged, which I call coterminous unionism. On the one hand, the unions have retained a relatively vibrant democracy at grassroots level, characterized by high levels of participation and accountability. On the other, the role of the unions has become increasingly institutionalized, bound by agreements with employers and the state. However, contrary to transition theory, it is evident that the mass base of the independent union movement has not been

demobilized (Joffe, Maller and Webster 1995:13). These developments will not necessarily result in a reduced incidence of industrial conflict, particularly as major causes, such as a significant aspirations gap, remain. Rather, the situation will most probably be marked by inconsistencies, by a scenario in which the many faces of the union movement will show themselves.

Indeed, there is a distinct possibility that fully-fledged strategic unionism may emerge, as, by 1994, the unions combined unprecedented political influence at the level of centralized government, with a mass following to back up their demands (see Adler & Webster 1995:21). However, at the time of writing, strategic unionism remained "an emerging and somewhat uneven phenomenon" (Von Holdt 1994:306). Coterminous unionism refers to the role of the union movement in the transition phase, where the unions face pressures from both the shopfloor and their negotiating partners, and - while still incorporating many of the aspects of a social movement - have also begun to assume the orientation of strategic unionism (see *ibid.*:314).

3.0 The Causes and the Internal Dynamics of Strikes

It is further evident that the causes of strikes are inherently bound up with their internal dynamics. By the latter is meant the duration of strikes, the numbers of workers involved, the demands expressed, and the outcome thereof. As noted above, the presence of trade unions will not only possibly affect the propensity to resort to collective action, but also the duration of a strike, and the nature of demands expressed. Effective

trade unions enabled increasingly sustained forms of strikes to take place.

Strikes should also be viewed within a very specific geographical or spatial context. The presence of community organizations in the case of township dwellers, or the specific characteristics of a hostel environment, may greatly assist workers in mobilizing support or enforcing solidarity. This may facilitate larger and longer strikes taking place. As Hyman (1975b:191) notes, there is a tendency for strikes to become ritualized and bound by unwritten rules of conduct. By the 1980s, the industrial relations environment had become increasingly sophisticated. The percentage of disputes marked by dismissals of strikers and/or police intervention declined. However, it should be noted that counter-tendencies, reflected in developments such as the mass strikes of 1987, remain possible.

4.0 The Legislative and Political Context of Strikes

There seems to be no evidence that latent discontent and/or conflict is directly transferable between community and workplace. Nonetheless, strikes reflect the socio-political and legislative environment in which they take place. In this sense, the relationship between the two may be seen as more contingent than causal. Legislative changes, most notably the Wiehahn reforms, contributed greatly to the institutionalization of strike action. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988:424) note, state strategies for controlling social conflict tend, over

time, to move from the dramatic to the subtle and legalistic. However, the serious challenges in 1987 seemed to have resulted in a return to more coercive strategies.

Nonetheless, the incidence of strikes actually increased, probably, as Webster (1987b:217) suggests, as a result of the state's inability to politically incorporate the unions. The rise of stayaways in the 1980s, following the upsurge of political organization and resistance, paralleled the rise of strikes and unionization. This greatly facilitated both stayaway action in support of political demands and consumer boycotts in support of strikes. However, it was only in the 1980s that the unions made use of the general stayaway weapon in pursuit of demands of primary concern to the broader trade union movement. As noted in Chapter 8, the shift to what may be termed coterminous unionism implies that stayaway action could well persist into a democratic South Africa, but that the binding of the unions into a series of agreements with both state and employers may result in such action becoming less coherent.

5.0 Strikes and Subjective Factors

It is evident that strikes are the product of not only organizational and material conditions, but also of the previous experiences of workers and managers of strike action and their subjective interpretations thereof. Workers who have had little previous exposure to strike action are likely to be cautious in contemplating such activity. Strikes which take place in such circumstances are likely to be short, spontaneous affairs.

Indeed, rather than embark on an unknown (and highly risky) course of action, grievances may be manifested in other, somewhat more hidden or rhizomatic forms, such as low productivity, or seemingly irrational outbreaks of violence, such as were endemic on the mines in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Strikes seem to be a cumulative phenomenon. In other words, an outbreak of strike action is likely to be followed by similar action at the same or neighbouring plants, should workers' interpretations of the possibilities of such action be favourable. It should be noted that this does not imply that the original strike need have been, in objective terms, a clear victory for workers. For example, whilst the Amato textiles strike of the late 1950s resulted in a major defeat for workers and the severe weakening of the TWIUs, the experience of the dispute seems to have encouraged workers to resort to collective action at a factory in the same region, Benoni Textiles, several years later (Walker and Weinbron 1961:269).

Indeed, experiences during a strike may result in management and/or workers adjusting their strategies and attitudes towards a settlement. Past experiences and the subjective interpretations thereof may thus affect not only the propensity to resort to strike action, but also the duration of disputes. Strikes are dynamic affairs, their duration not determined by a single, consistently rational costs-benefits analysis. As Clausewitz (1968:188-189) notes, conflict tends to be marked by "living reactions", the nature of the conflict being constantly reconstituted. Thus, strikes should be seen in temporal terms, in the context of preceding events in factory and region.

The relationship between subjective factors, such as workers' interpretations of previous outbreaks of strike action, and more objective factors, such as shifts in real wages, should not by any means be seen as either dualistic or dialectical. Indeed, the dividing line between the two may be somewhat unclear (Weinstein 1990:86), although a distinction between broad social and economic factors, and individual understandings and interpretations of both present and past circumstances, remains necessary. As Sayer (1992:22) argues, subjective factors entail not only a passive process of interpretation, but also creative action as a result of such interpretations.

6.0 The Risk Society of Striking

Recent writings in social theory have suggested the increasing emergence of "risk societies" (Turner 1990:147; Beck 1992:13). As traditional constraints and structures of control break down, with an attendant disembedding of meaning, considerably greater individual freedom of action is possible (Turner 1990:147). This situation can be referred to as "risk society". Whilst this does not imply that life is any more physically dangerous (in fact, it may be less so), there is greater scope for risk-taking.

It can be argued that during the 1980s, such a situation had developed in the field of industrial relations in South Africa. Striking had become less physically dangerous, with the authorities, and more particularly the police, intervening in increasingly few strikes. Indeed, strikes had increasingly become

institutionalized and bound by unwritten rules. This, and the greater exposure of individual workers to strikes, has resulted in what may be termed a risk society of striking.

Traditional constraints on striking, ranging from an unwillingness to embark on an unknown form of resistance to the violent intervention of police, had become eroded. The right to strike had gradually become legally recognized. All these factors culminated in strikes becoming a normal means of voicing discontent with working conditions. By the 1980s, strikes had indeed become an integral part of workplace culture. In other words, the workplace environment became more conducive to the taking of calculated risks.

7.0 The Possibilities of Strike Action

A further issue concerns the ultimate potential of strike action. Contemporary theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1988:472) argue that strike action is ultimately constrained on the "plane of capital" - in other words, action takes place in terms of existing relations within society and does not offer a challenge to these. However, the conditions which make continued authority possible can provide the basis for new challenges, "opportunities for counter-attack". A good example of this would be the Industrial Council system. A basis for incorporating the established unions in the 1950s and 1960s, it became a powerful tool in the hands of many of the independent unions in the late 1980s. However, strikes may be the product of localized tendencies or counter-forces, and thus need not form part of the total system (Jameson

1991:416).

The majority of strikes during the period under review concerned wage issues, as opposed to questions of control. However, as noted above, wage strikes are in part the product of rising wage aspirations, and thus have a significance beyond day-to-day economic concerns. There is little doubt that the current political changes have yet to meet rising aspirations, which are by no means confined to the workplace (Haines and Wood 1993:44-46). Indeed, accommodating demands for recognizable socio-economic betterment remains a central item on the agenda of the post-April 1994 government. As noted in Chapter 8, there is little doubt that wage aspirations will remain a major cause of strikes in the 1990s, although a high wage aspirations/high strikes spiral seems unlikely.

8.0 Rationality, Power and Strikes

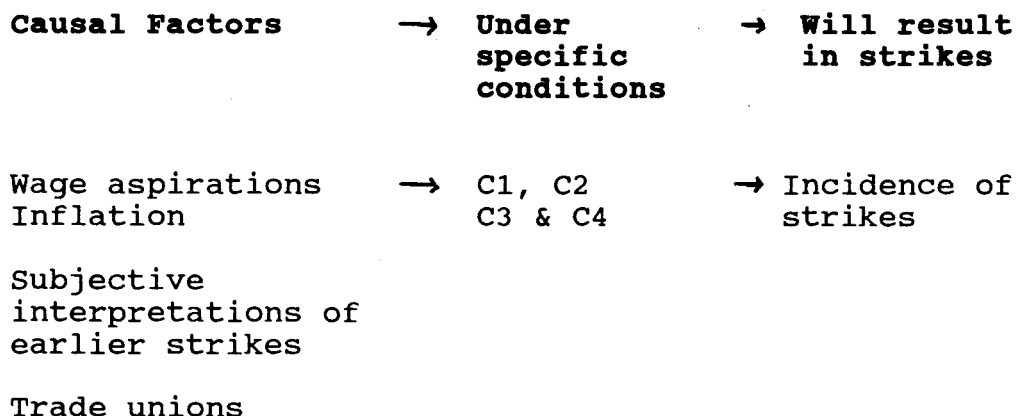
An additional contingent factor is the possibility of variable reasoning, that rationality may be variable and tempered by only limited information being available to some/all parties to a dispute (Thompson & McHugh 1990:139). In other words, people may act otherwise, when subjected to the same basic stimuli. Agents do not always have adequate information to guide their behaviour (Arrow & Hankopolija 1985:24). The decision to resort to collective action results from a complex process of dialogue and compromise between differing views of what constitutes rational action (Martinelli & Smelser 1990:31).

The Positive Political Economy (PPE) paradigm provides a

distinct departure from both the established political economy and laissez faire traditions, through its inclusion of institutions and social collectives (Olson 1990:214), and its rejection of fixed assumptions about the effects of inequalities in wealth and power (Alt & Shepsle 1990:1-2). However, the relationship between individual actors and social collectives is depicted as one-way, founded on individual rational choice (Ordeshook 1990:10). In the case of industrial conflict, it seems apparent that the relationship between action and social collectives (e.g. unions) is ultimately dualistic, as suggested by Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens 1984:282) and not always a consistently rational one. Structural changes "throw up new possibilities for actors", and, indeed, the relationship between the two can be seen as recursive, rather than unilaterally causal (Adler & Webster 1995:19).

The PPE paradigm falls under the broad ambit of Public Choice Theory. It retains as its central premise the notion that society is constituted of rational actors whose decisions are underlain by a desire to individually maximise their benefits at the least possible costs, and forms the core of the 1980s New Right theories of the state (Dunleavy 1991:3-5). It is concluded that this rational actor premise needs to be challenged, and that a more pragmatic approach, moving away from the assumption of individual self-interested behaviour, provides an ultimately more useful method for explaining collective action at the workplace.

It is evident, therefore, that a number of factors contribute to strike causality, confirming the hypothesis laid out in Chapter 1. Founded in the historical experience of South African strikes from 1950-1990s, individual instances of strike action are located in terms of their relationship with their structural context (see Skocpol 1984a:1) as a means of identifying these factors. As noted earlier, the theorizing process is about trying to make general sense out of specific social events, employing "whatever existing theoretical resources...that are seen useful and valid" (ibid.:2). It is against this backdrop that the causal explanation of strikes outlined in Chapter 1 is confirmed, based on Andrew Sayer's (1992:108) model of social causality:



- where C1 represents the prevailing political climate in terms of social protest and political mobilization, C2 legislation governing industrial conflict, C3 spatial issues, such as hostel or township conditions, and C4 the amount of information opposing

sides possess, including information about their relevant adversary's intentions, and other factors resulting in some variation in the reasoning process.

It should be noted that the relationship between unions and strikes remains a dualistic one, and strikes may impact back on union structures. For example, the current (mid-1990s) shift in the role of the independent union movement will have far reaching implications for strike action, most probably, as suggested in Chapter 8, resulting in a rise in unofficial and/or public sector strikes (see Wood 1995).

10.0 Periodizing Strike Action

In Chapter 1, it was argued that, using the tools of analysis of historical sociology, it was possible to locate strikes in terms of specific historical settings reflecting shifts in both causal and contingent variables (see Skocpol 1984b:379). It is apparent that a number of distinct historical settings can indeed be identified, separated by breaks or discontinuities including the realignment of the union movement in 1955; SACTU's collapse in the early 1960s; the wage increases, unionization initiatives and strike waves of the early 1970s; the legislative reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period also marked by rising community-based protests and the consolidation of the union movement; the mass strikes of 1987, followed by a state counter-offensive; and the altered socio-political environment of the 1990s.

The model confirmed above can provide the basis for

understanding the similarities and differences in strikes in each of the distinct historical settings or periods¹. Certain types of strikes tended to predominate in each of these particular periods. Although, as is evident from Chapter 7, there are certain key differences between strikes in the first three periods (i.e. the years 1950-1972) identified above, there is an important commonality in that strikes tended to be of fairly short duration, not always over clearly articulated demands, generally involving only single companies, with limited support from the wider community. Union assistance to strikers, which was mostly forthcoming in the SACTU years, tended to be limited, often more moral than material. Whilst generally not characterized by prior planning by workers, such strikes were the product of real material causes.

In contrast, the period from 1972 until the Wiehahn reforms represented a new era in collective action. Strikes were often well-organized affairs, generally with some form of union presence, over clearly stated demands pertaining directly to workplace issue. However, organizational and other limitations resulted in their being of comparatively short duration. From 1980 until 1987, strikes tended to be longer and better organized, a reflection of the increased strength of the union movement and their enhanced bargaining position. In contrast, the 1987 "Trials of Strength", were not so much attempts by management and workers to extract concessions from each other, but to radically alter the balance of power at the workplace. The 1988-1989 period saw a return to the pattern of the early 1980s, albeit that the union movement was in a somewhat weaker

position. In contrast, in the post-1989 period, there have been a number of new tendencies in strike action, most notably a rise in public sector strikes, and in unofficial or semi-official strikes, in many cases involving workers at odds with central union organization.

It is evident that shifts in one of the causal and two of the contingent variables identified in the model can help explain why certain types of strikes tend to take place at certain times. Firstly, it is evident that what distinguishes each of these distinct periods is organizational mobilization. From 1950 to 1955, the African trade union movement was weak and divided. In contrast, in the SACTU era, trade unions were largely united under the umbrella of the Congress Alliance. The new political unionism that emerged was reflected in, inter alia, a number of stayaways taking place, and a moderate increase in strike action. However, by the early 1960s SACTU, which had never succeeded in building a totally effective shopfloor organization, fell victim to state repression. The period stretching from SACTU's collapse until 1972 was, again, a time where African workers lacked any effective organizational support.

In contrast, the years from 1973 until the 1979 Wiehahn reforms were marked by the emergence and rapid growth of a number of new independent trade unions. At the same time as the new unions emerged, there was a massive upsurge in strike action. The relationship between the new unions and strikes was indeed a dualistic one. The unions benefitted from the militancy and mobilization surrounding strikes, yet themselves provided organizational assistance to striking workers. Whilst the unions

continued to expand and strikes to rise in the period following the Wiehahn reforms, industrial relations became increasingly formalized within the expanded statutory collective bargaining framework. In addition, the unions increasingly began to assume a social movement role, reflecting the unprecedented wave of socio-political protests that took place in the 1980s. This was reflected in the rise of stayaway action.

Following the mass strikes of 1987, the membership of several key unions began to decline. Whilst the unions continued to make use of strikes, as well as stayaways, few assumed the intensity of the 1987 mines or railways disputes. Finally, the 1990s saw the unions becoming drawn in as a key partner in South Africa's political transition. This has yet to result in the demobilization of the unions' mass base, as predicted by transition theory (Adler & Webster 1995:13). Nonetheless, it has resulted in certain tensions within union organization, and, reflecting the dualistic relationship between unions and strikes, will have an impact on the nature of collective action at the workplace.

In addition, it seems apparent that two contingent variables, industrial relations legislation, and socio-political protest, varied greatly between these periods, again resulting in changes in the nature of strikes. For example, both the SACTU years and the 1980-1987 period were times of mass political mobilization and protest, not only affecting strike action, but also directly resulting in mass stayaways. Conversely, the mid-to-late 1960s was a highly repressive period, with few political protests, and weak worker organization. Furthermore, the

prevailing industrial relations legislation also shaped industrial conflict in each of these distinct epochs. For example, as noted above, the Wiehahn reforms contributed to the trend towards the institutionalization of strikes in much of the 1980s.

Finally, whilst beyond the scope of this thesis, it is evident that the discontinuities noted above, were, in part, a reflection of shifting patterns in South Africa's industrialization. As Joffe, Maller & Webster (1993:52) note, racial fordism ultimately provided the environment in which social movement unionism emerged (which, in turn, influenced and was affected by strikes). The gradual adoption of new industrialization strategies in the 1990s, brought about by the need for greater global competitiveness (see Haines 1994:1-12), has created the possibility for the full development of strategic unionism.

In summary, it is evident that shifting patterns of strike action can be periodized in terms of the model. It is indeed possible to understand why certain types of strikes take place at certain times (see chapter 7) in terms of changes in causal and contingent variables. In particular, there are a number of distinct phases of organizational mobilization, waves of political protests and distinct legislative environments during the 1950-c.1990 period. However, in each distinct period, it is possible to trace and confirm the distinct pattern of strike causality verified in Section 9 of this chapter.

Essentially, there are three basic objectives of any comparative analysis: To explain further key variables; to identify broader trends and problems; and to reach a stage where some form of prediction is possible (Macridis 1978:18). Owing to considerable differences in the size of the labour force in different countries, probably the best comparative measure is the numbers of workers involved in strike action per thousand workers employed in the relevant country. Using this measure, figure 27 compares the level of strike action in a number of developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, accurate information was only available for one major tropical African state, Kenya. Although substantially lower than South Africa, the incidence of strikes in that country was significantly higher than many developed countries.

As can be seen from this graph, South Africa has the highest (both average and median) level of strike activity of all the countries compared. There is a considerable margin between South Africa and the next most strike-prone countries, the United Kingdom and Canada. It should be noted that a very large coal miners' strike took place in the United Kingdom during the period under review. Similarly, a major metal industry strike took place in Germany in 1990. With this exception, the level of strike activity in Germany is relatively low. The level of strikes in Poland, a country where a vigorous trade union movement emerged in the 1980s, is very much lower for the few years that accurate statistics are available (see figure 27).

However, it seems that large numbers of strikes took place in Poland in the early-to-mid 1980s. Unfortunately, comparable figures were only available for Brazil for one year, 1988, when 240 workers per thousand were involved in strike action (ILO 1993:1065-7).

This figure does not seem by any means unique for Brazil, with over 23.3 million workers taking part in strikes during 1986 (Beecham & Eidenham 1987:2). Like South Africa, there were high levels of political protest during the 1980s, and a resurgence of trade union activity (ibid.:16-19). Whilst political protest is by no means directly transferable into strike action, political mobilization may facilitate community support for striking workers. Furthermore, as noted above, a dualistic relationship exists between trade union organization and strikes. An additional factor explaining the high levels of strikes in South Africa and Brazil would be wage aspirations. The real wages of workers in Brazil stagnated or declined in the 1960s and 1970s (Beecham & Eidenham 1987:12), with some improvements in the 1980s (see ILO 1992).

Although the level of strike action in South Africa seems very high by global standards, insights gained through exploring the outbreaks of industrial conflict in South Africa may shed new light on relations of power and conflict in the workplace, and on why, under certain circumstances, strikes are unlikely to take place.

Strike action in South Africa has been transformed over the past three decades. From isolated, seemingly spontaneous outbursts, strikes have become an integral feature of the South African industrial relations scene. Despite this radical transformation, strikes do follow certain distinct patterns, and can be ascribed to a combination of identifiable causal and contingent variables, as per the hypothesis contained in Chapter 1. By describing those situations where upsurges of strikes took place, it is also possible to comprehend something of those repressive "silent years", periods of apparent industrial peace, such as during the 1960s.

By the 1980s, strikes had become an integral feature of South African industrial life. Indeed, during the Emergency years, strikes and stayaways became the only feasible means of large-scale collective action. South Africa's pending economic reconstruction will not only concern future strategies for development, but will also have to encompass new ways for reconceptualizing and reforming workplace relations. Again, by understanding something of the nature of conflict at the workplace, and of workers' demands and aspirations, the first cautious steps can be taken towards such a reconceptualization.

Whilst major causes of strikes, such as aspirations disparities, persisted into the 1990s, the socio-political environment has radically changed. New industrial relations legislation and the rise of corporatism will accelerate the tendency towards institutionalization. These tensions are most

visible in the union movement, which, in the early 1990s, combines an accommodationist summit with a democratic base. The situation may be described as coterminous unionism. The parallel tendencies of persistent shopfloor democracy and, more specifically, activism, on the one hand, and institutionalization on the other, need not necessarily be either contradictory or dialectical. Rather, the situation is one of incoherence, with regular strike action continuing. Nonetheless, the unions retain the capacity to secure for themselves a major role in transition period and beyond, through the development of fully-fledged strategic unionism (Von Holdt 1994:306).

As Berger and Godsell (1988:280) note, there are certain constraints on comparative analysis. Whilst experiences cannot be duplicated, it is at the same time possible to seek functional equivalents in differing sets of social circumstances. Traditionally, there has been a tendency to employ Western-developed theoretical constructs in the South, with only limited attempts to modify or develop them, a situation which Hyman (1979:323) refers to as "theoretical imperialism". Whilst this study makes no claims that the theoretical constructs synthesised and developed have a universal applicability, aspects thereof may be of utility in formulating new explanations for workplace conflict in those developing countries with an emerging or vigorous trade union movement, such as Poland, Brazil and, perhaps, Russia.

The past decade has seen a massive re-think in social theory, that has both opened new debates and injected fresh life into old ones (Wood 1993:89). A central aspect of these debates

has been a concern with the very question of modernity, and of rationality (Lash & Friedman 1992:1). This has led to a number of innovative theoretical initiatives. These would include contributions as diverse as the re-awakening of interest in economic sociology, Anthony Giddens's re-formulation of the relationship between individual action and wider social context, Ulrich Beck's conception of risk society, Andrew Sayer's rethinking of realist methodology, and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's exploration of the role of the state, resistance and change. Although there have been a number of new approaches to conceptualising the nature of work, reflected in the works of Shelagh Cohen (1987:32-51) and Anthony Woodiwiss (1987:275-316), there have been few attempts to update theories of strike action, and relocate them in terms of contemporary debates and practice.

A primary objective of this thesis has been to attempt such an update. As noted above, there are limits to the general applicability of any theoretical understanding, and, in different social contexts, such constructs represent, at best, a starting point from which a directly applicable framework may be developed. However, in the South African context, it is hoped that the constructs developed will shed light on a widely prevalent form of social conflict, assist in the analysis of future outbreaks, and enable the identification of those situations where a high propensity to engage in strike action may exist.

Endnote

1. As Collins (1992:196) argues, a scientific frame of reference or hypothesis enables one to encompass and analyze practicalities, actual historical events. Such a framework of reference indeed provides the basis upon which one can interpret unfolding social events (ibid.:197).

GRAPHS AND TABLES

GRAPHS AND TABLES

Figure Number	Title/Description
1	Strike totals/volume per year
2	Black unemployment 1960-1980
3	Black unemployment in the 1980s
4	Total strikes vs black unemployment (regression analysis)
5	Average wages - current prices
6	Average wages - 1985 prices
7	Total strikes vs wages - 1985 prices (regression analysis)
8	Total strikes vs black wages - 1985 prices (regression analysis)
9	Total strikes vs inflation rate (regression analysis)
10	Total strikes vs black wages (lagged - 2 years) (regression analysis)
11	Wage board activity
12	Strikes on seasonal basis
13	Overall trends - strikes vs inflation
14	Total strikes vs membership of registered unions (regression analysis)
15	Strike causes in the 1980s
16	Wages in mining sector - 1985 prices
17	Wages in manufacturing sector - 1985 prices
18	Wages in construction sector - 1985 prices
19	Productivity (plot)
20	Wage vs total strikes in the 1970s
21	Strikes per region in the 1980s (two parts)
22	Strikes versus recorded "unrest"
23	Industrial court activity
24	African employment - manufacturing sector (four parts)
25	African average wages - manufacturing sector (four parts)
26	Occupational distribution in the metal industry
27	International comparison - workers involved in strikes per 1000 workers
28	Skill/pay differentials in 1990
29	Occupational distribution in the mining industry
30	Comparison of indicators
31	When COSATU members first joined a union
32	When COSATU members joined current union
33	Age spread of COSATU workers
34	RDP will improve working and living conditions

35	Support for tri-partite alliance
36	Believe alliance should continue to fight 1999 elections
37	Knowledge of National Manpower Commission
38	When last participated in shopsteward elections
39	Has a shopsteward ever been dismissed by workers
40	New government will improve wages in next five years
41	New government will improve working conditions in next five years
42	If new government fails to deliver, collective action will be needed
43	Mass action needed if government fails to deliver
44	Will do nothing if government fails to deliver
45	Skill level of COSATU membership

Table number

Title/Description

Statistical Tests

1	Strikes vs unemployment
2	Strikes vs black unemployment
3	Strikes vs real wages
4	Strikes vs black real wages
5	Strikes vs inflation
6	Strikes vs black real wages (lagged -2 years)
7	Strike volume vs unemployment
8	Strikes vs registered union membership
9	Strikes vs "unrest" incidents
10	Wages vs productivity
11	Wages vs union membership
12	Strikes vs business cycle

Other Tables

13	Stayaways (4 parts)
14	Industrial relations legislation and strikes (2 parts)
15	Skill vs attendance at union meetings
16	Skill vs attendance at union meetings (nature of relationship)
17	Major consumer boycotts over workplace issues
18	Knowledge of RDP (cd 50) vs participation in its formulation (cd 51)
19	Regional variations with regard to support for tri-partite alliance
20	Knowledge of NMC (cd 42) vs participation in a report back on that commission (cd 43)

Strikes per Year

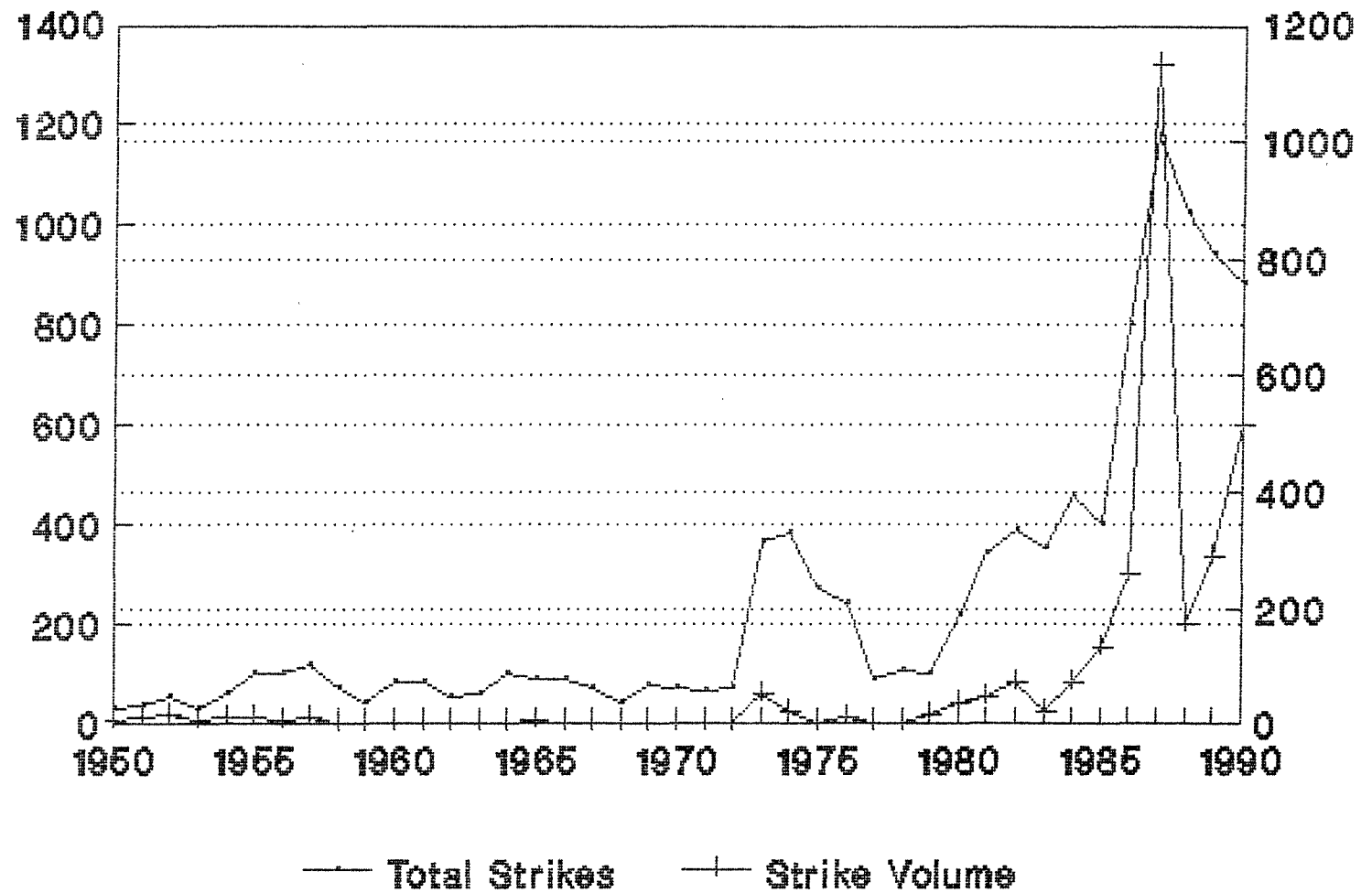


FIGURE 1

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992)

Black Unemployment 1960-1980



FIGURE 2

Bell 1984

Black Unemployment in the 1980s

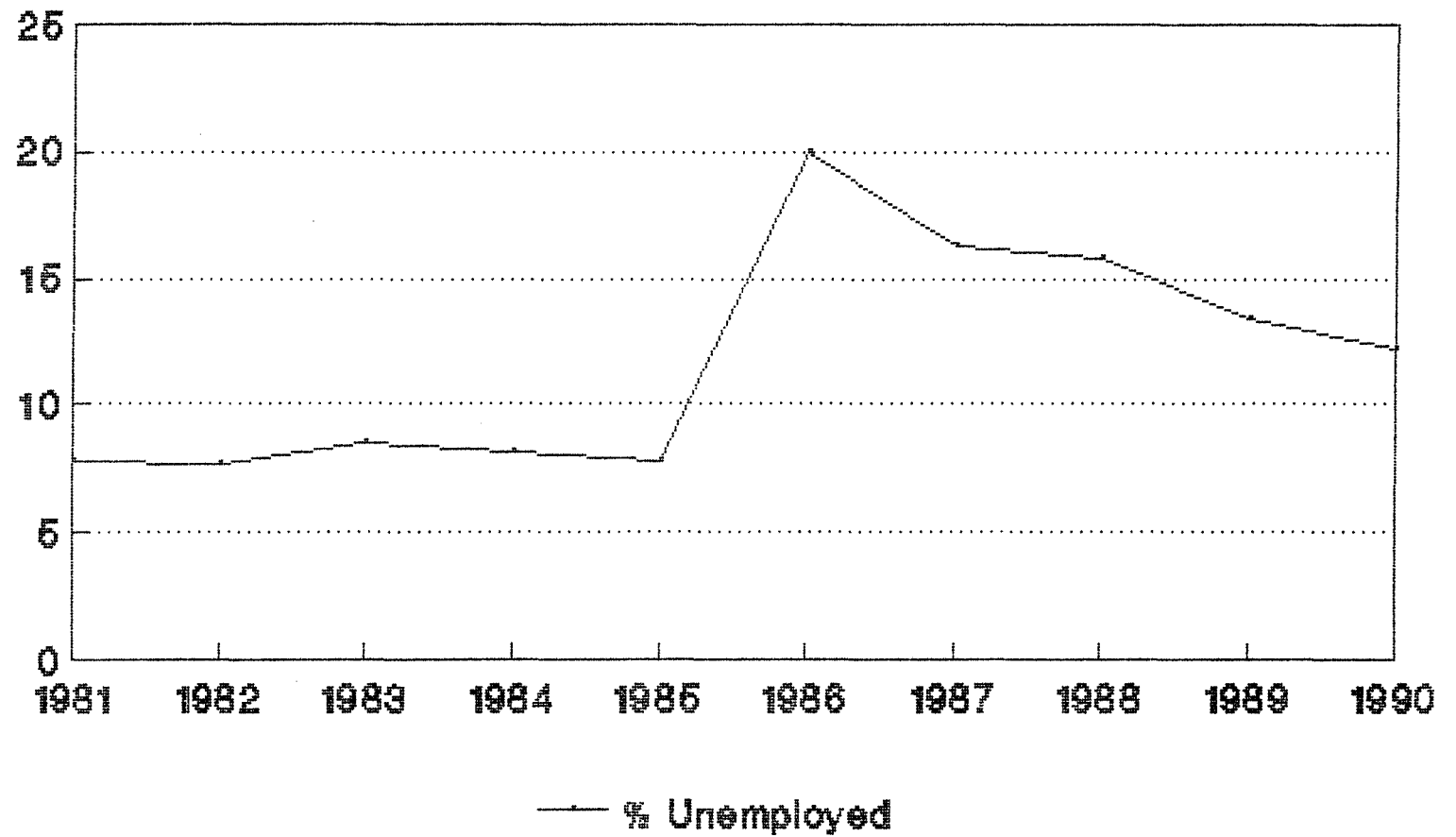


FIGURE 3

(CSO 1992, NMC 1987)

FIGURE 4

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987)

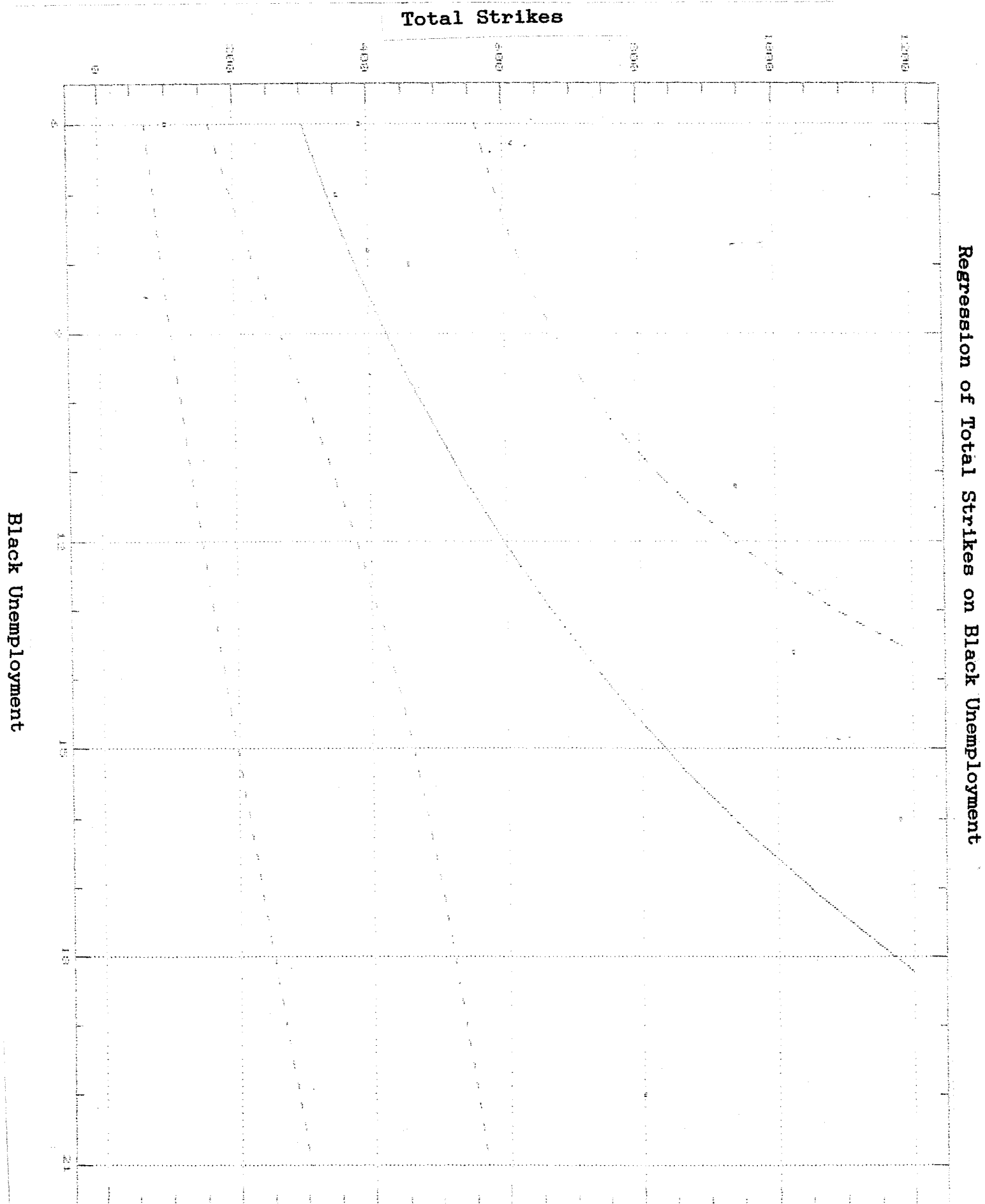


FIGURE 5

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1972-1992)

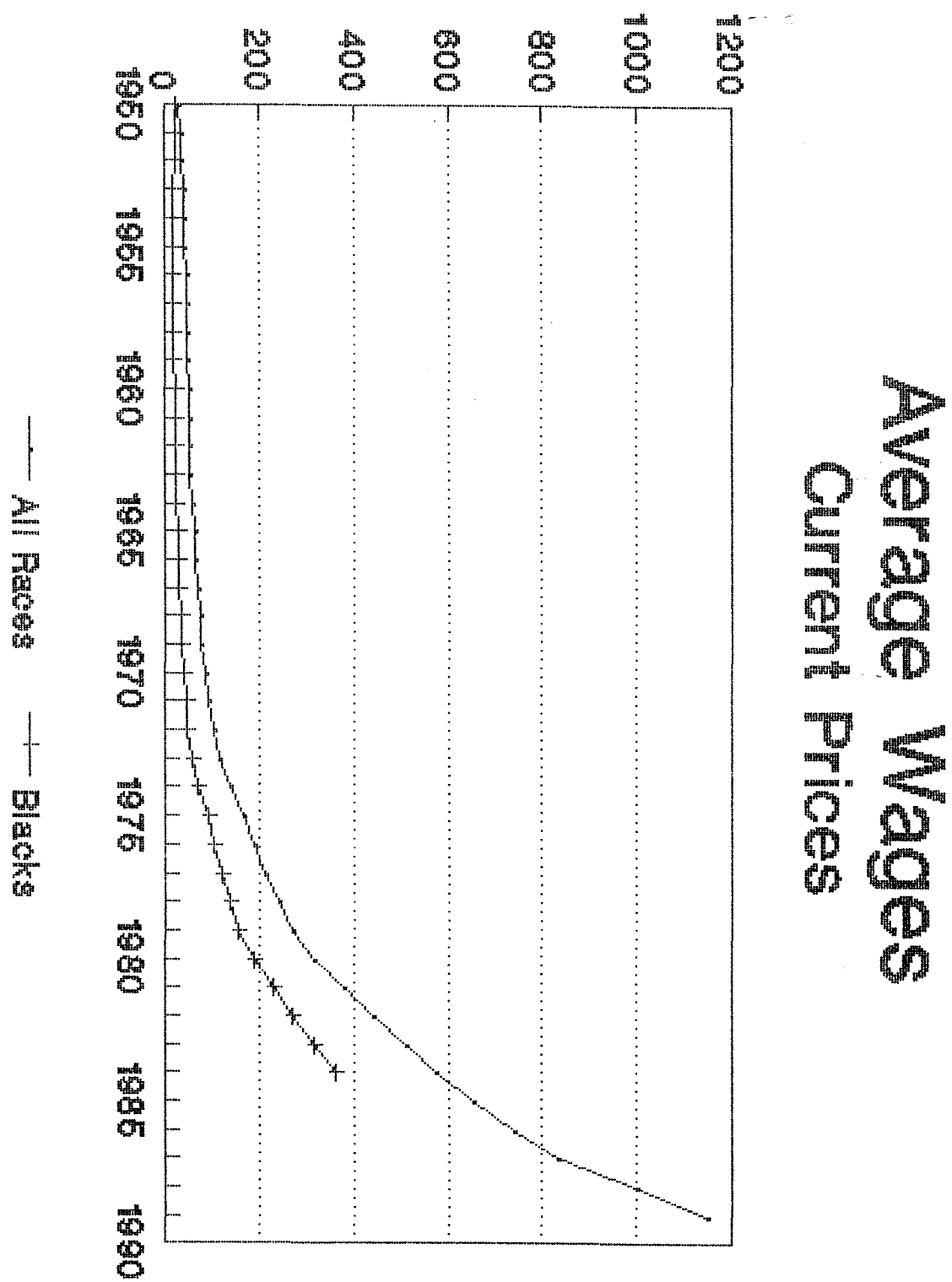


FIGURE 6

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1972-1992; SARB 1960-1986)

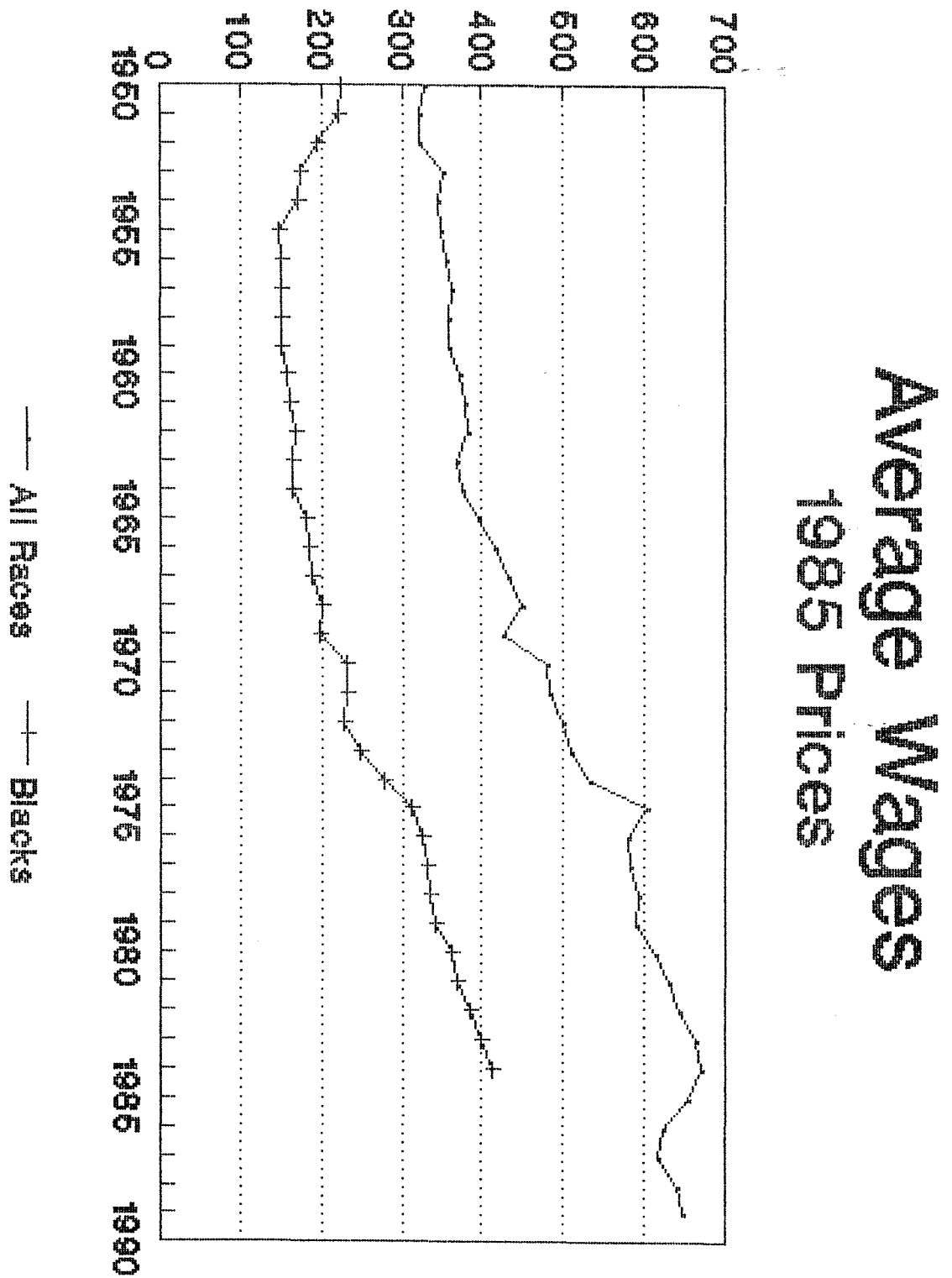


FIGURE 7

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
SARB 1960-1986)

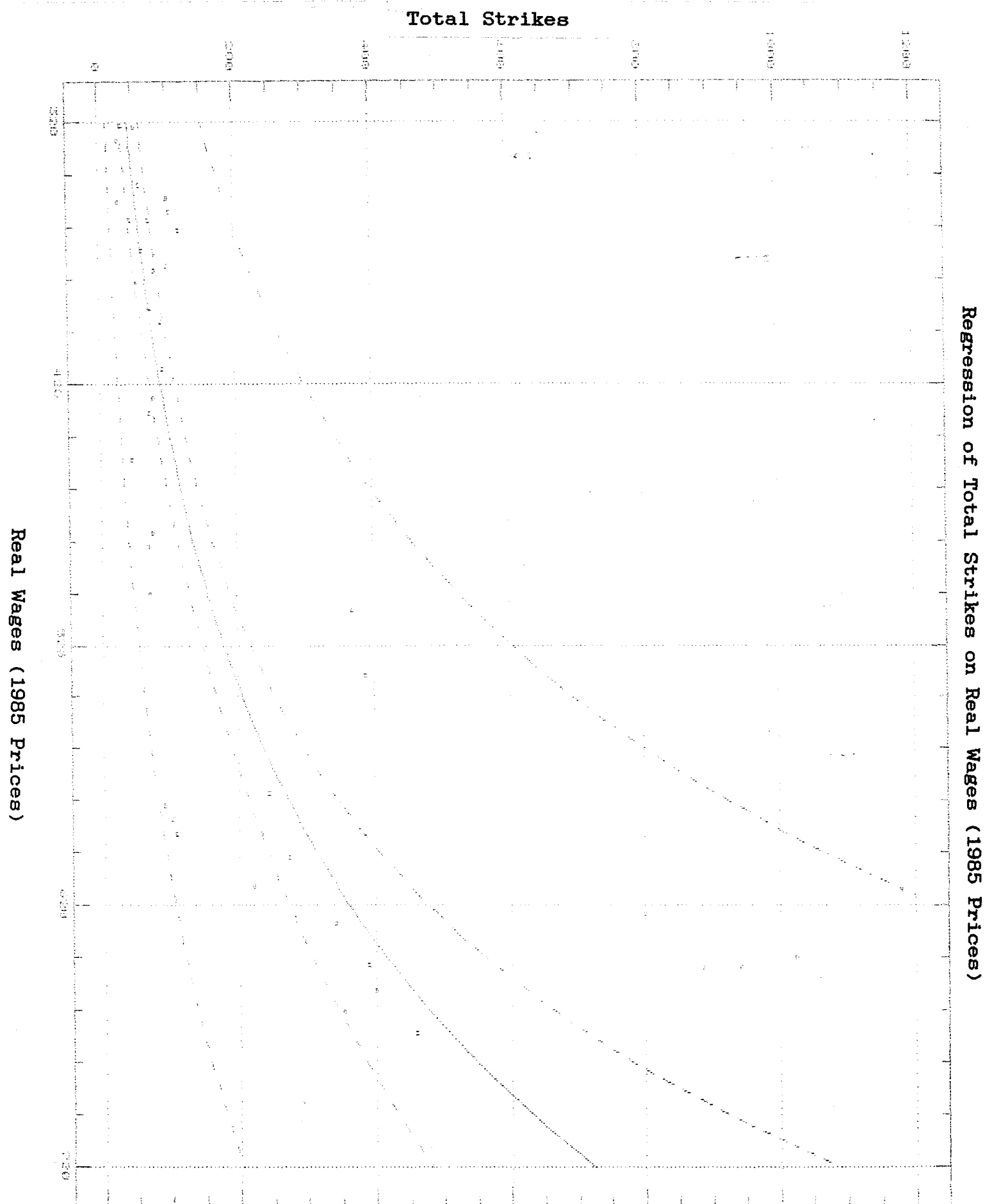
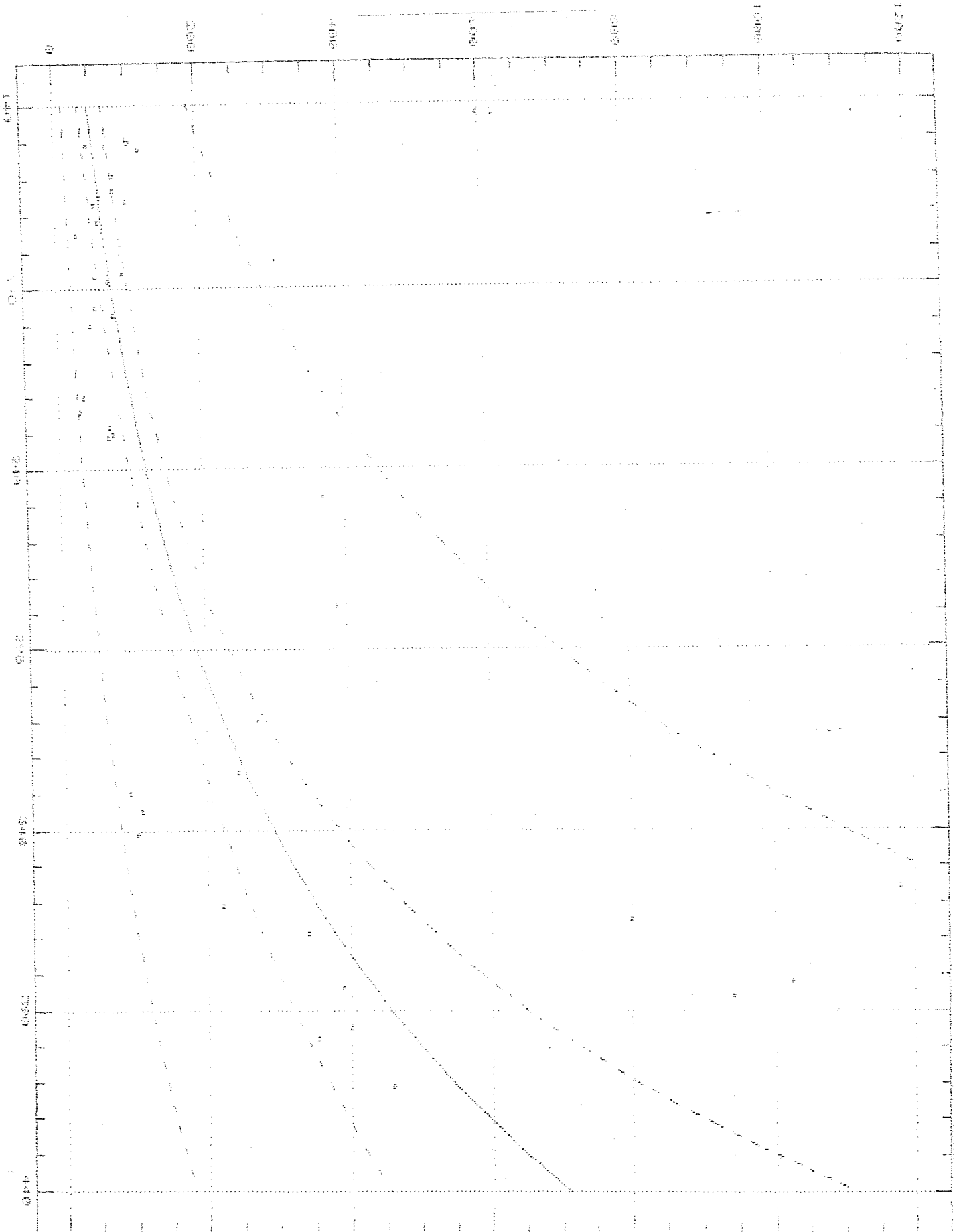


FIGURE 8

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
SARB 1960-1986)

Total Strikes

Black Real Wages (1985 Prices)



RELATIONSHIP OF TOTAL STRIKES ON BLACK REAL WAGES (1985 PRICES)

FIGURE 9

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992;
SARB 1960-1986)

Total Strikes

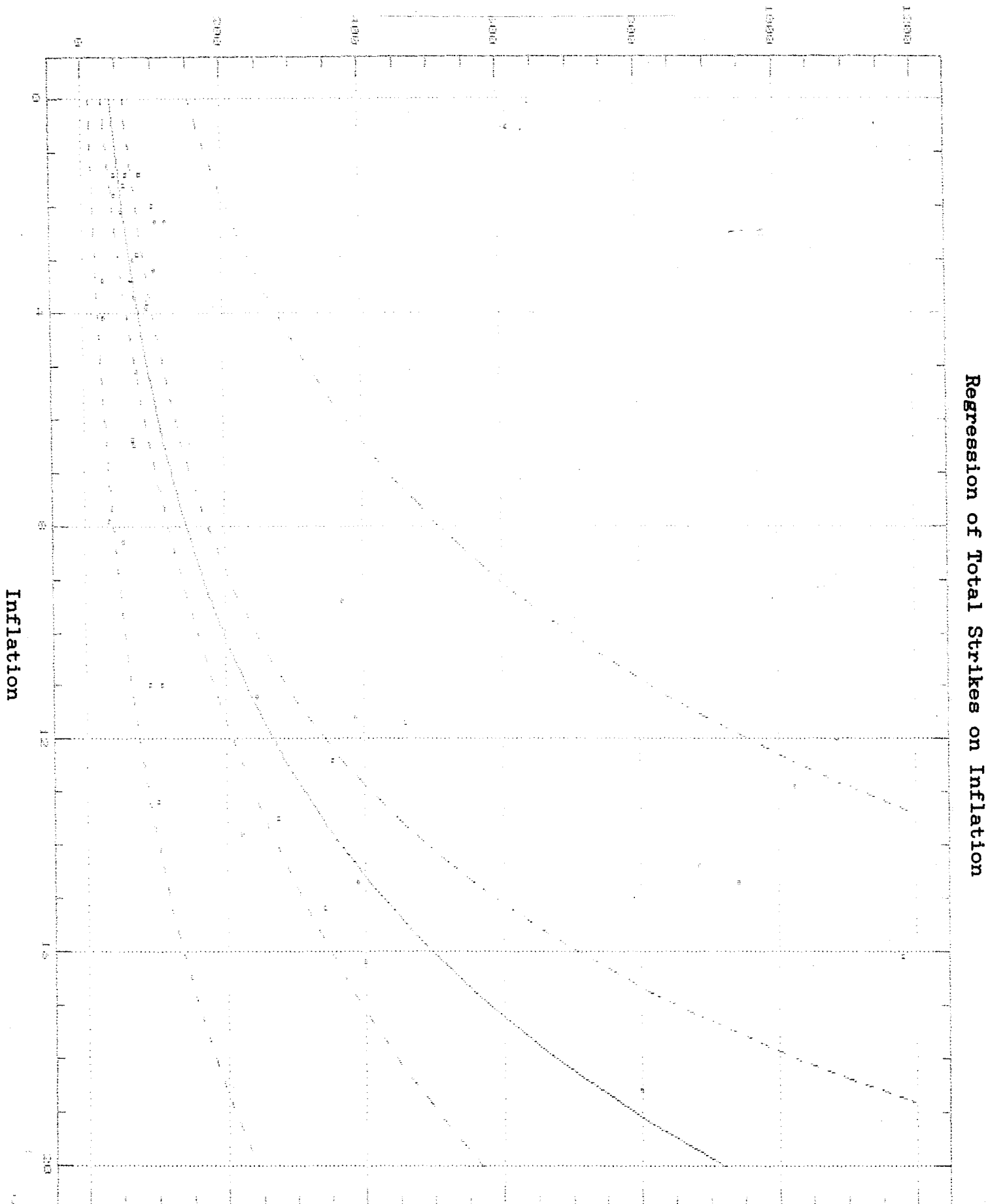


FIGURE 10

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
SARB 1960-1986)

(Lagged -2)

Total Strikes

Regression of Total Strikes on Real Wages (1985 Prices)

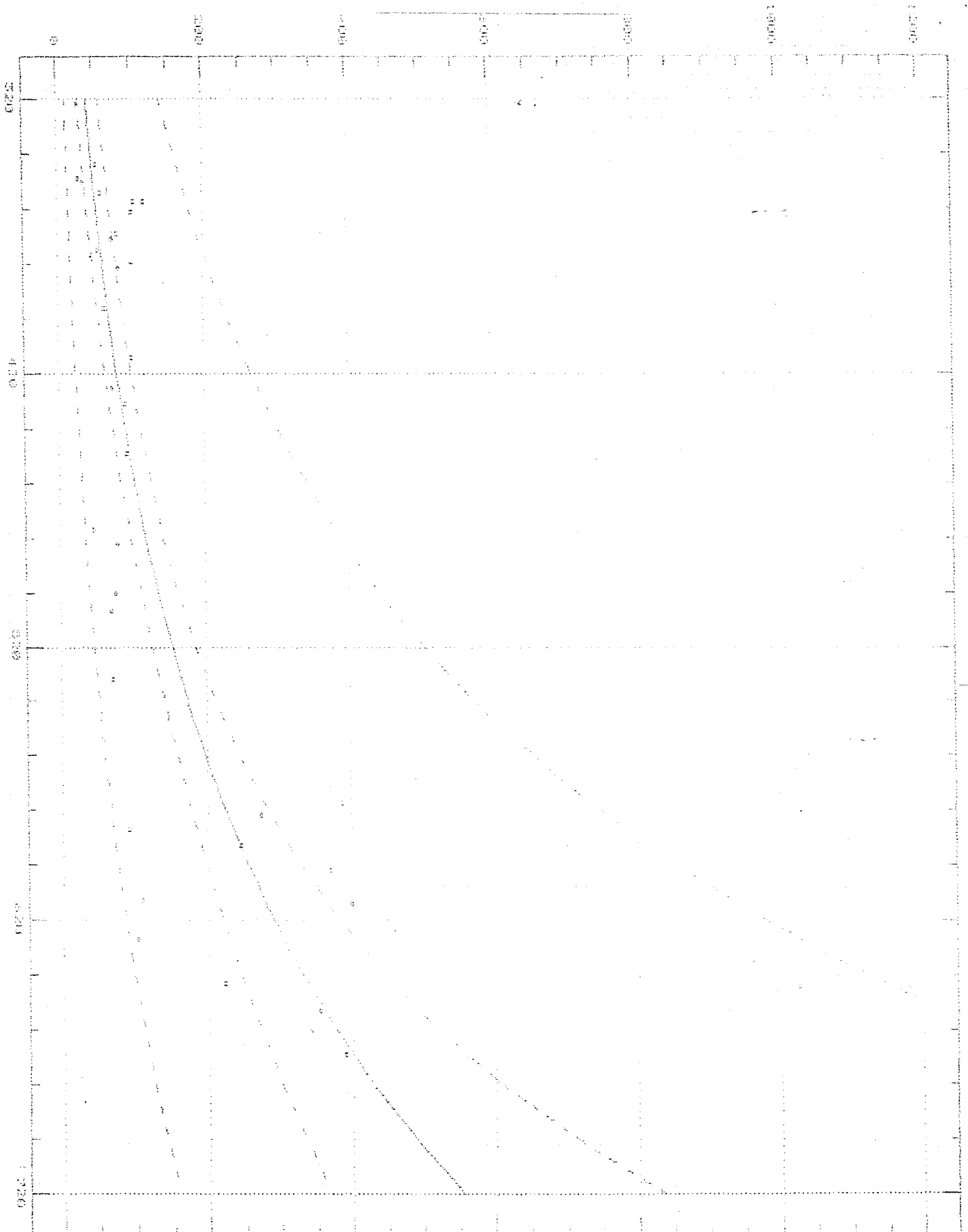
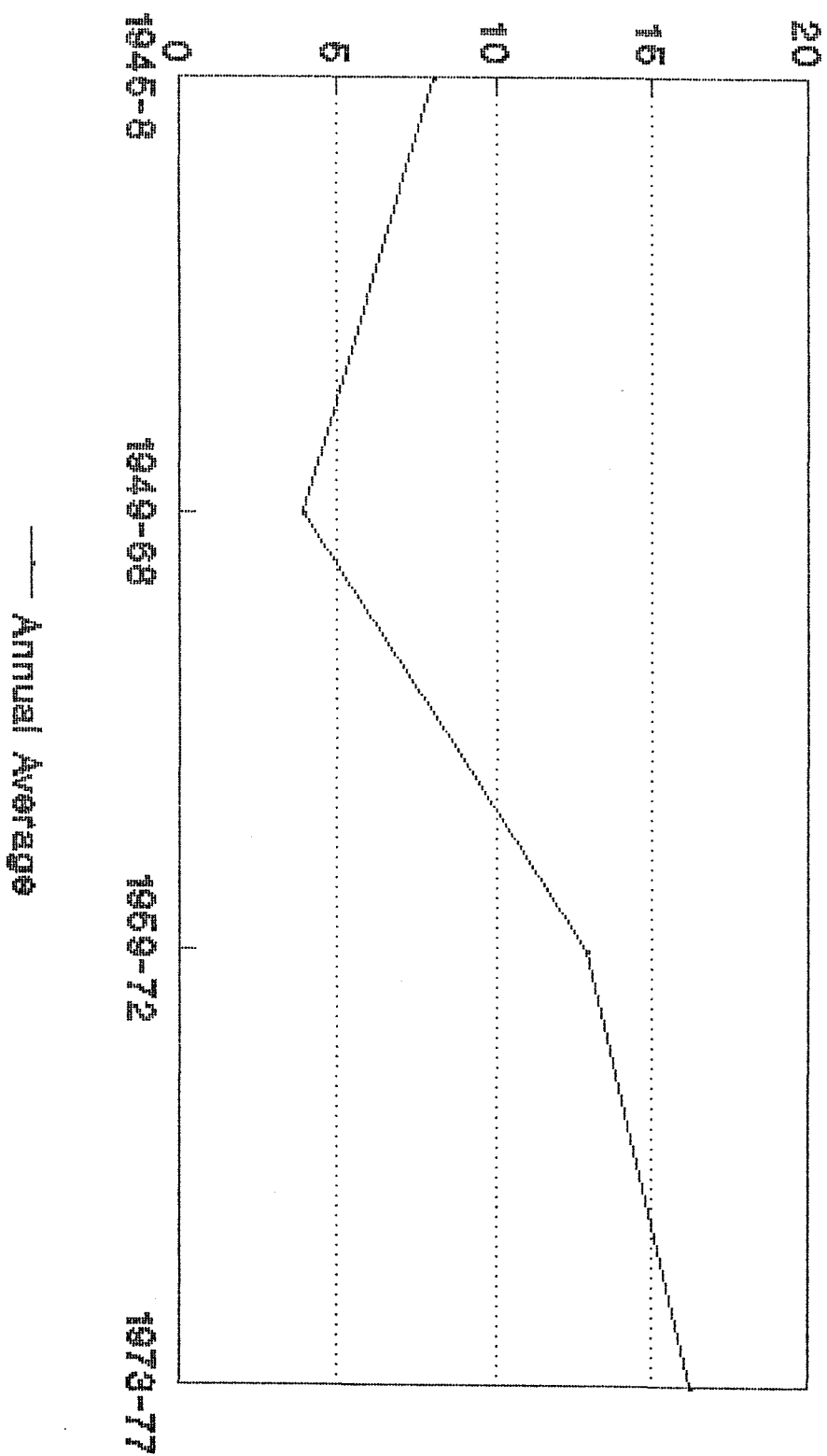


FIGURE 11

Wage Board Activity 1945-77



Hipkin 1986:74

(CSO 1954, 1956; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1986)

Strikes on Seasonal Basis 1960-1984

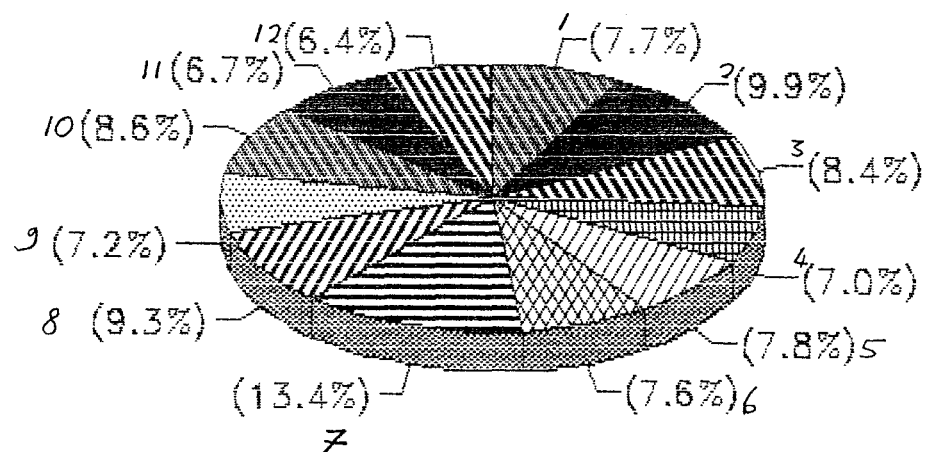
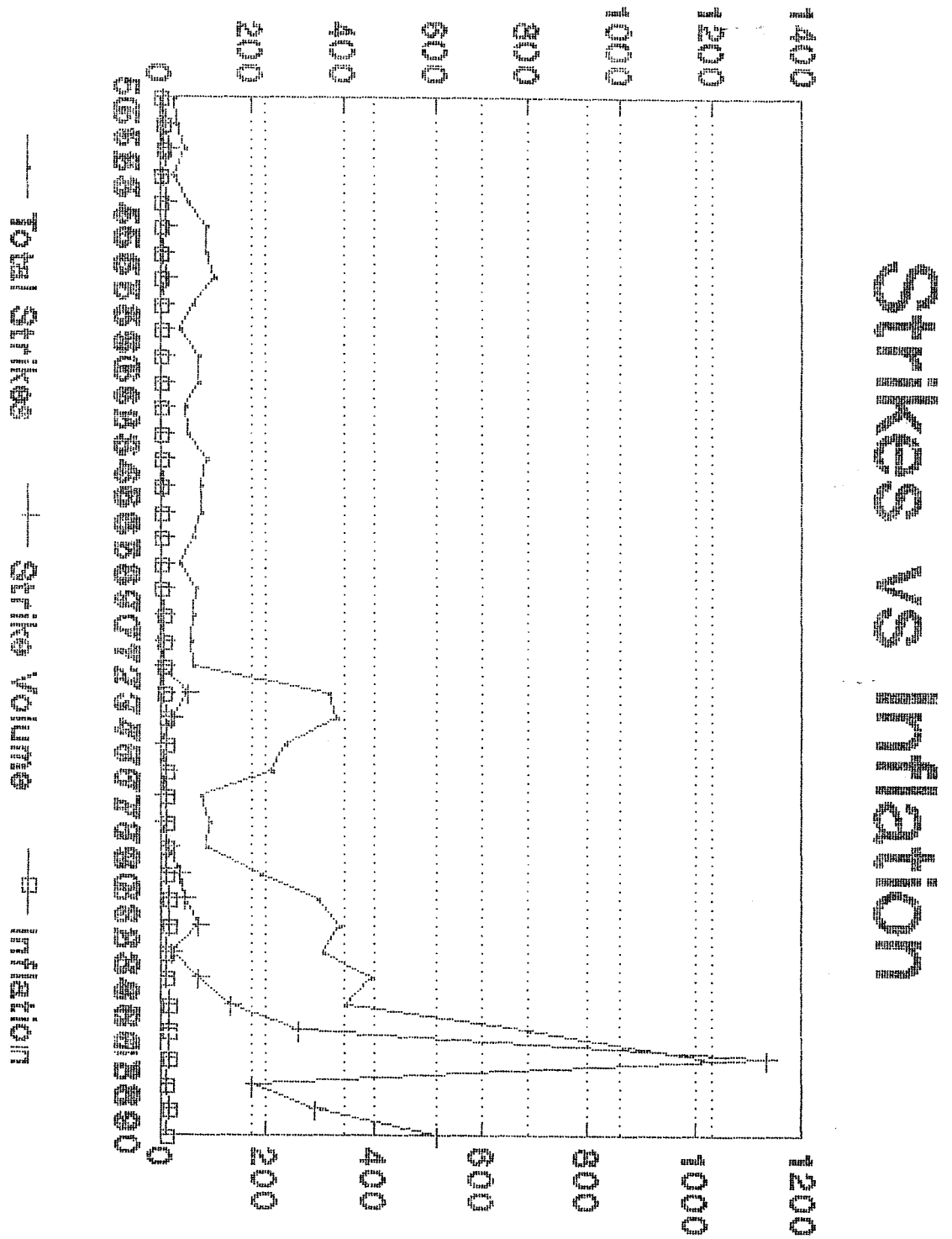


FIGURE 13

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
SARB 1960-1986)



Regression of Total Strikes on Membership Registered Trade Unions

FIGURE 14

(CSO 1986,1989,1992;NMC 1986)

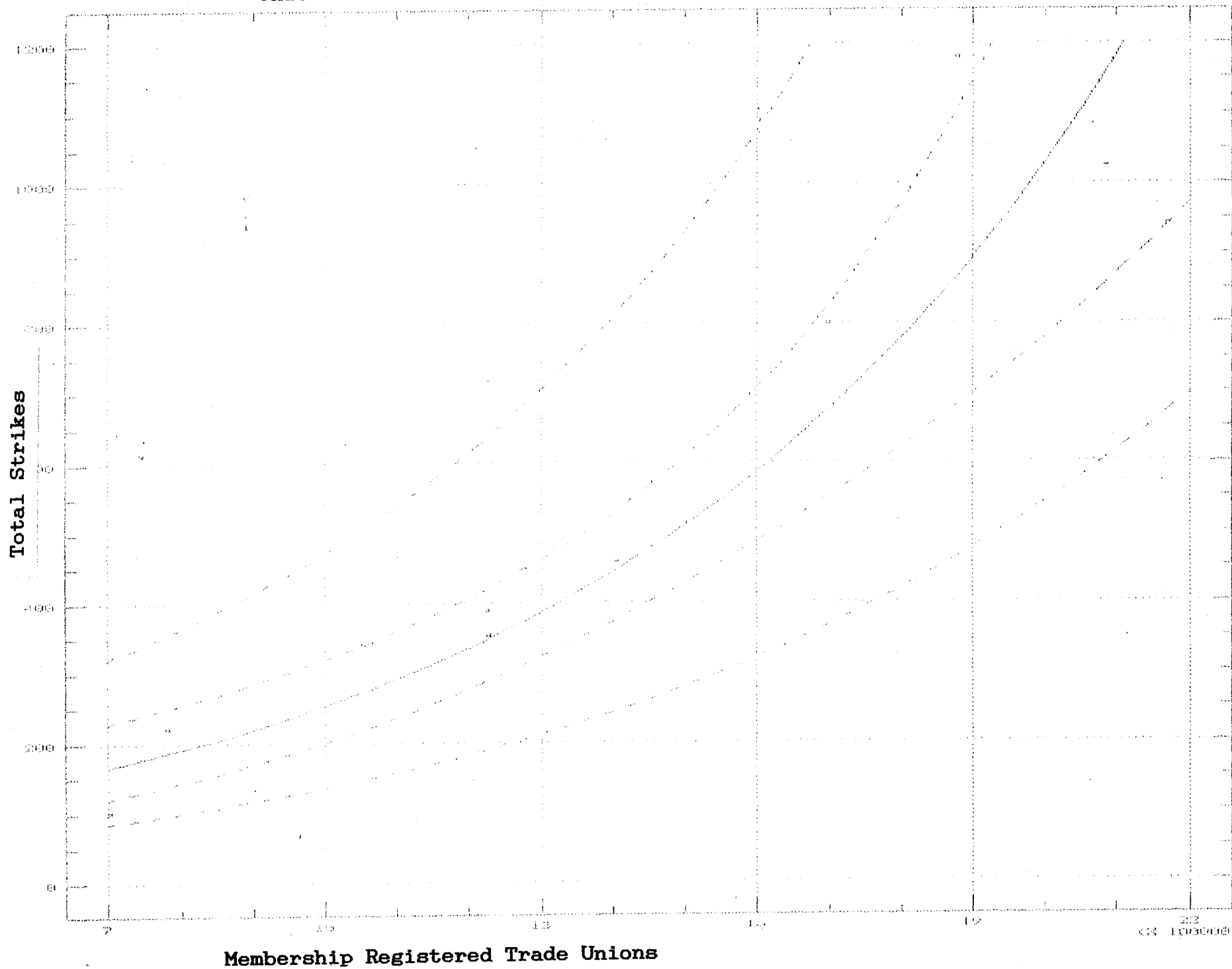
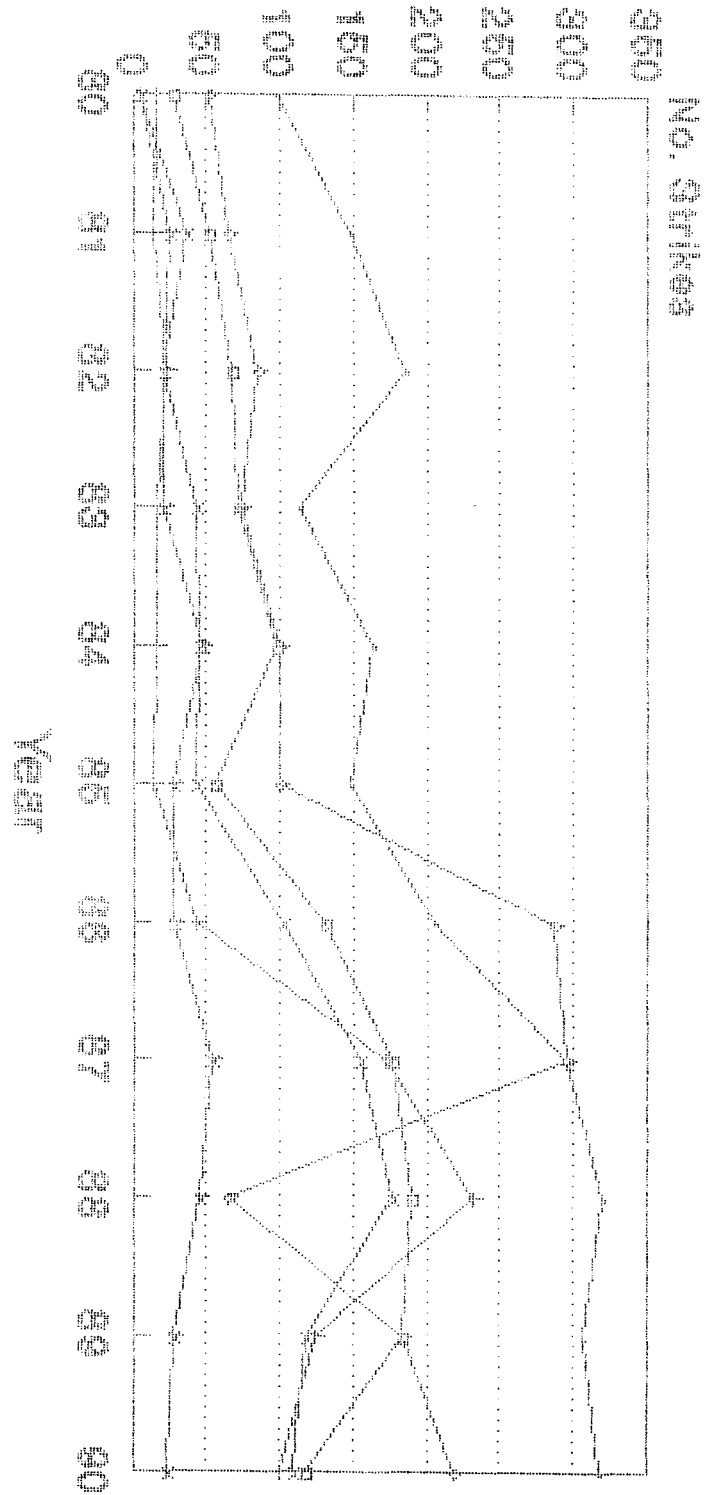


FIGURE 15

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

(in %)

Wages for Manufacturing — Total Union
Wages for Nonunion — Total Union



Wages in Mining Sector 1985 Prices

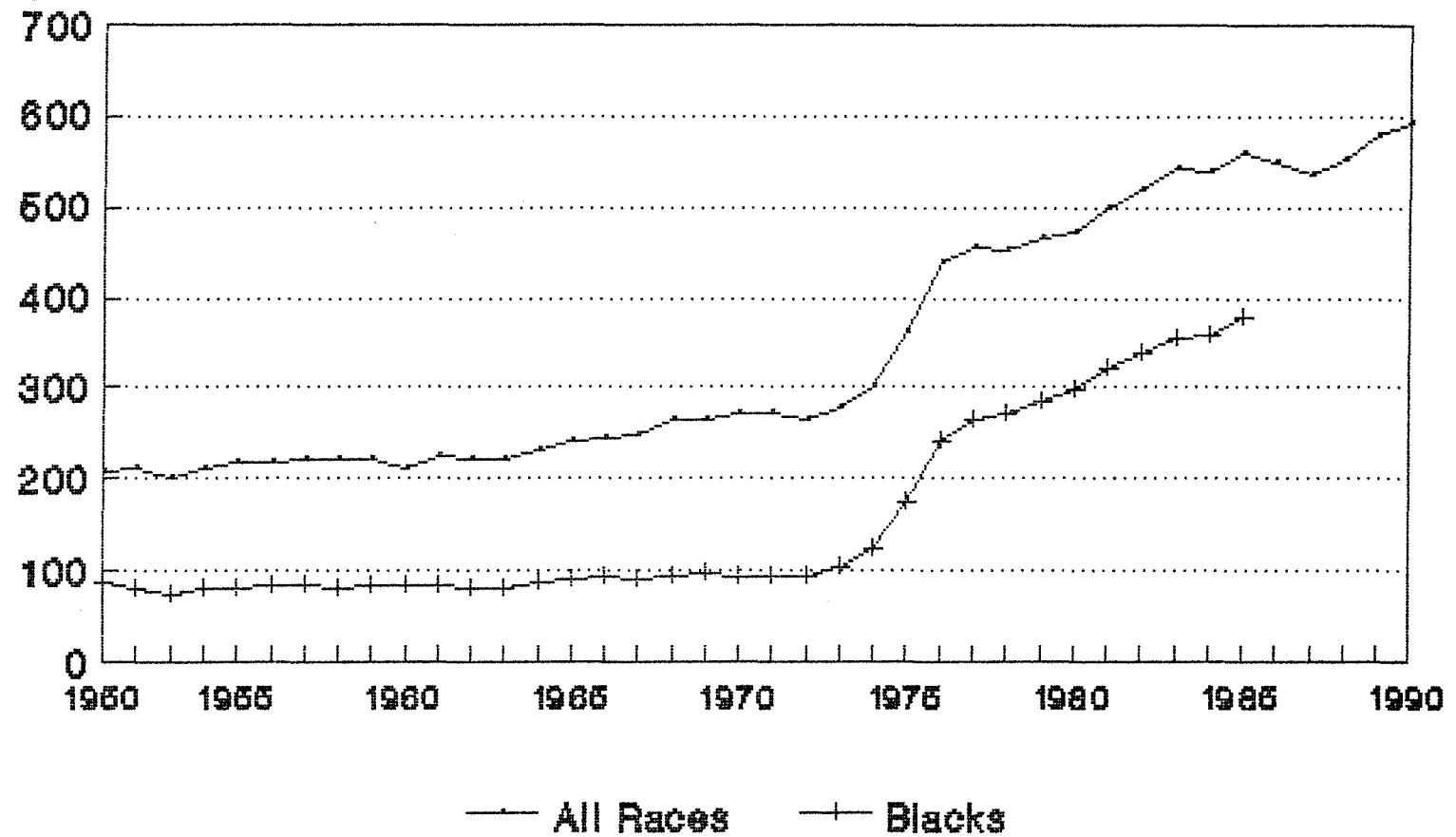


FIGURE 16

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1972-1992; SARB 1960-1986)

FIGURE 17

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1972-1992; SARB 1960-1986)



Construction Wages 1985 Prices

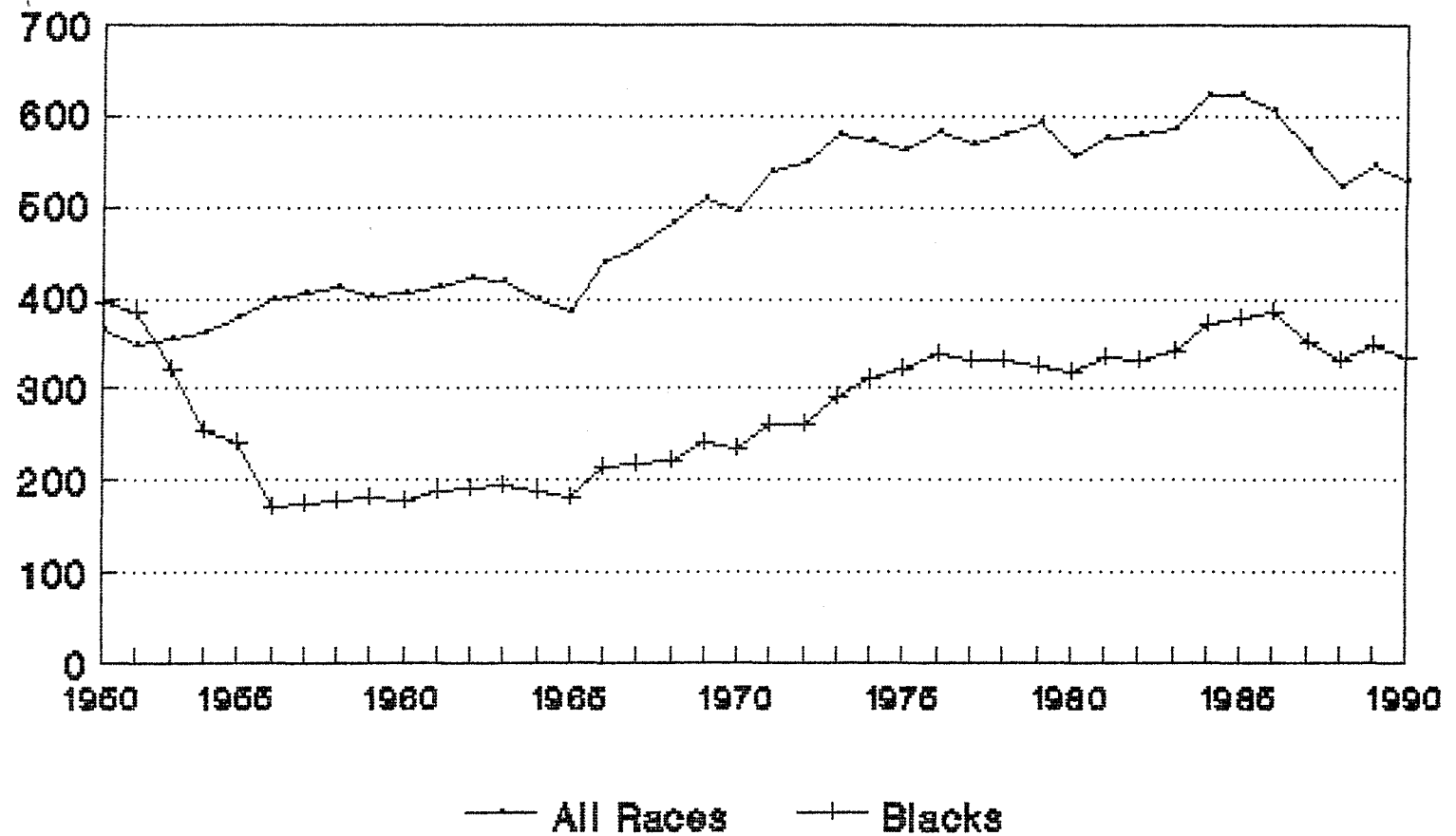


FIGURE 18

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1972-1992; SARB 1960-1986)

(CSO 1986,1992;DOM 1981a-1991a)

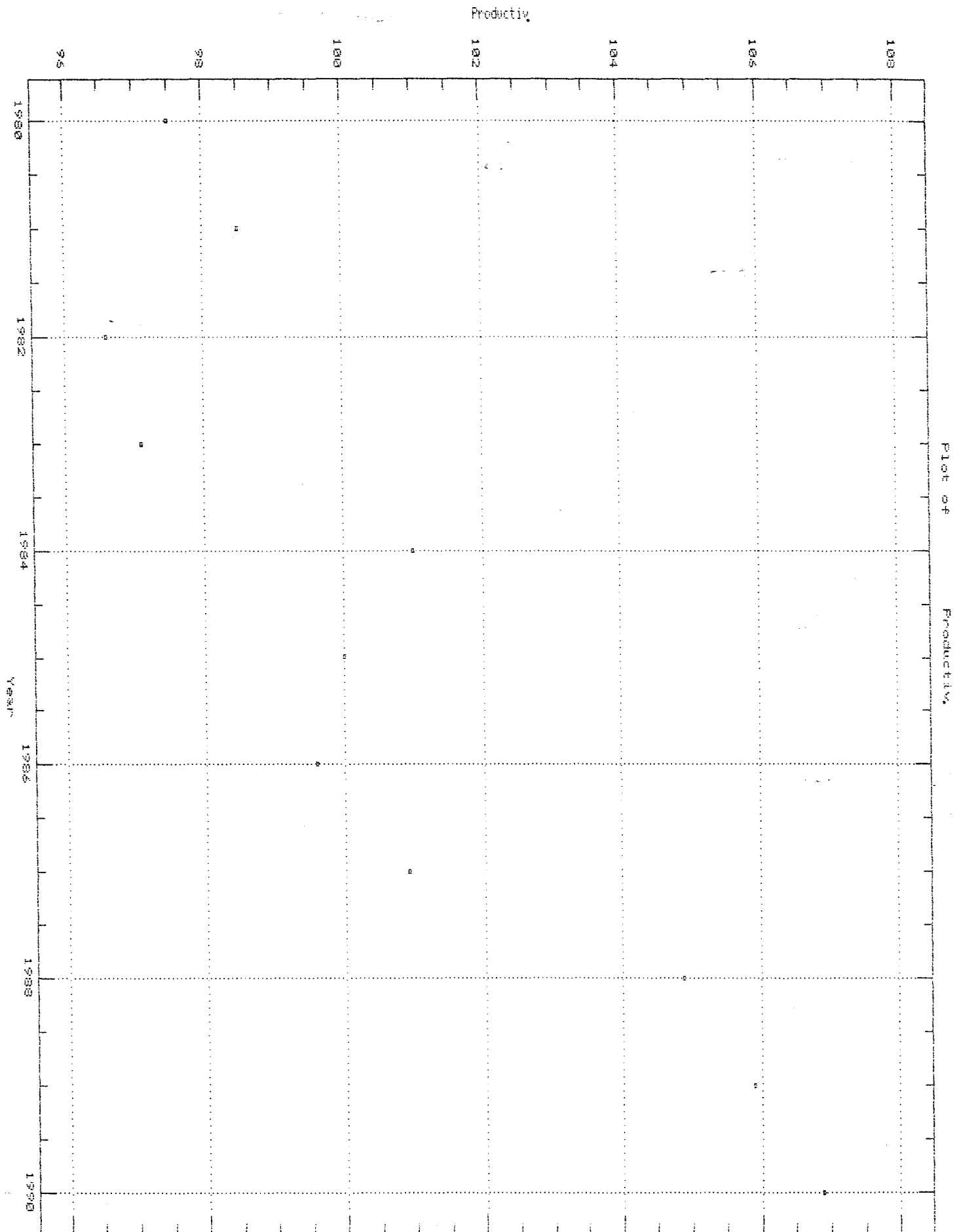
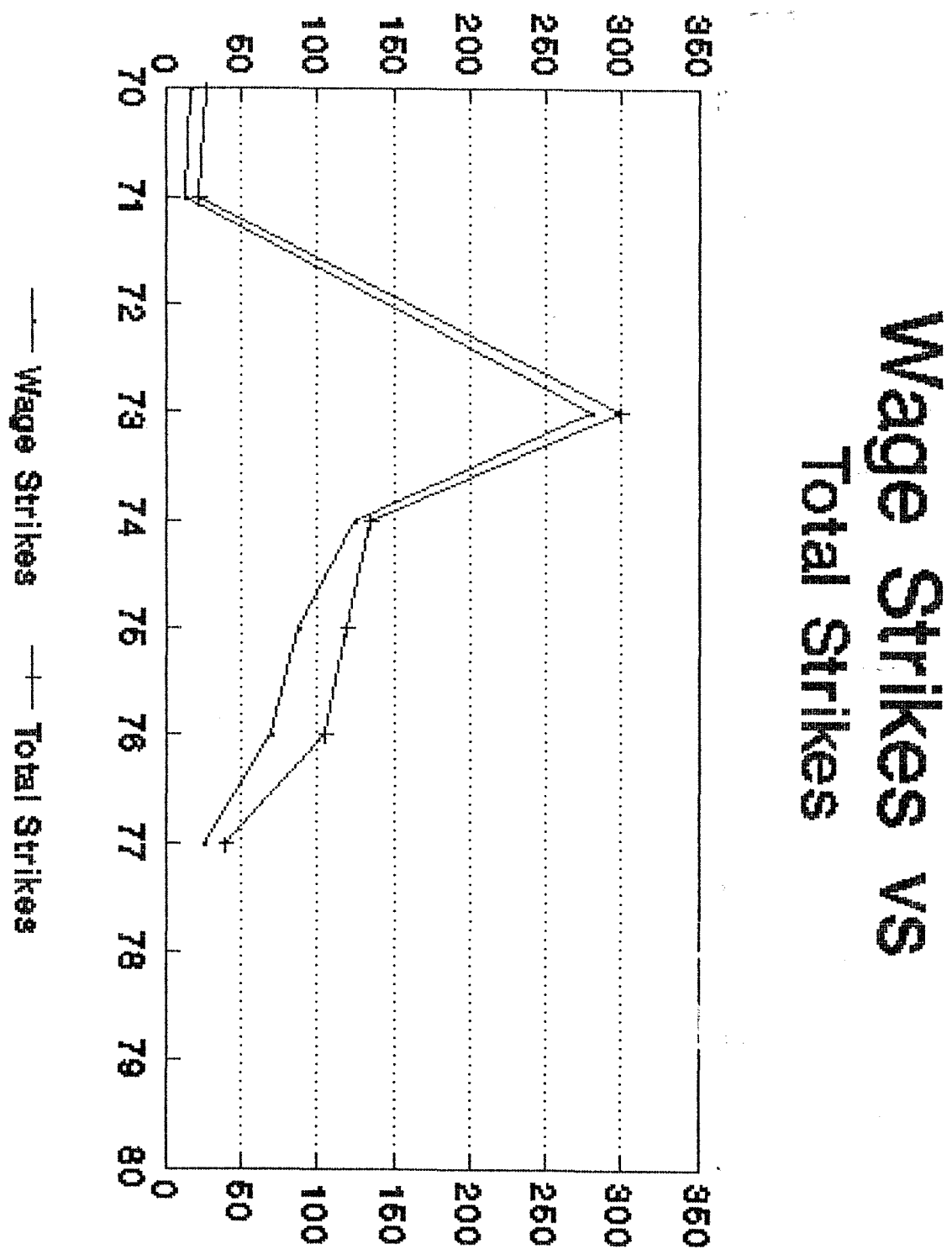
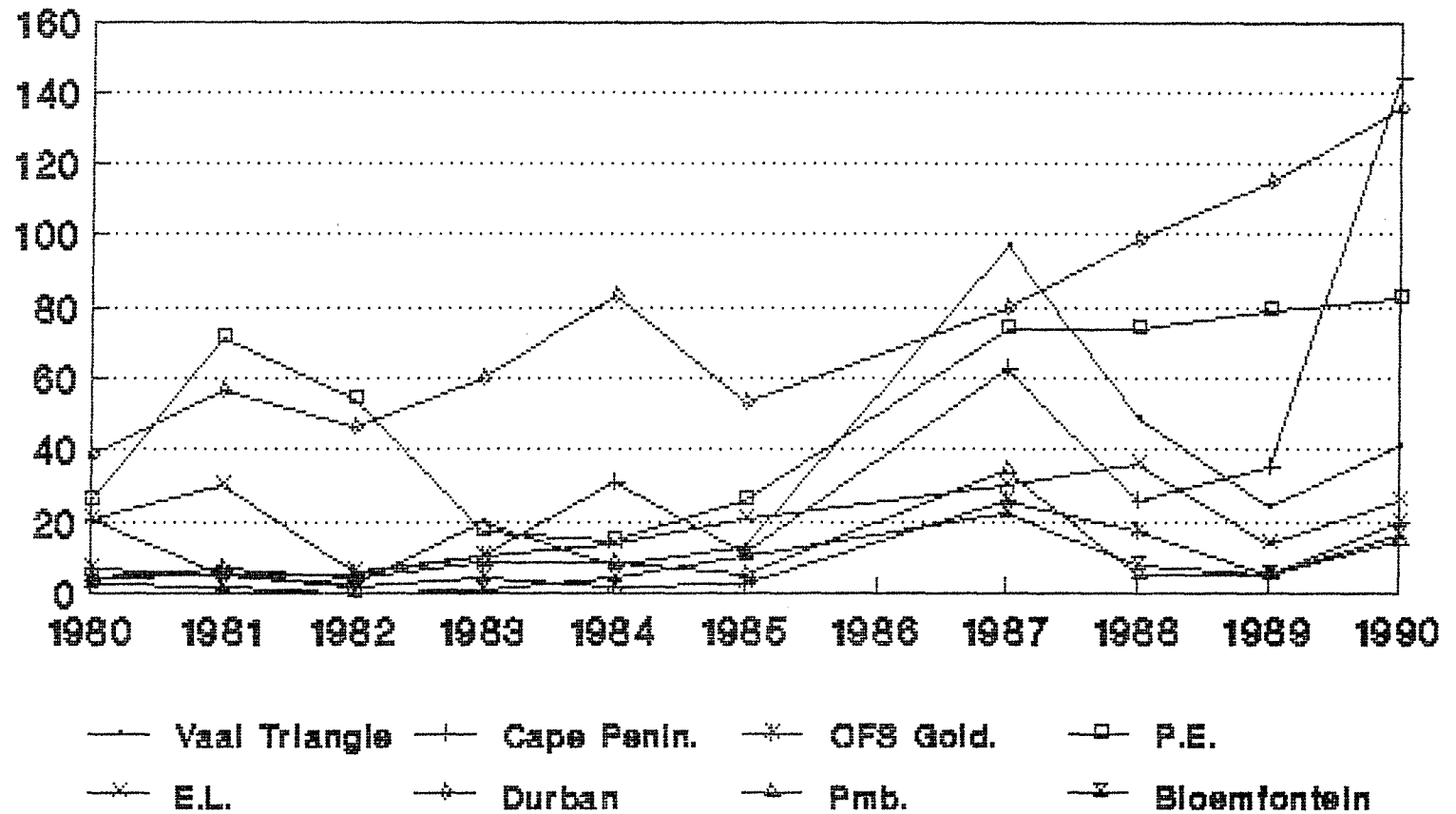


FIGURE 20

(DOM 1970-1980; SAIRR 1970-1979)

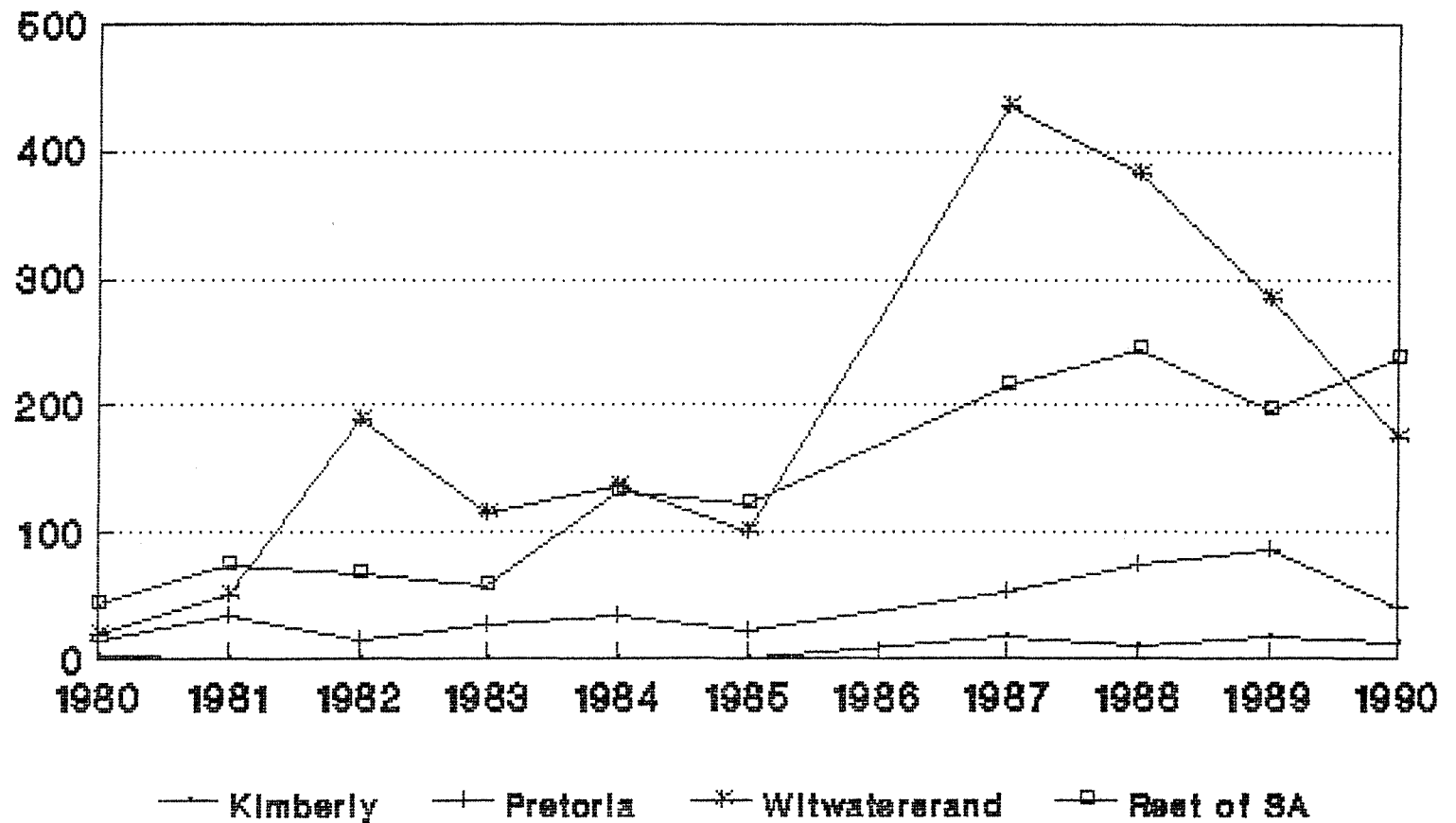


Strikes by Regions (Part 1)



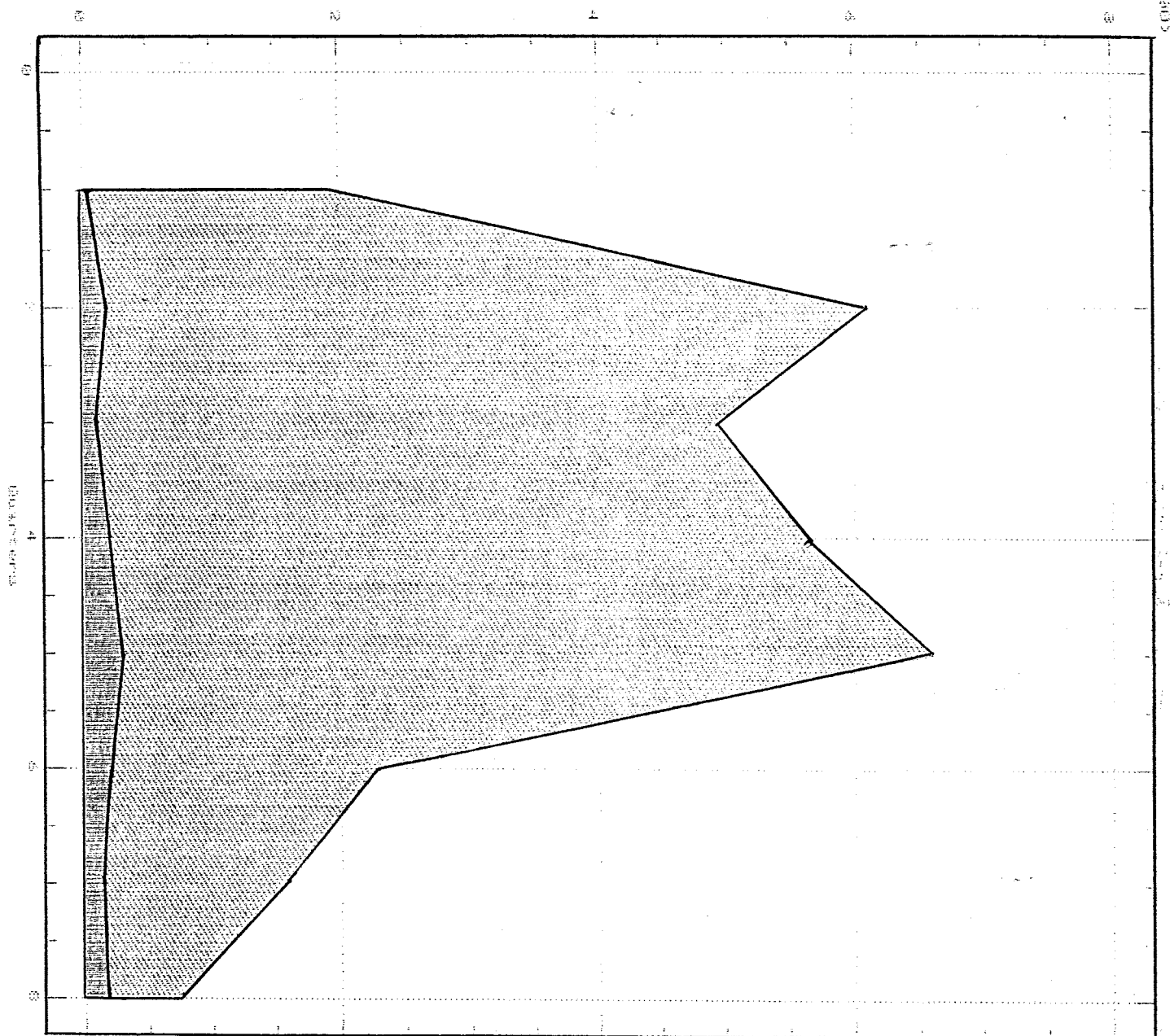
(NMC 1986, 1987-1990; CSO 1988)

Strikes by Regions (Part 2)



(NMC 1986, 1987-1990; CSO 1988)

FIGURE 22



Strikes
Unrest

STRIKES AND
"UNREST" INCIDENTS

April 1985 - March 1987

(Star 11/6/1987; NMC 1986;
CSO 1992)

Industrial Court Activity

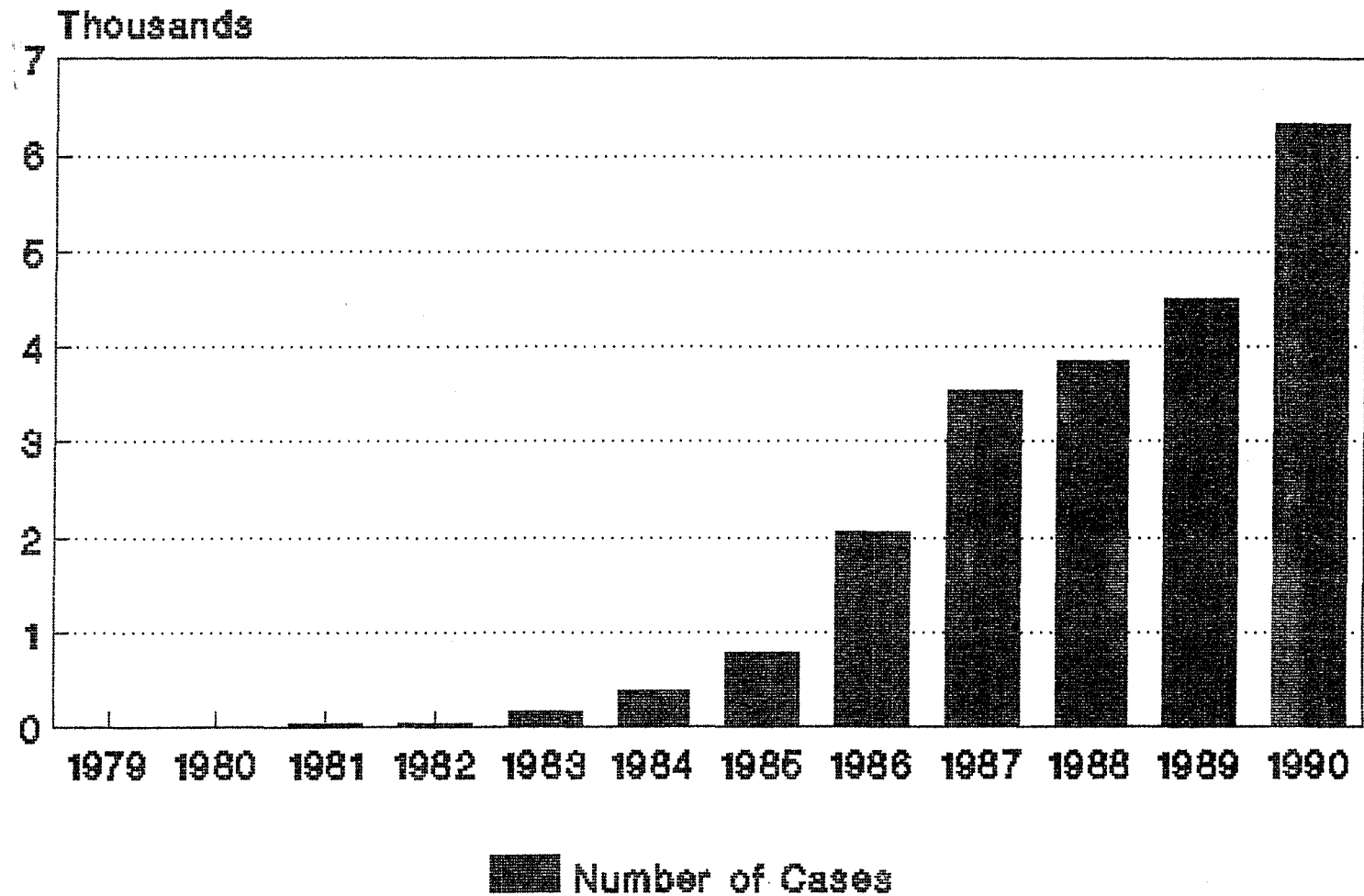


FIGURE 23

NMC 1990

FIGURE 24

(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

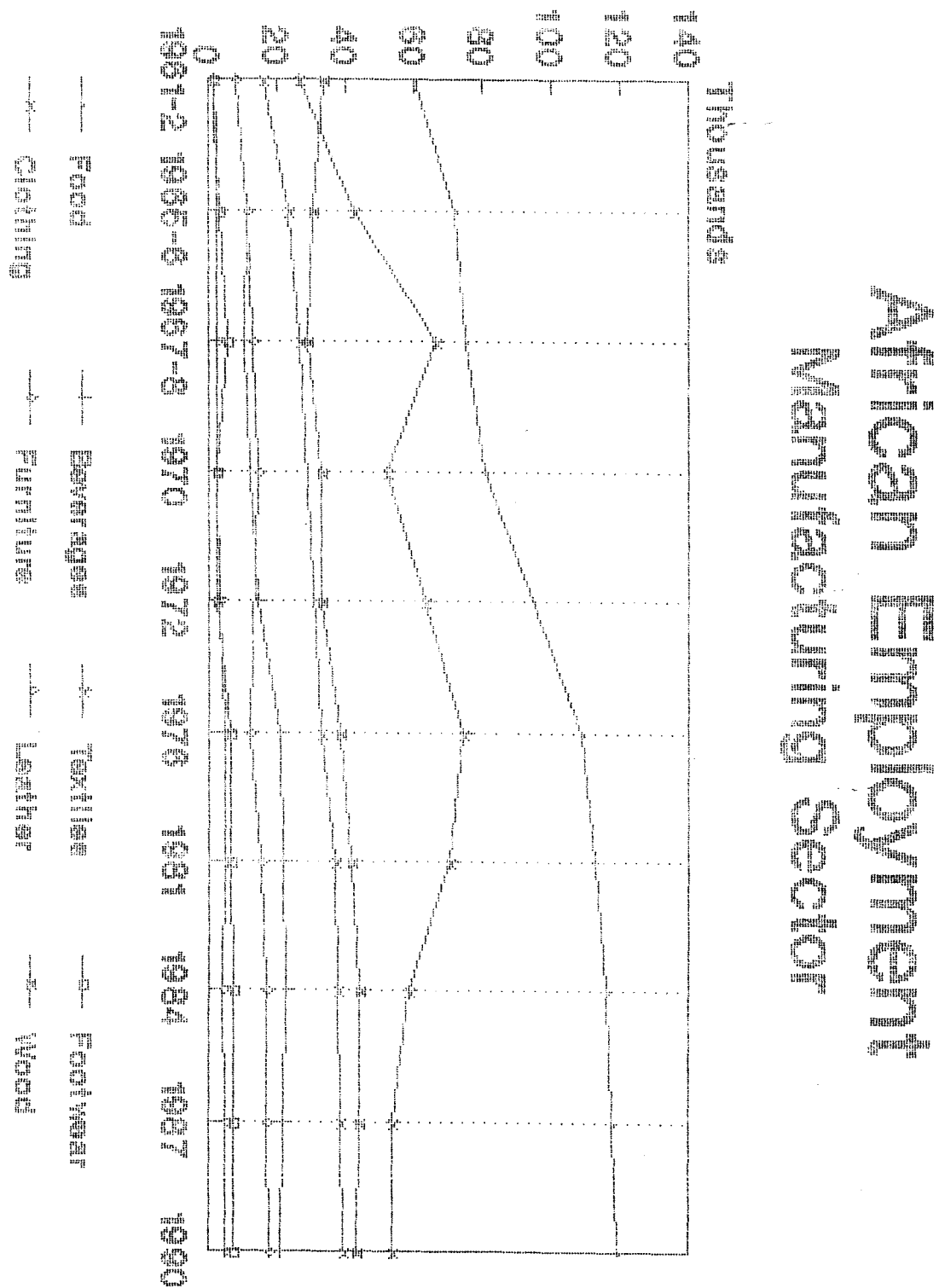


FIGURE 24 (Continued)

(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

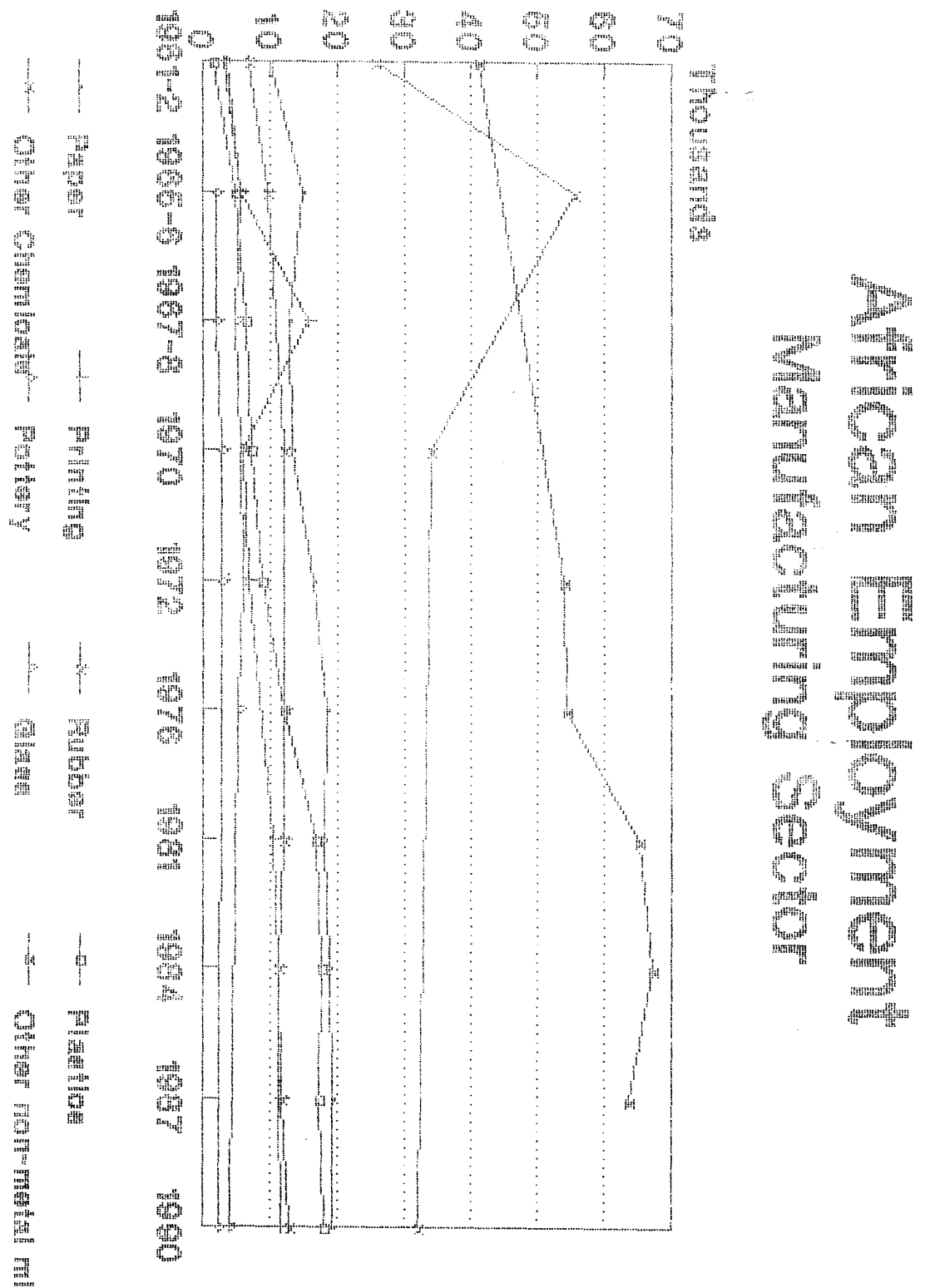


FIGURE 24 (Continued)

(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

African Employment Manufacturing Sector

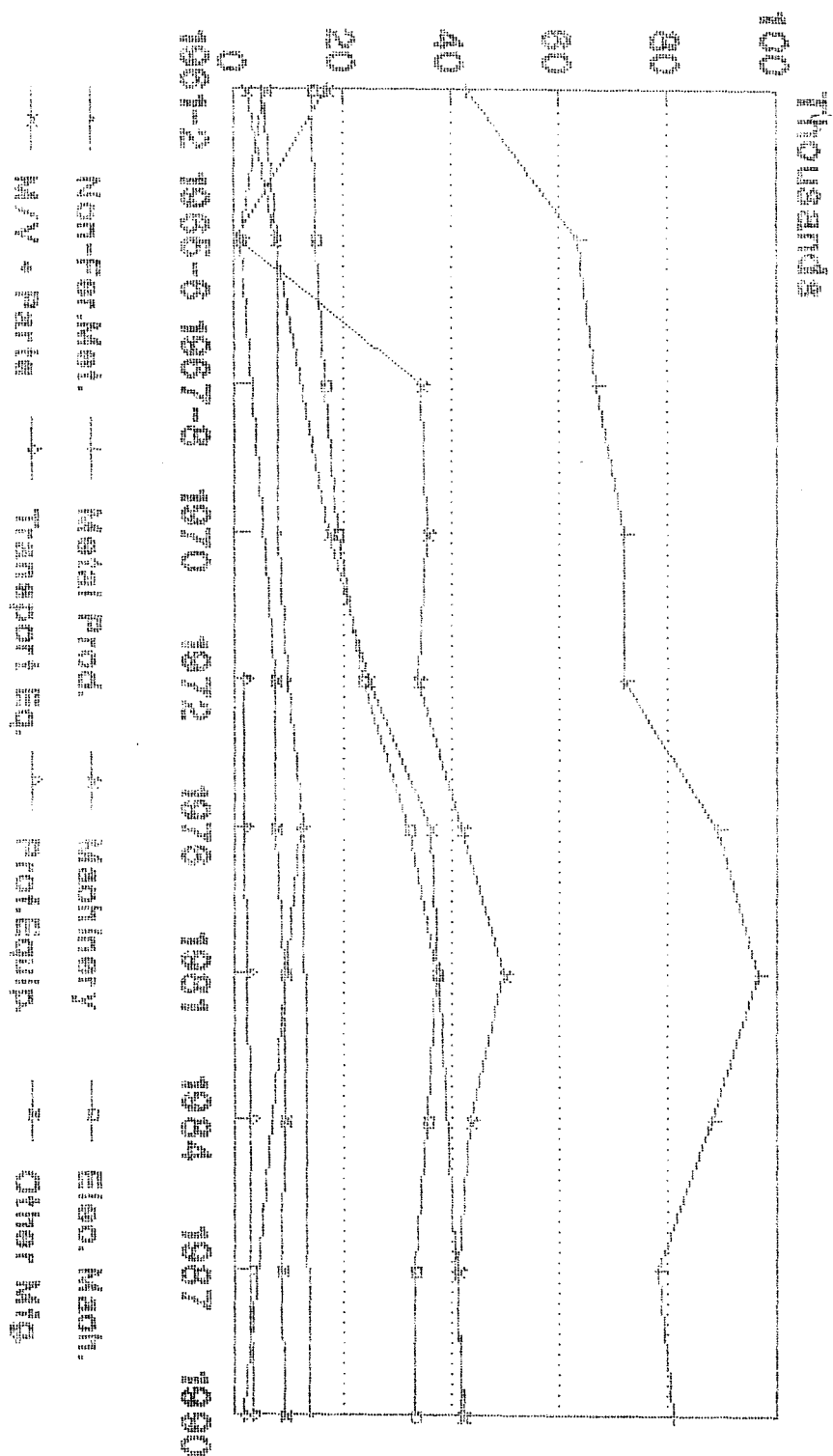
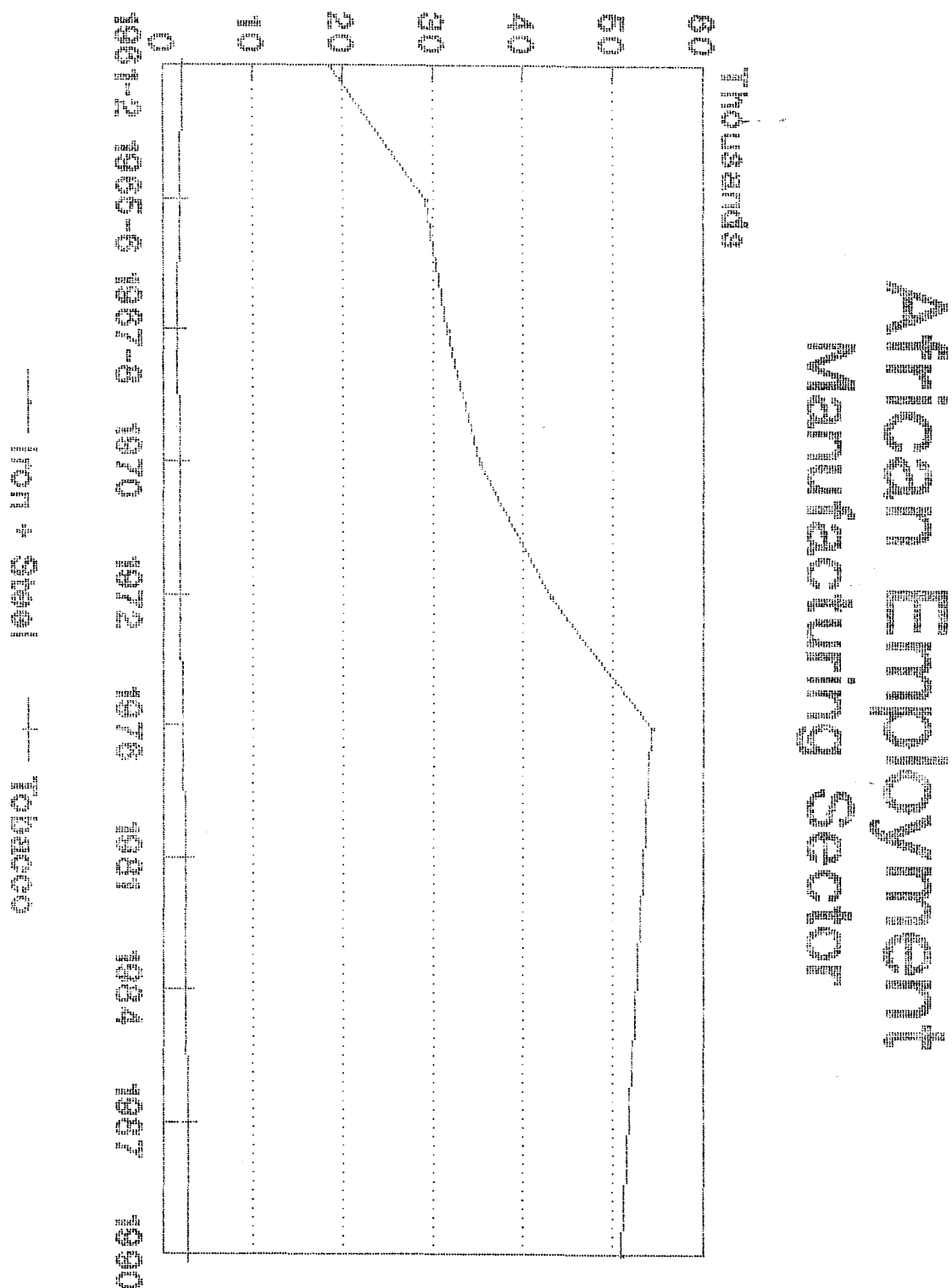


FIGURE 24 (Continued)

(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)



African Average Wages Manufacturing Sector

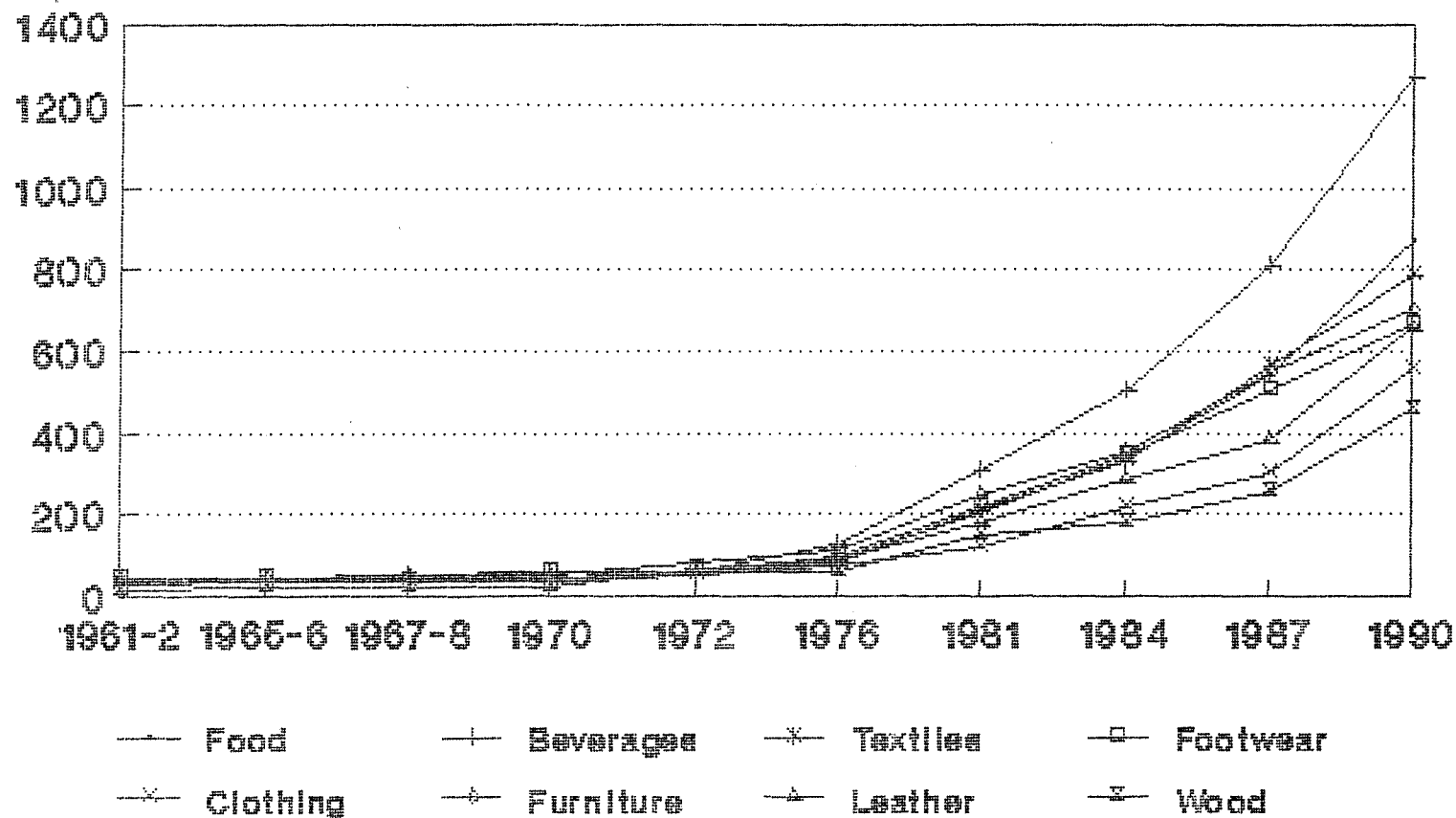


FIGURE 25

(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

African Average Wages Manufacturing Sector

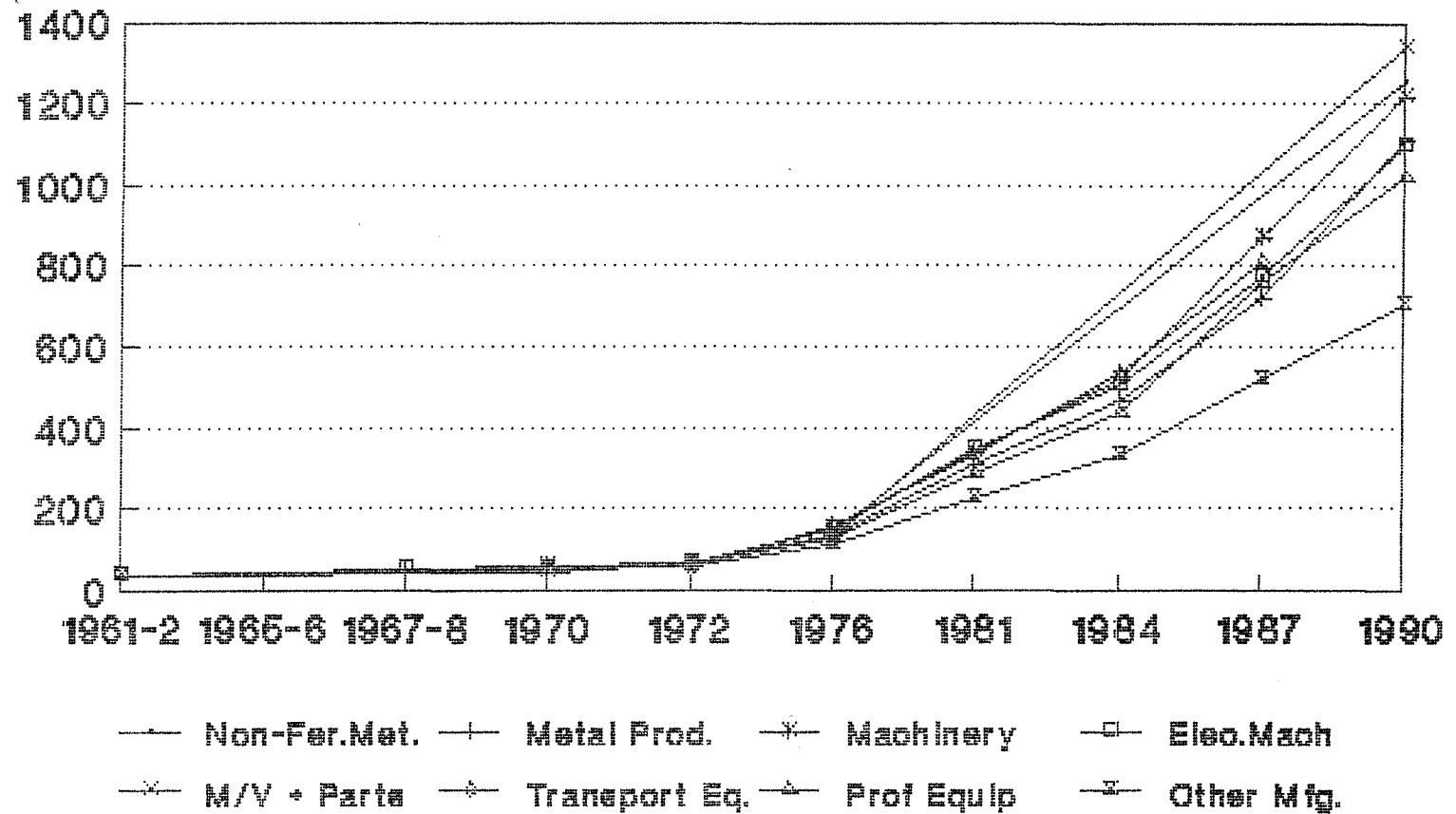


FIGURE 25 (Continued)
(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

African Average Wages Manufacturing Sector

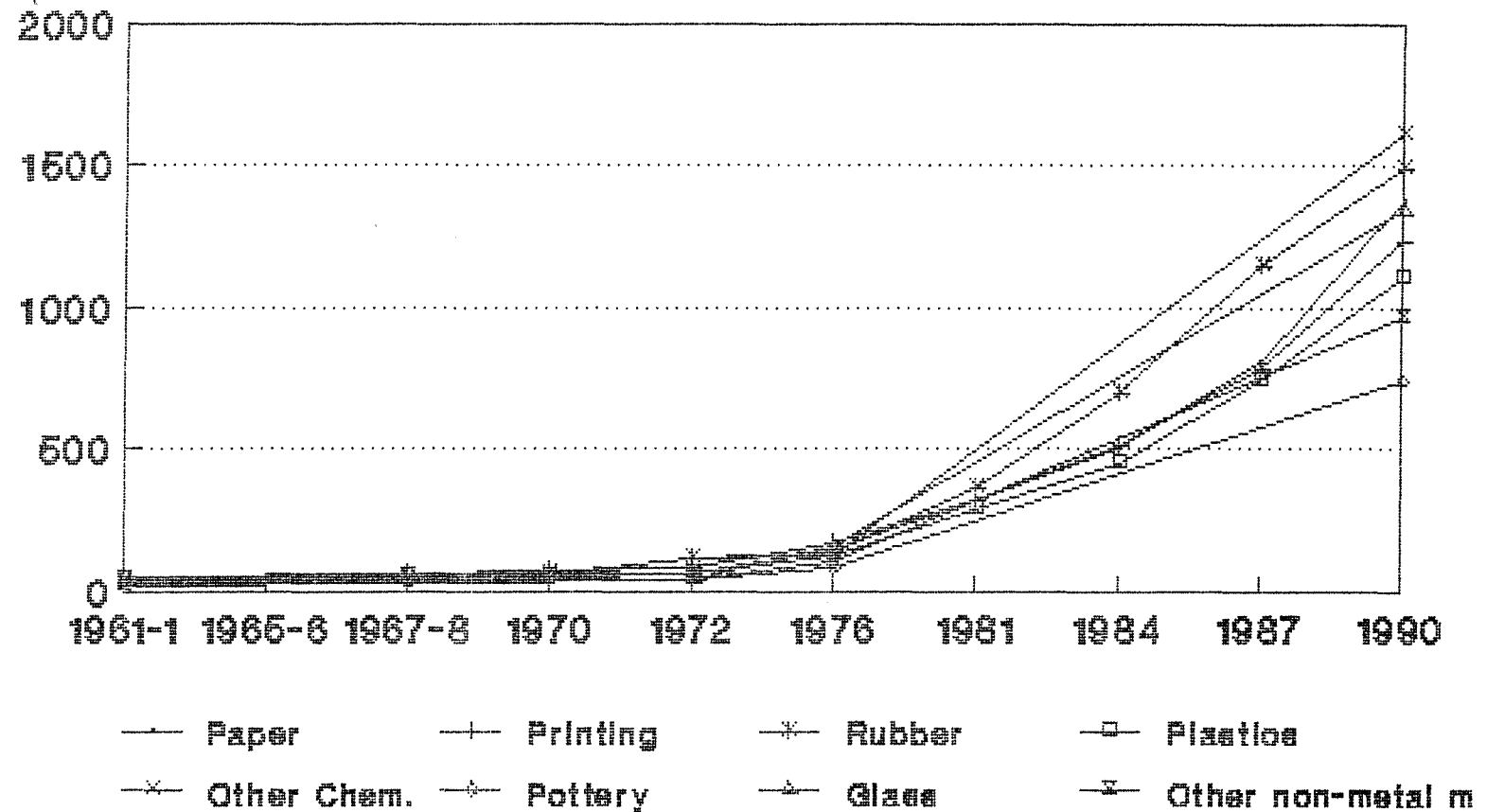


FIGURE 25 (Continued)
(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

African Average Wages Manufacturing Sector

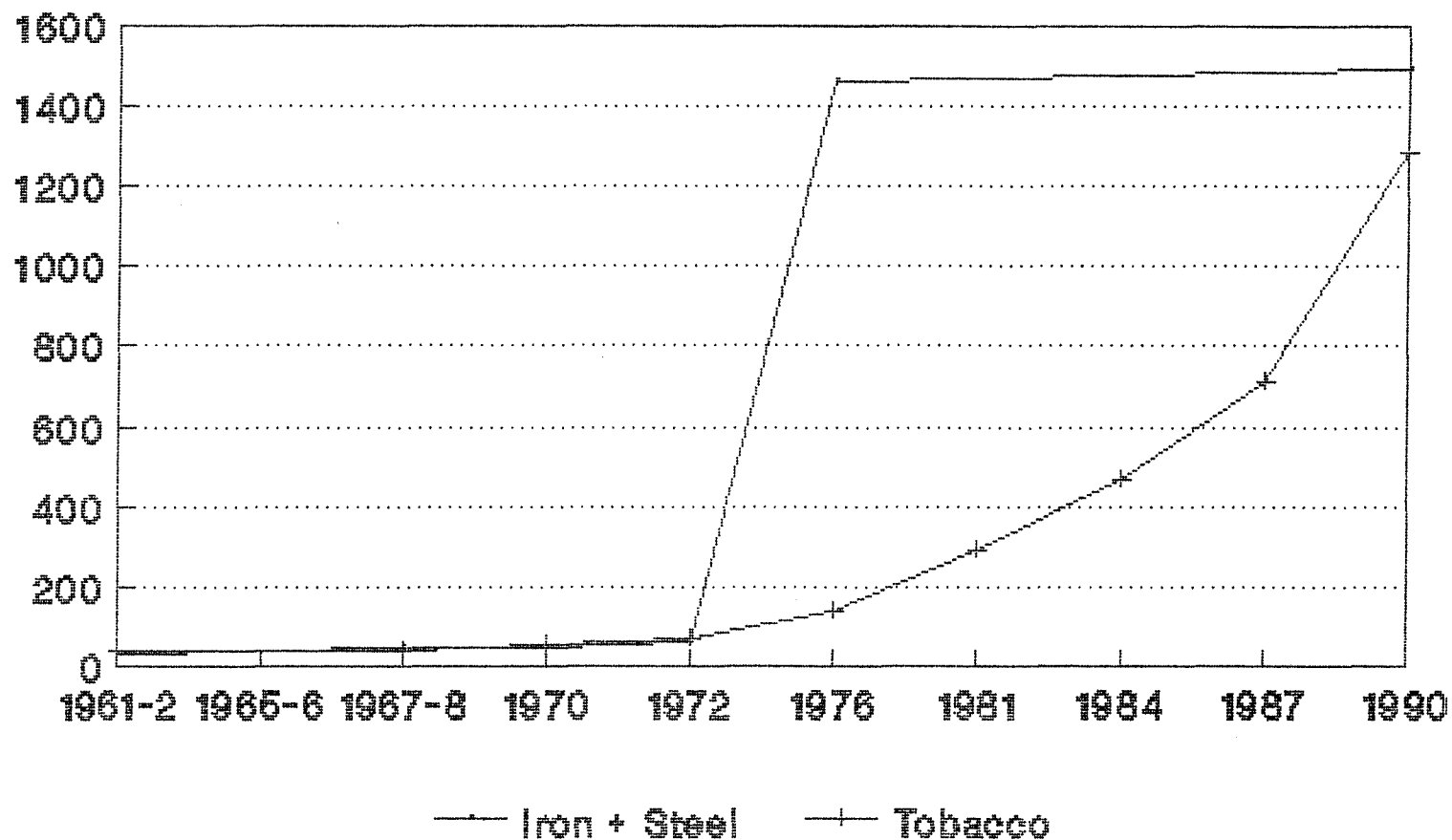
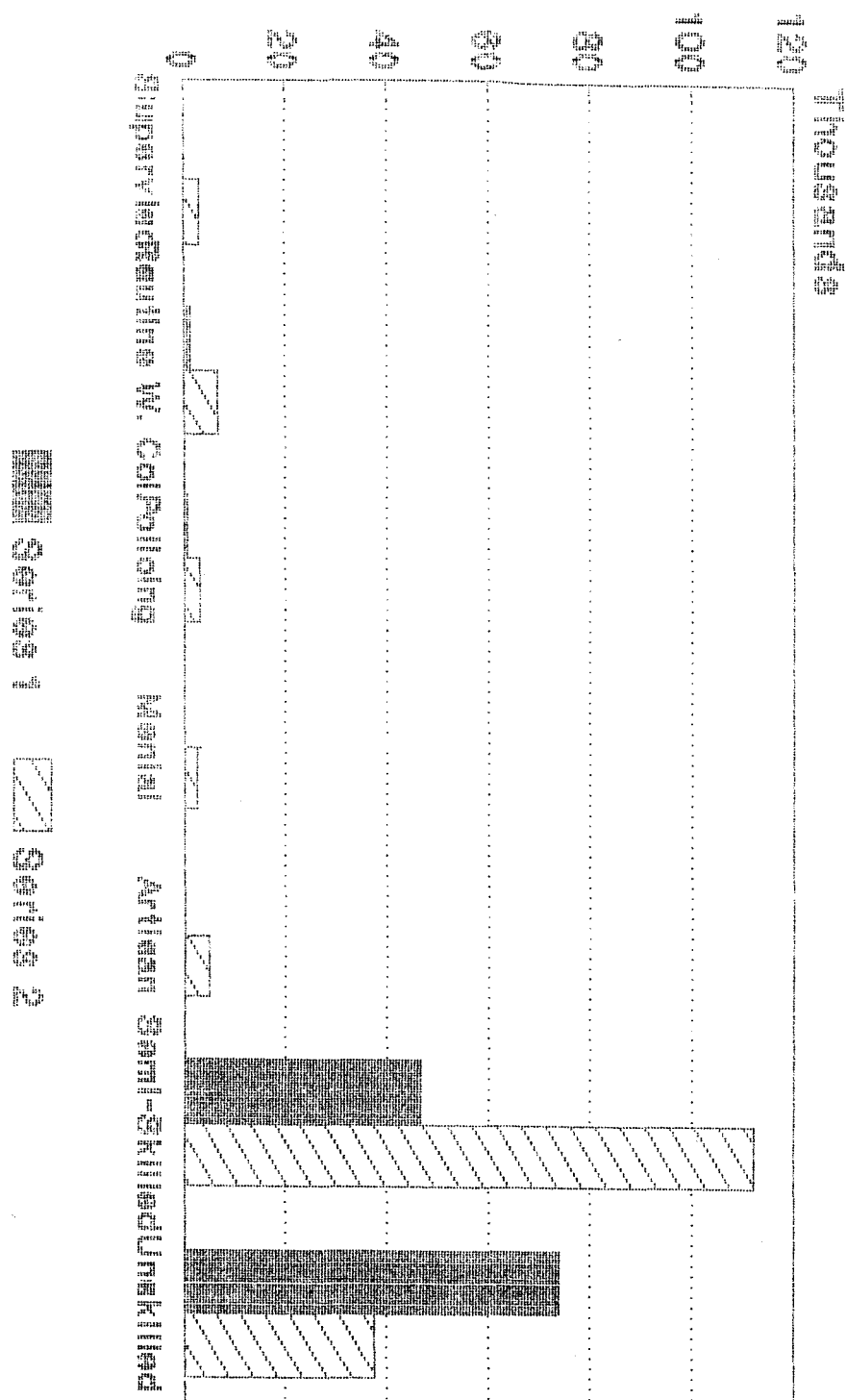
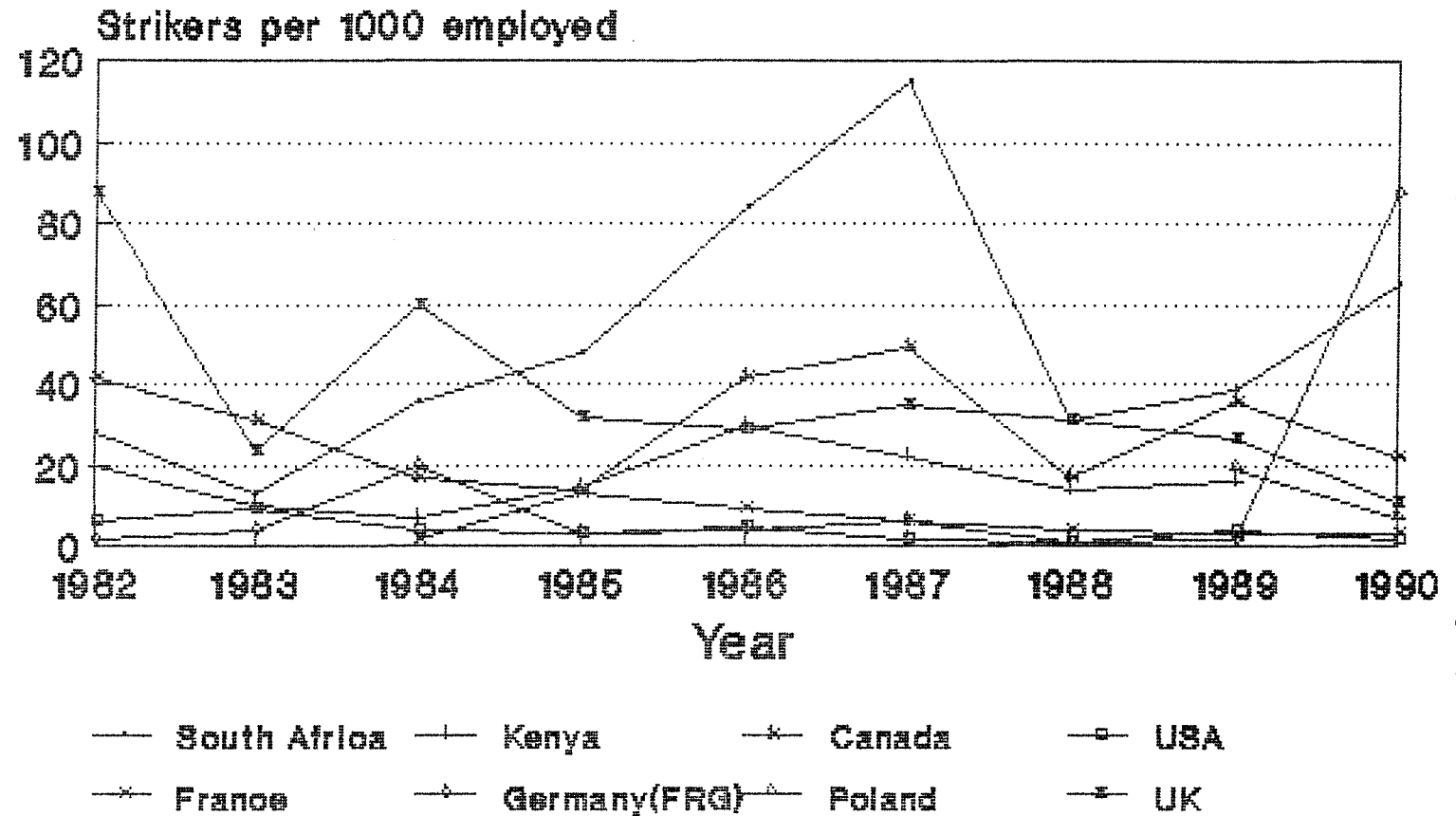


FIGURE 25 (Continued)
(CSO 1972-1992, 1986-1992)

[illegible]

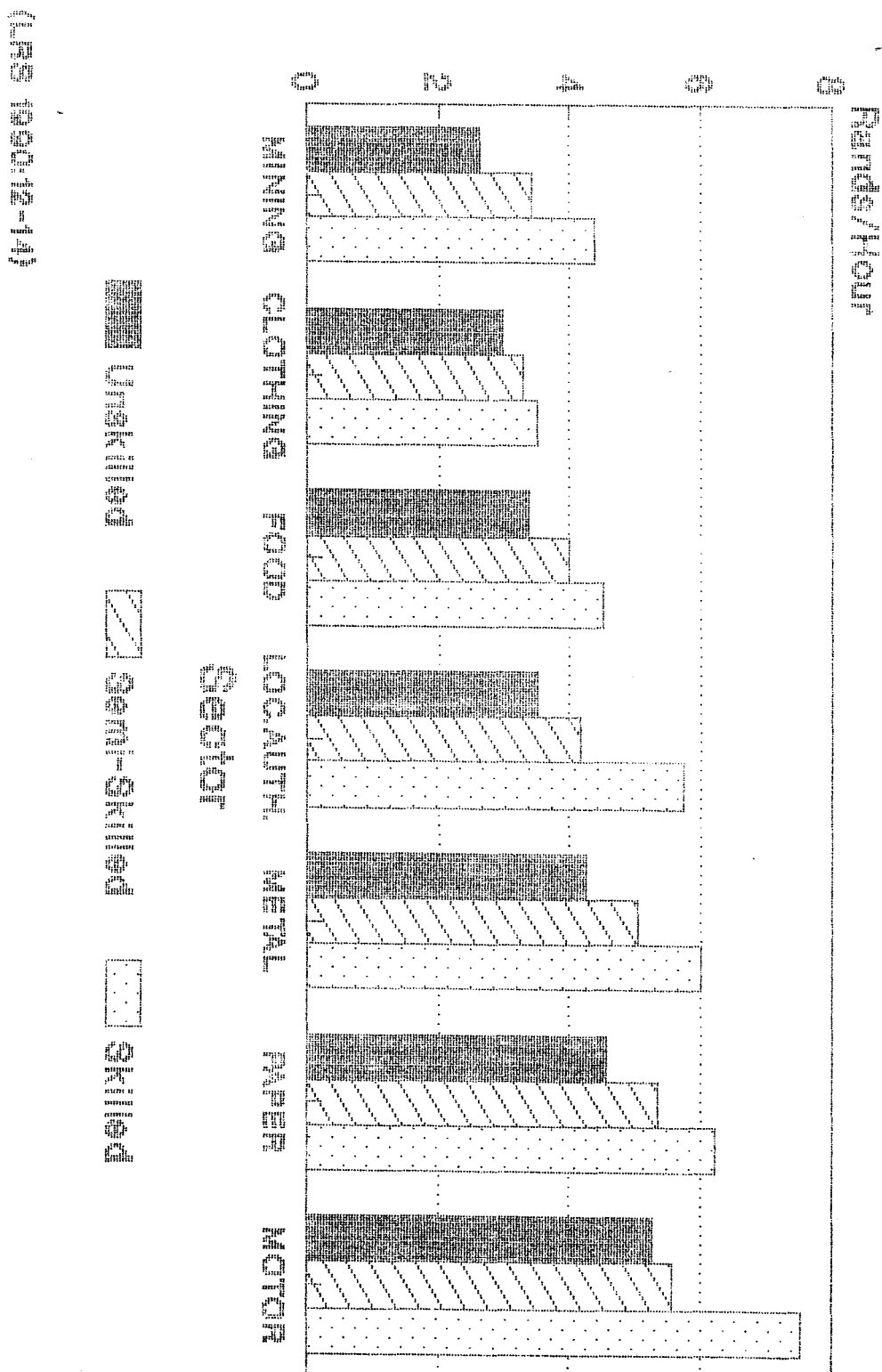
Workers Involved in Strikes Per Thousand Employed



Sources: ILO 1992; CSO 1992; NMC 1986

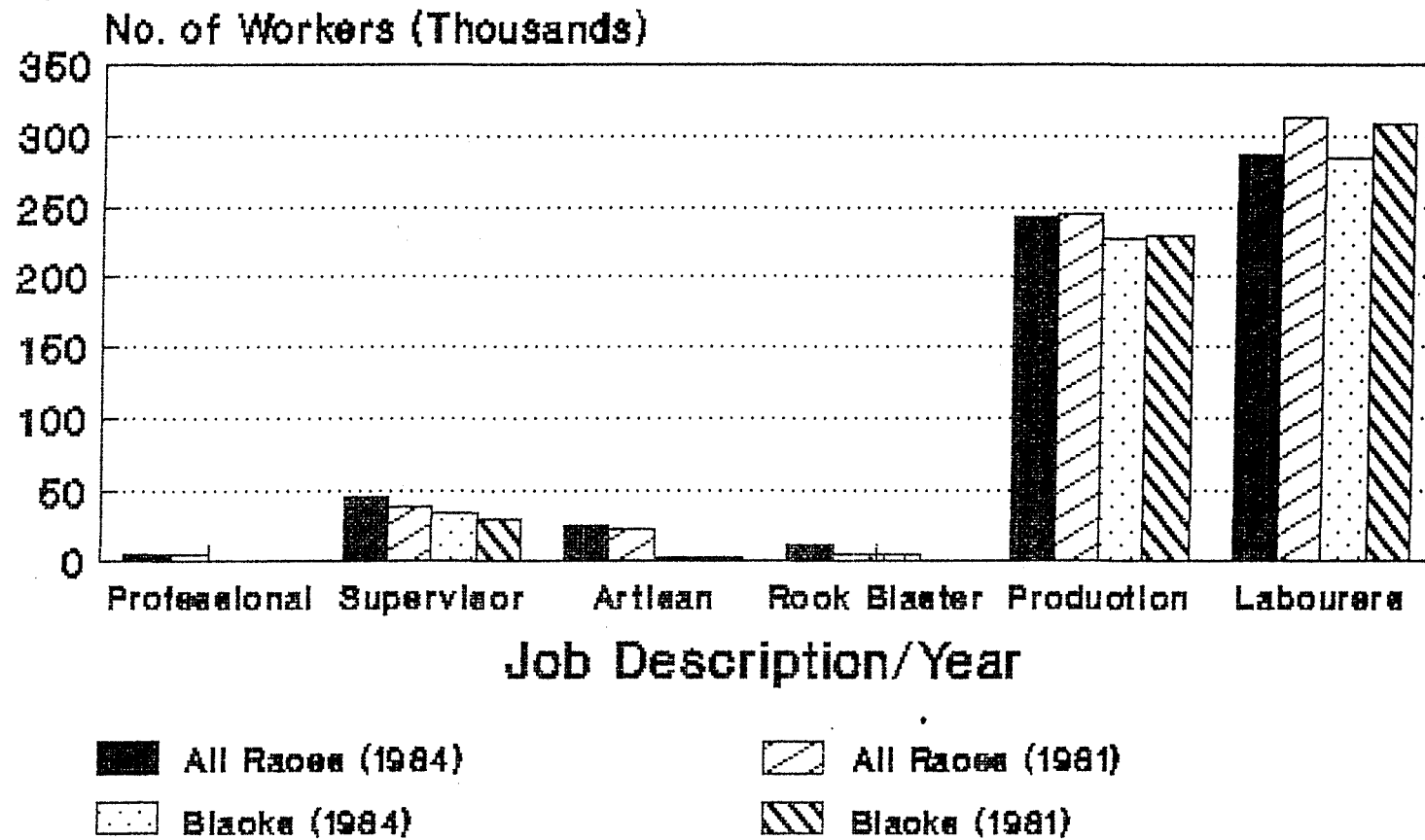
FIGURE 28

Skill-Pay Differentials Hourly Wages: Unionised Workers in 1990



Skill Levels

A Comparison: 1981-1984



DOM 1981a; 1984a

A COMPARISON OF INDICATORS 1980 - 1984

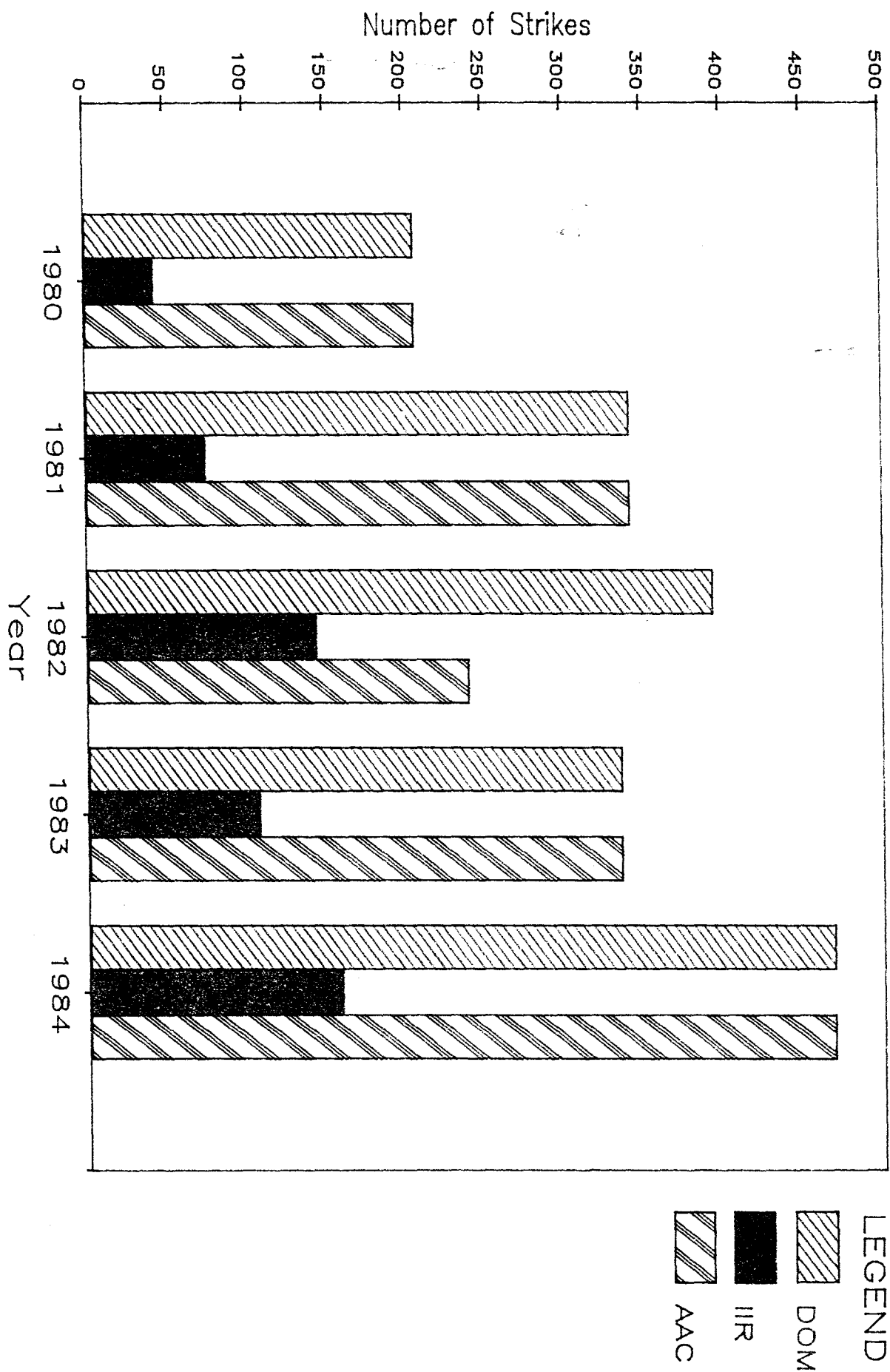


FIGURE 30

(Wood 1989)

FIGURE 31

When First Joined Trade Union

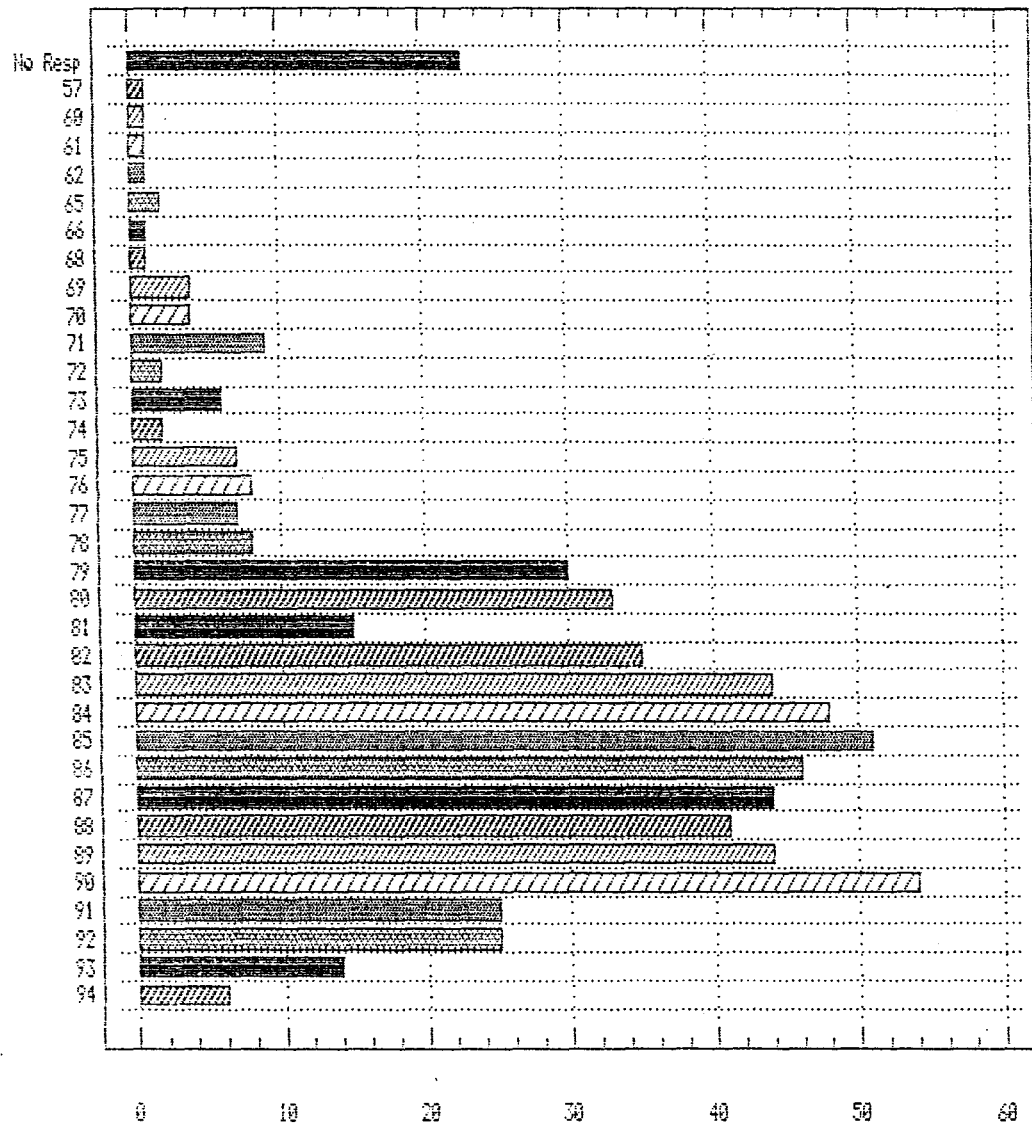


FIGURE 32

When First Joined Current T.U.

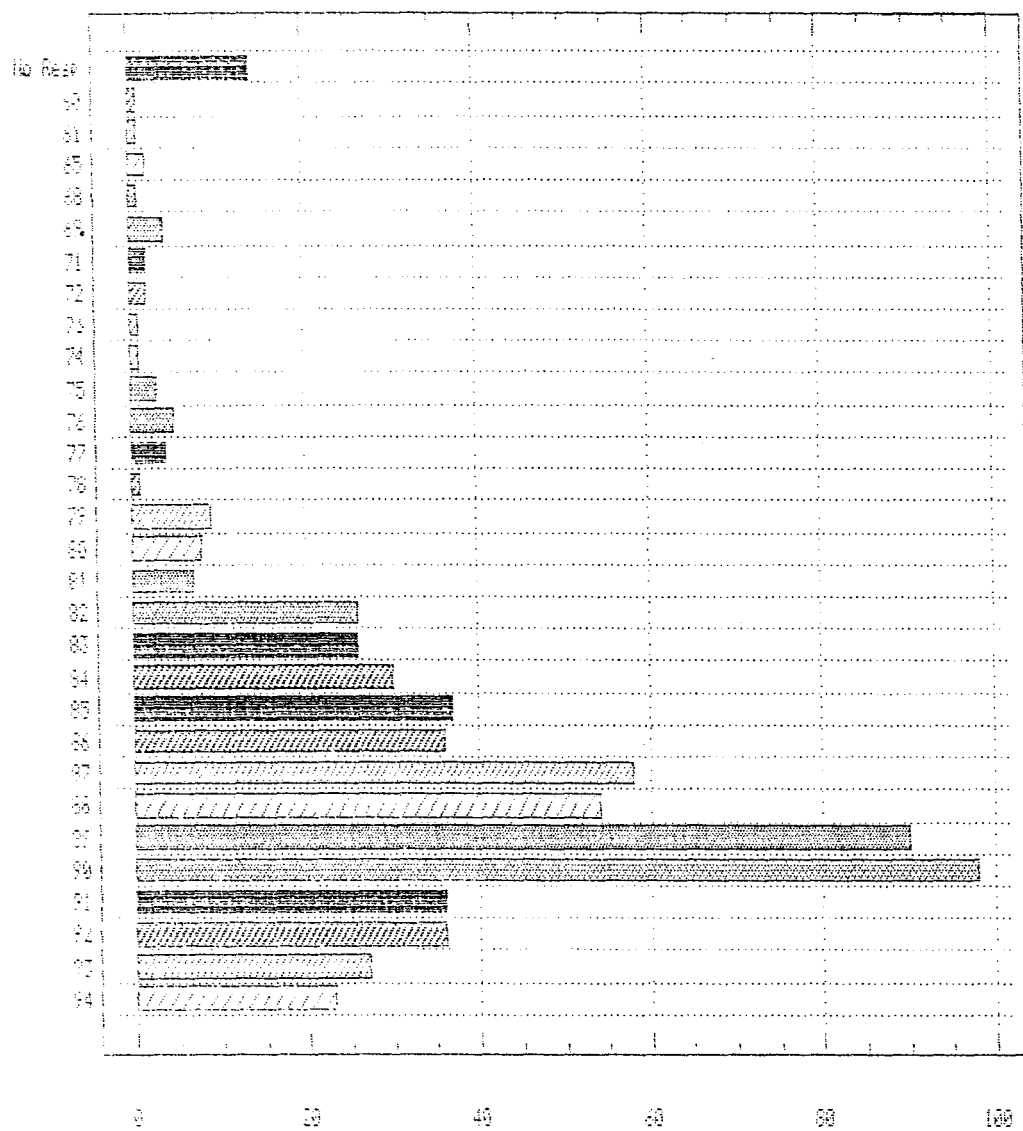


FIGURE 33

Age of Respondents

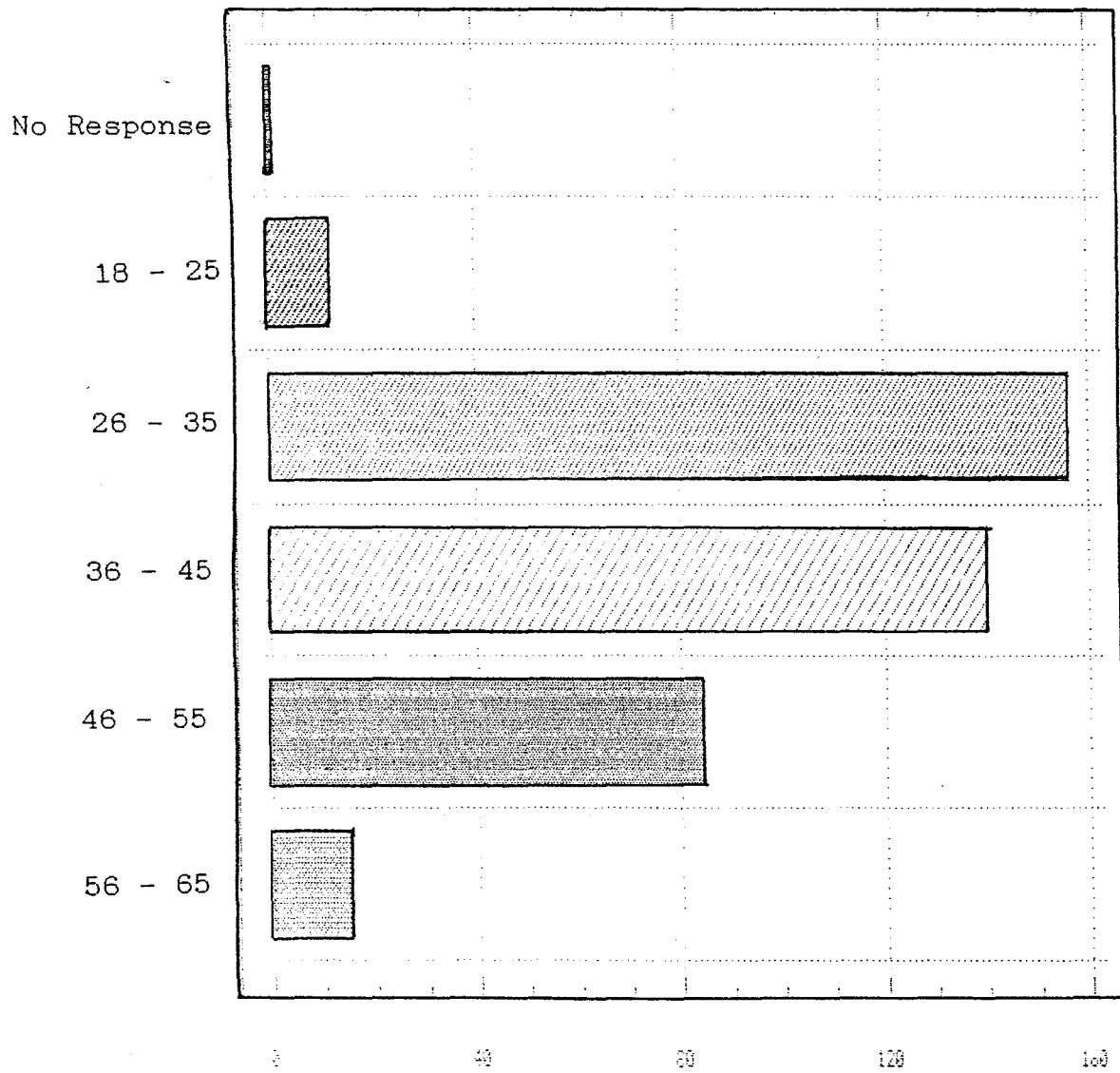


FIGURE 34

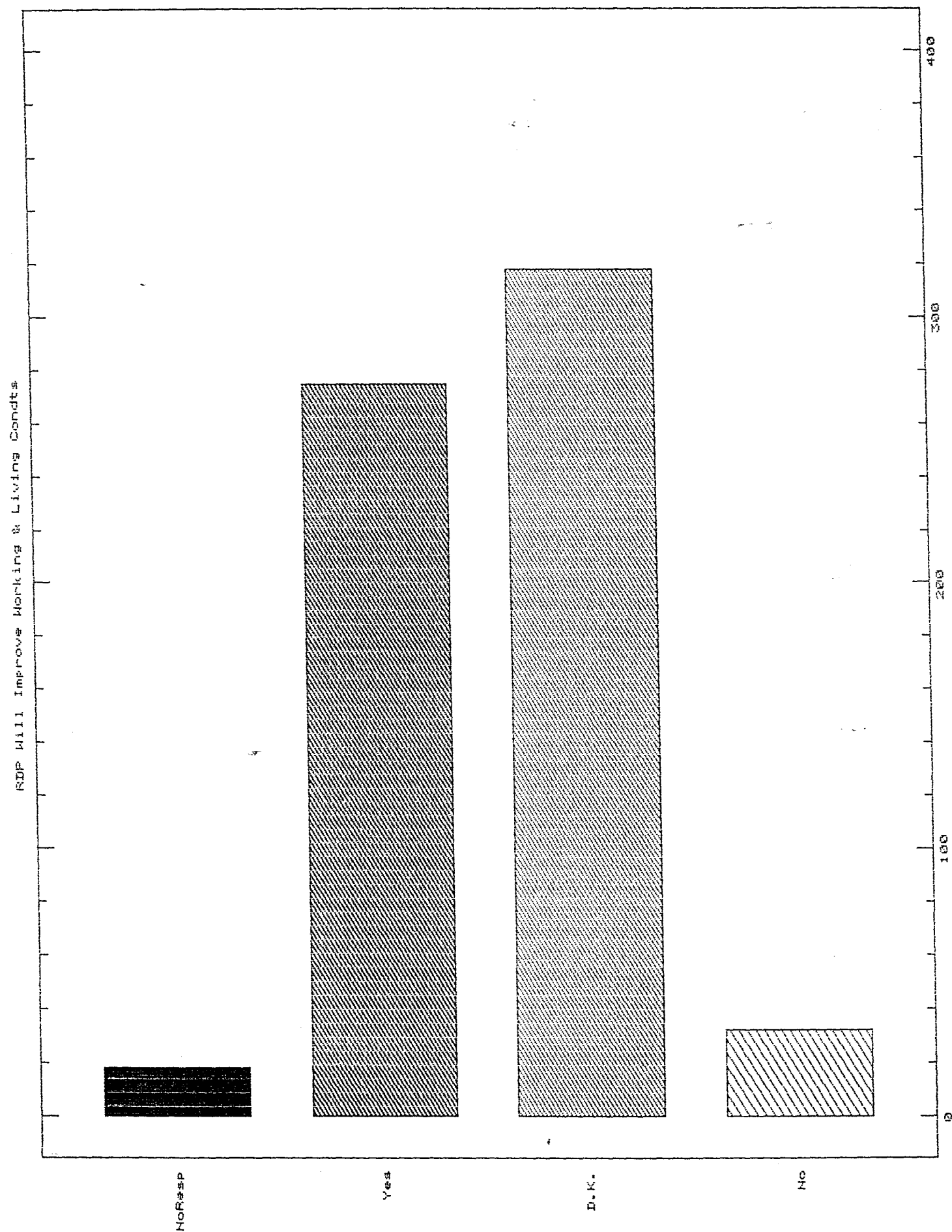
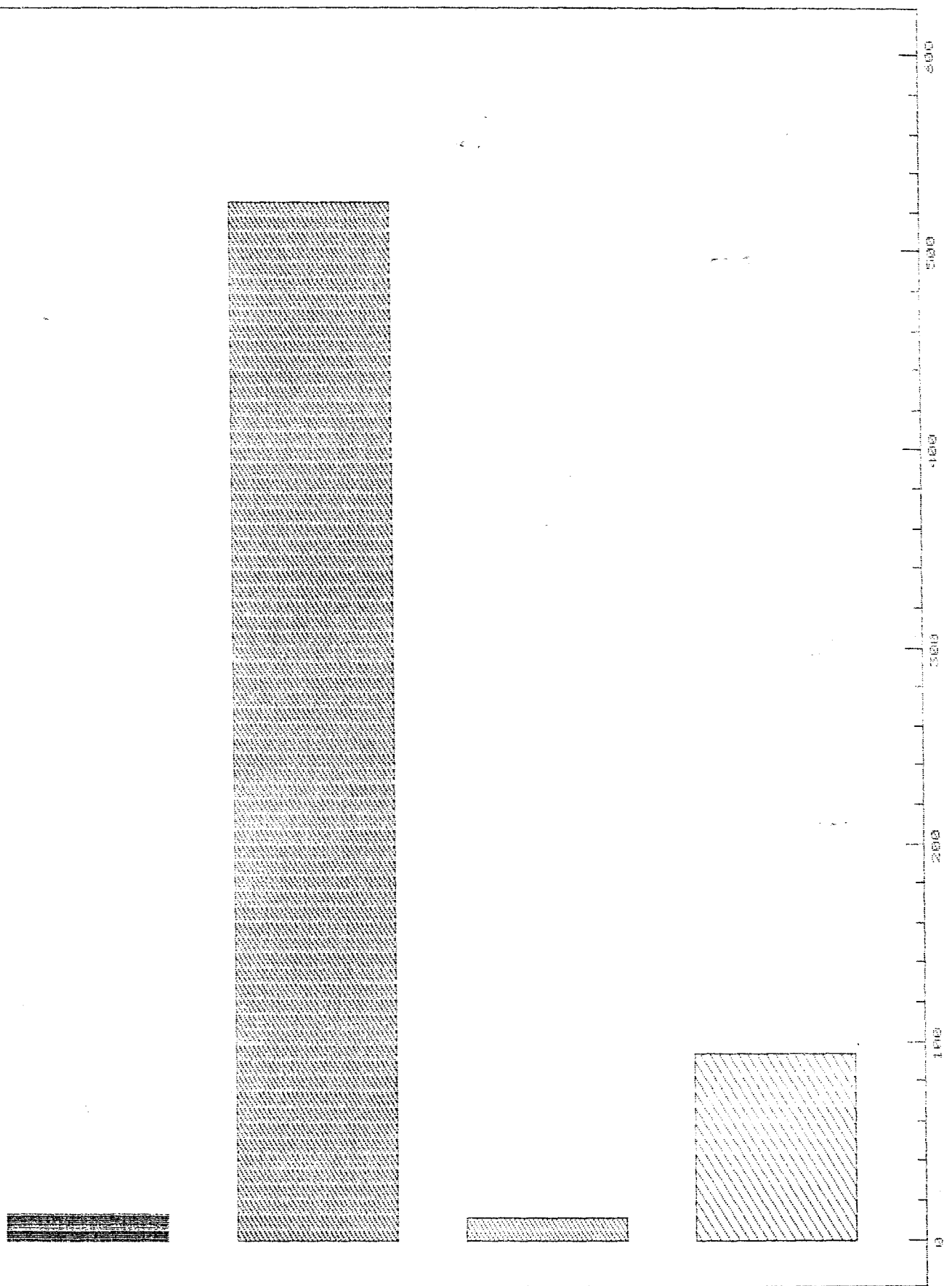


FIGURE 35

Views on Tripartite Alliance



No
Response

Support
Alliance

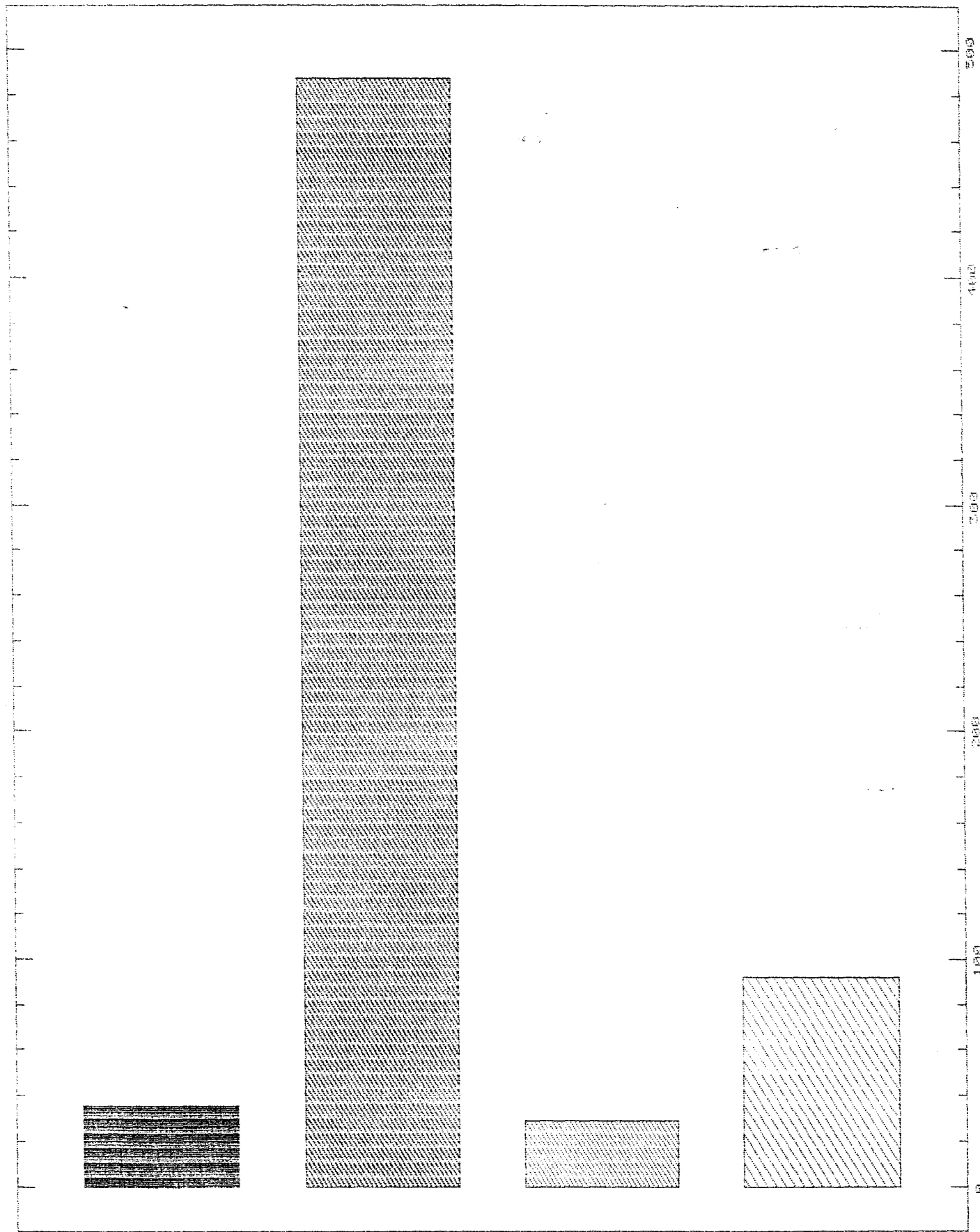
417

Workers
should be
only
represented
in parliament
by the SACP

COSATU should
not be
aligned to
any party

FIGURE 36

Alliance Should Continue to Fight Elections in 1999



No Response

Yes

COSATU should
form new
alliance
with other
parties

COSATU should
form its
own party

FIGURE 37

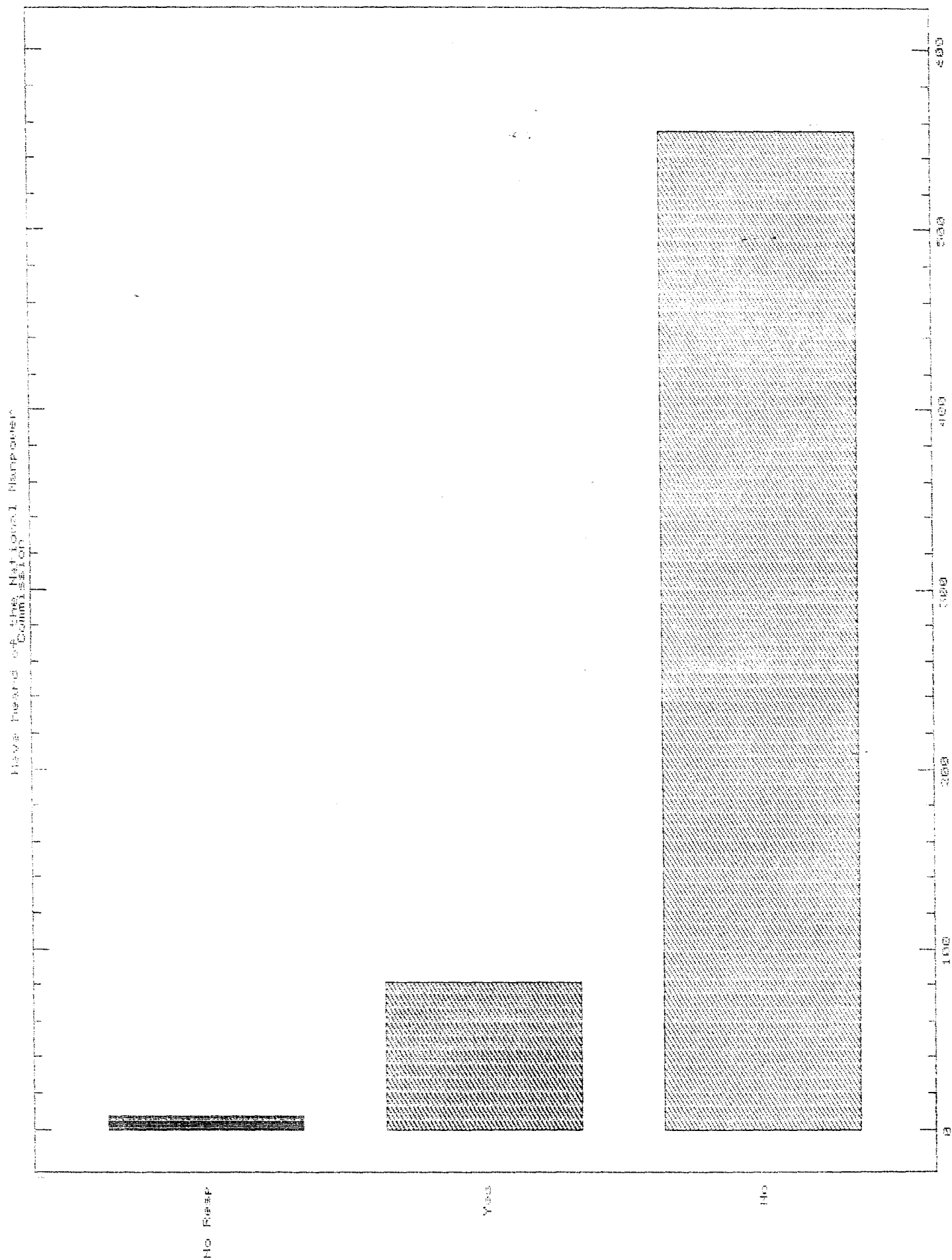


FIGURE 38

When last participated in shopsteward elections?

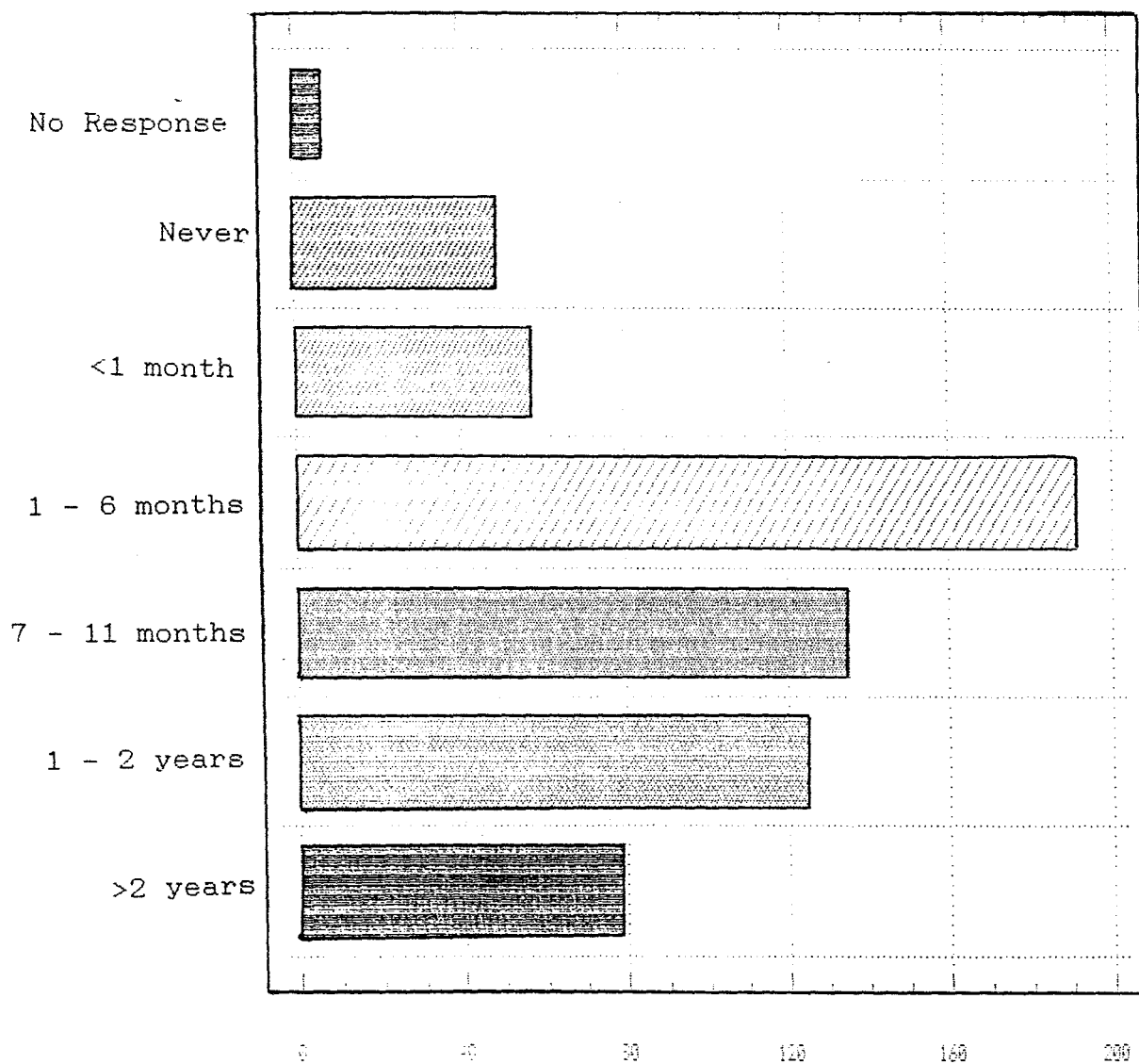


FIGURE 39

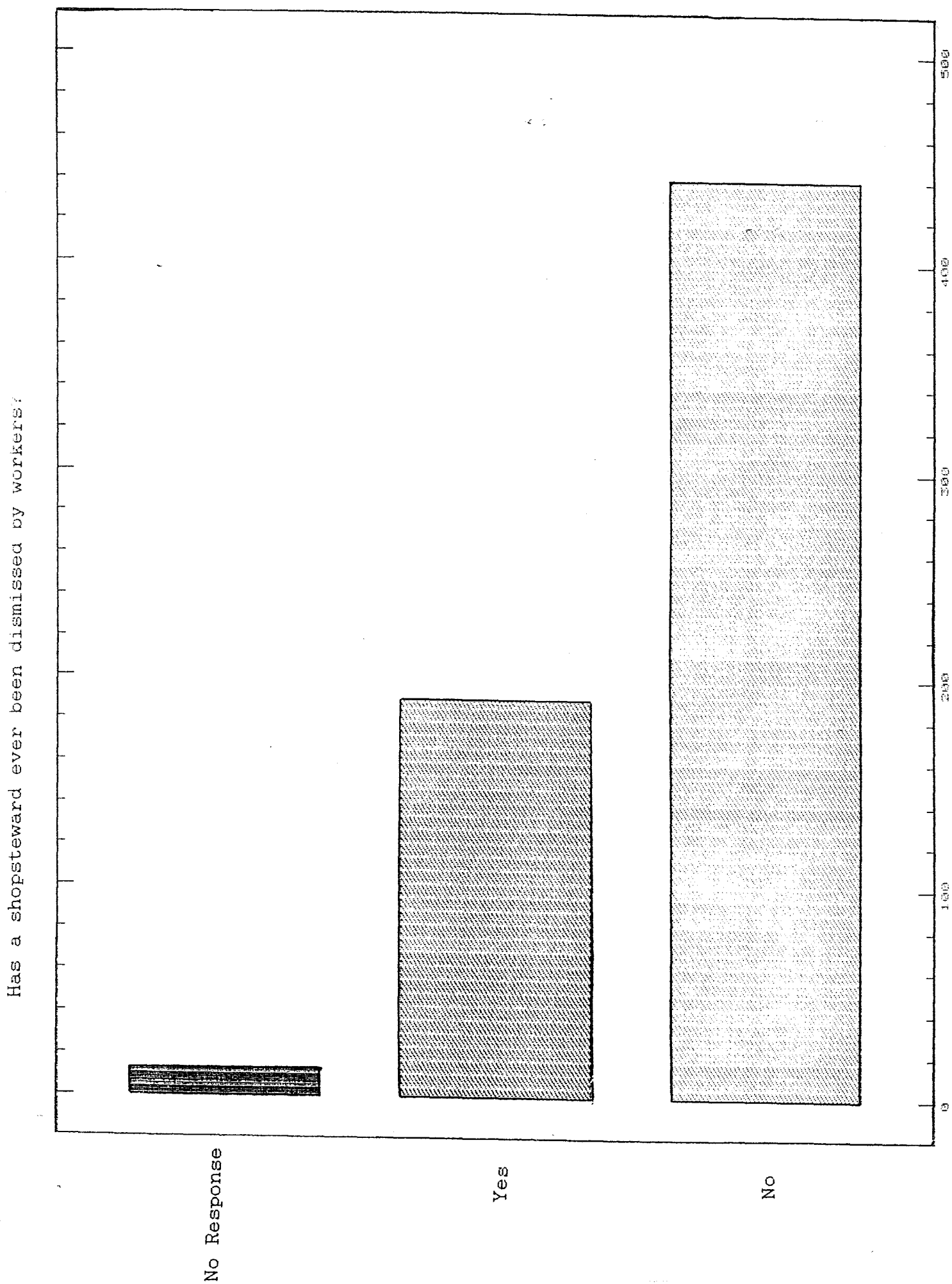


FIGURE 40

New government will improve wages in
next five years

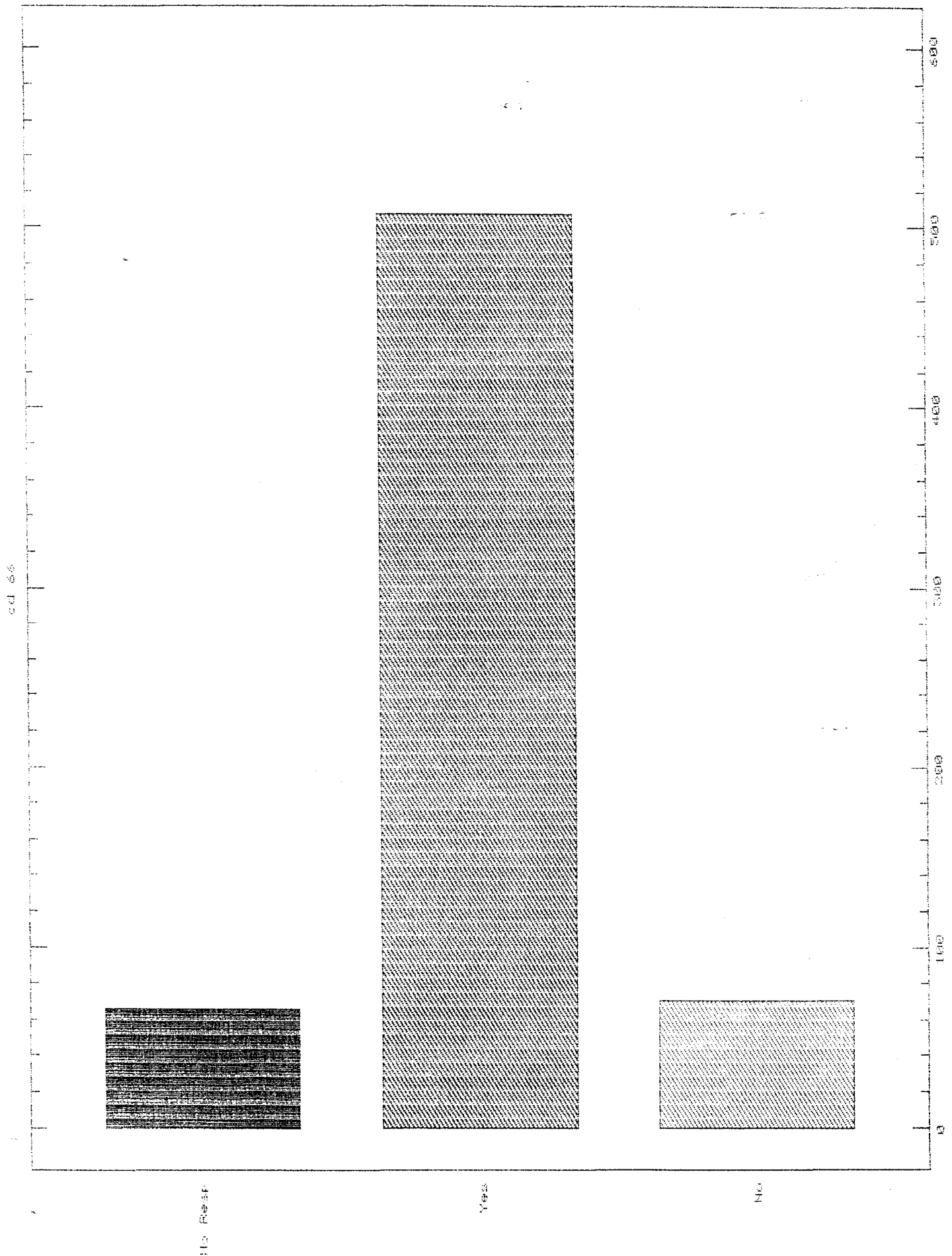


FIGURE 41

New government will improve working
conditions in next five years

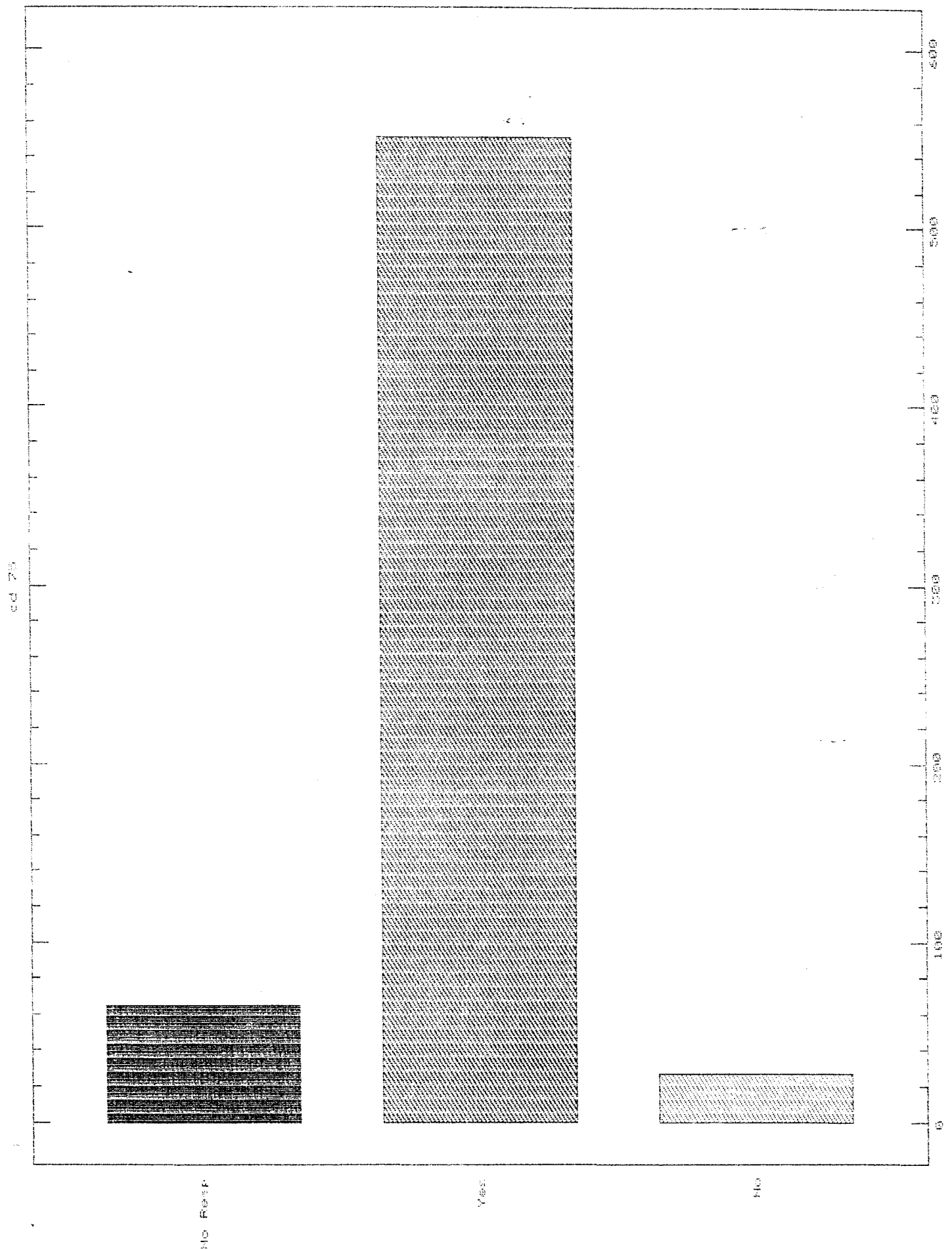


FIGURE 42

If new government fails to deliver,
collective action will be needed

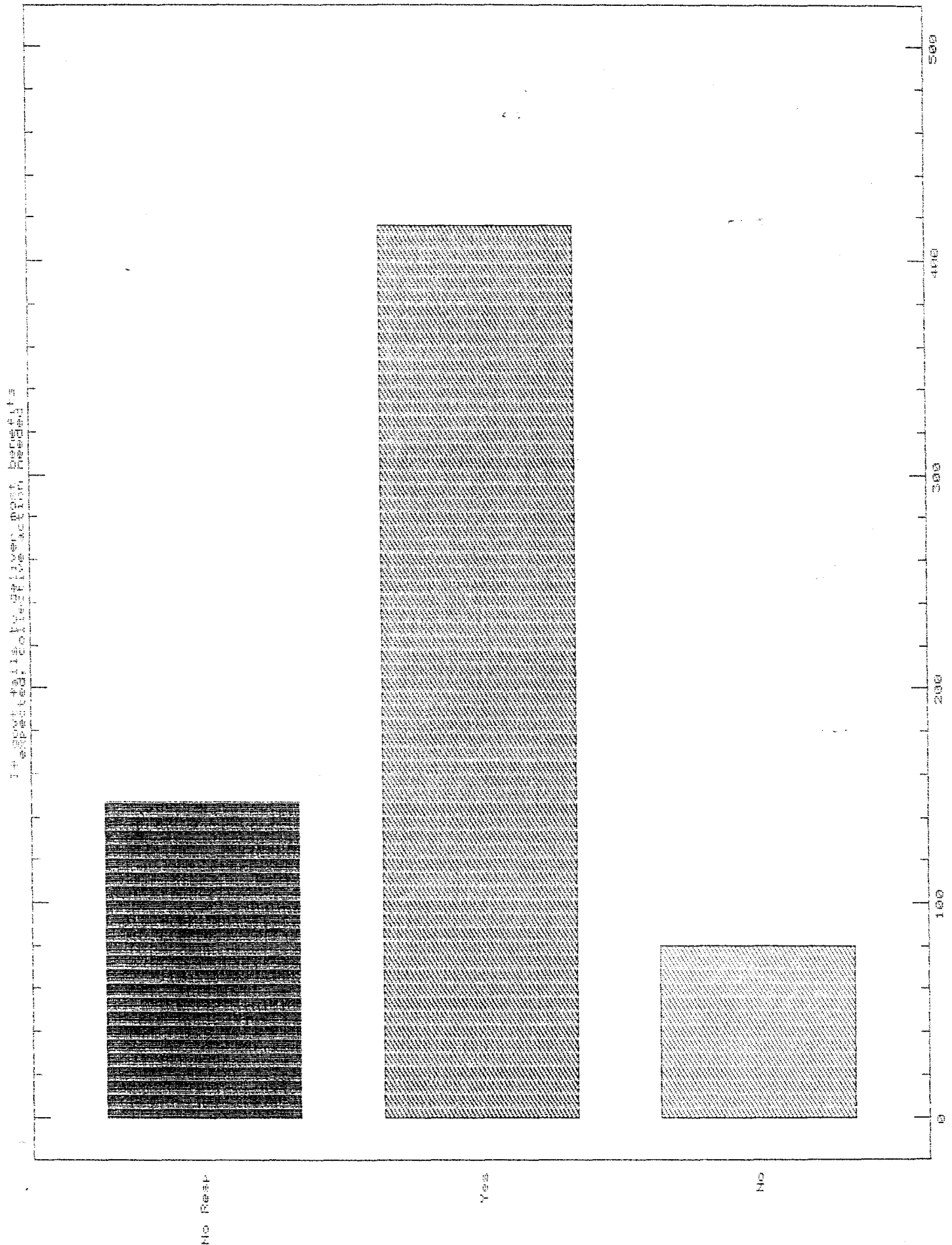


FIGURE 43

Mass action needed if government fails to deliver

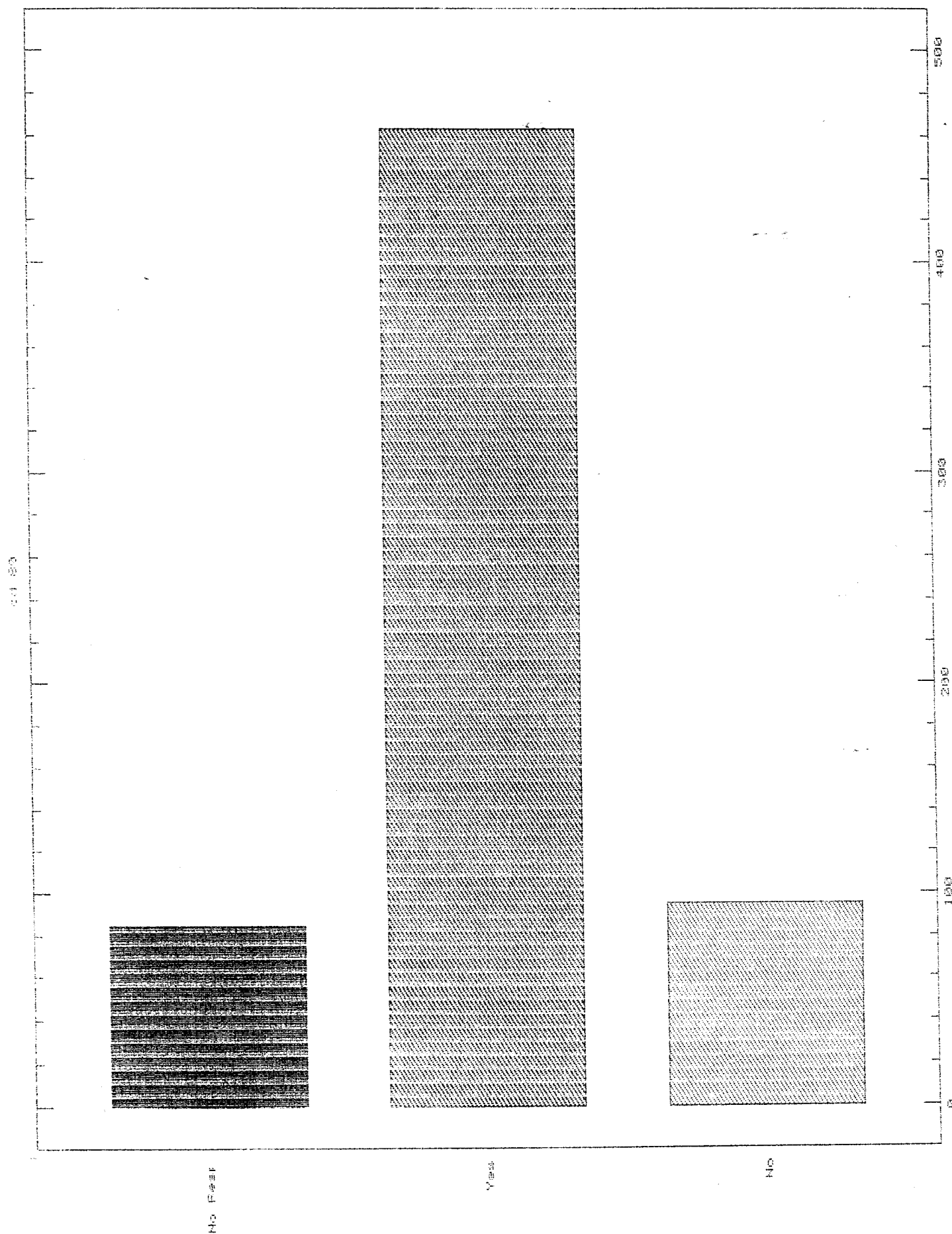


FIGURE 44

Will do nothing if government fails to deliver

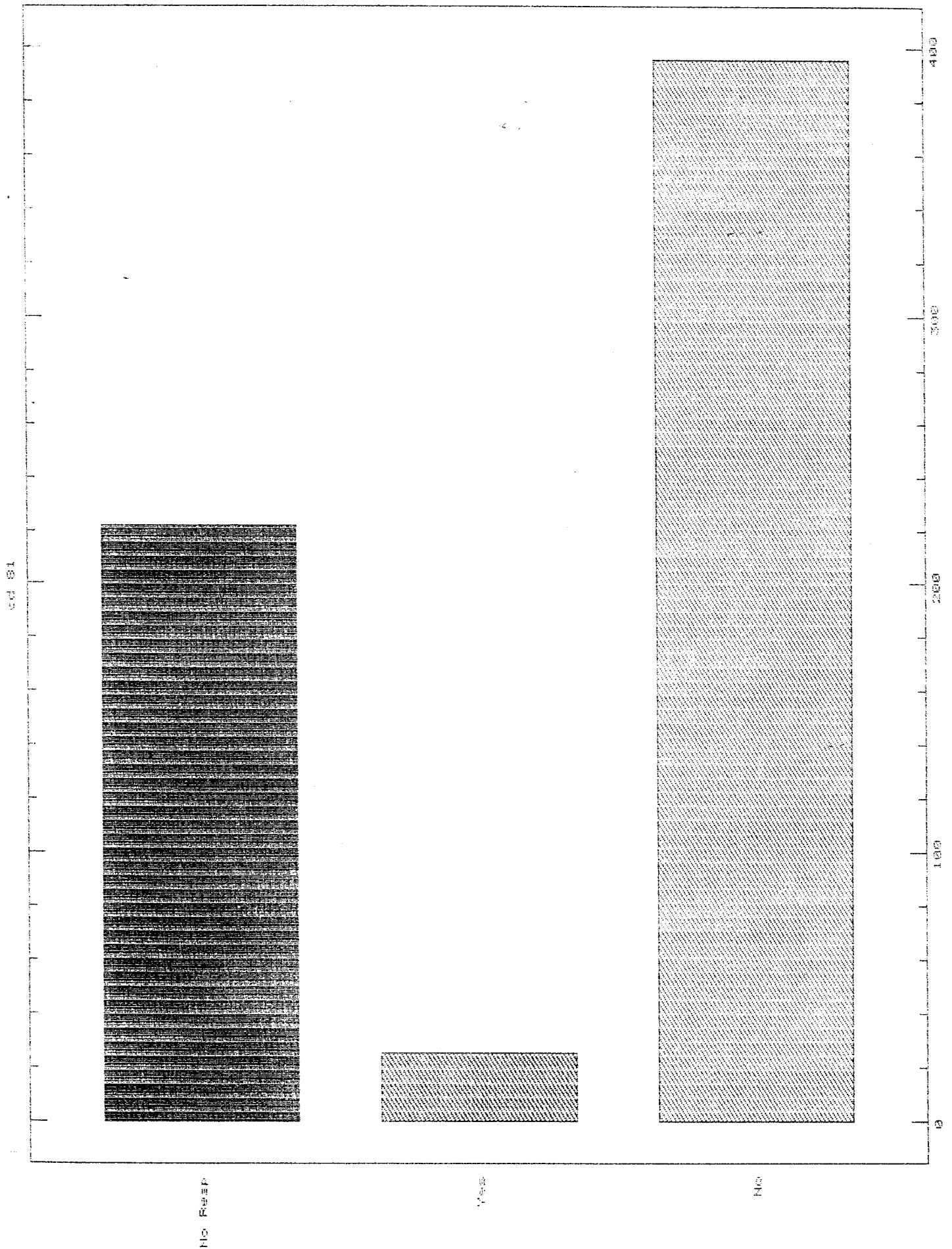


FIGURE 45

Skill Levels of COSATU Members

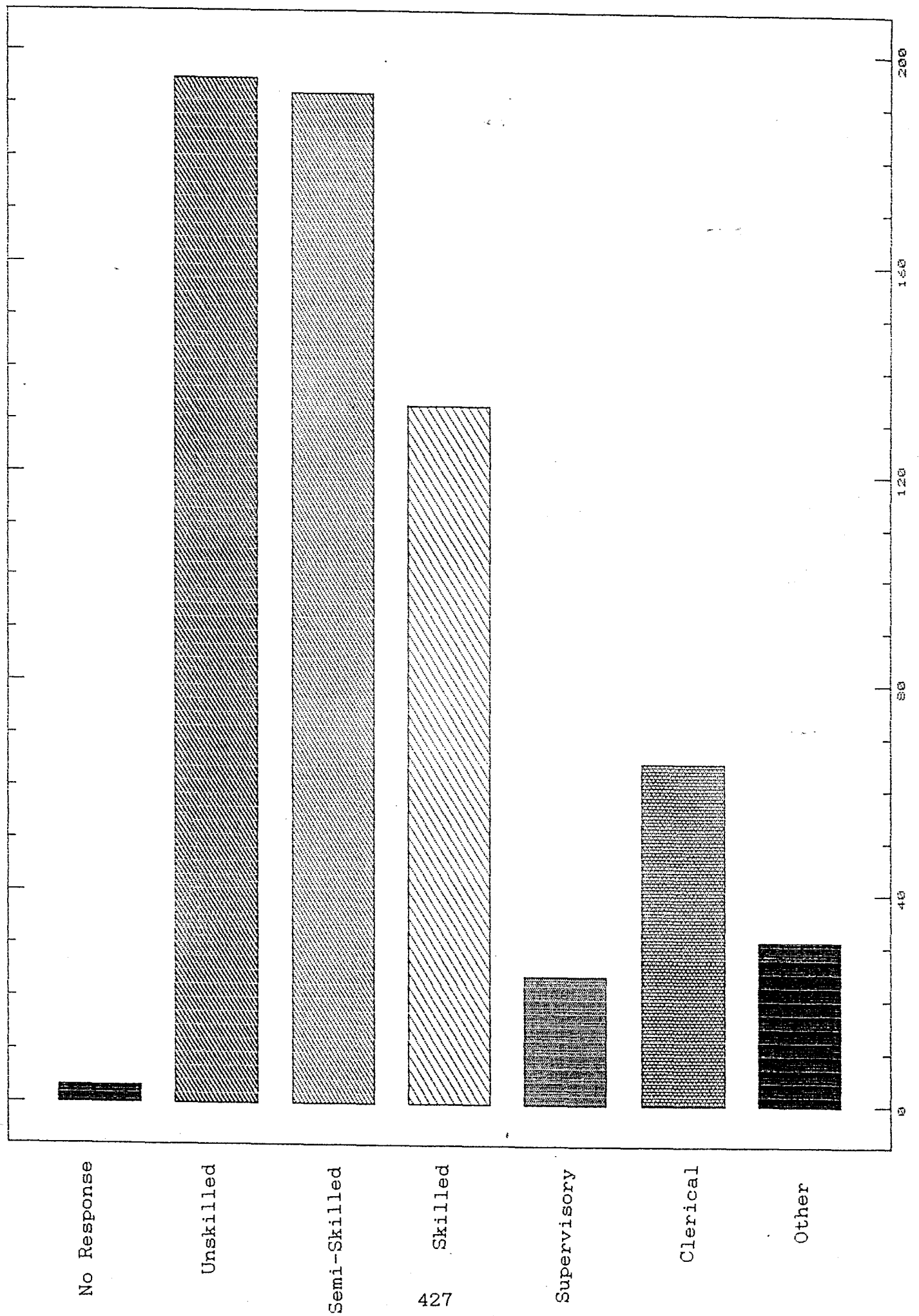


TABLE 1

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes Independent variable: Unemployment

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	5.77495	1.68892	3.41932	.00288
Slope	-0.0620046	0.0946976	-0.094697	.52047

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	.1687695	1	.1687695	.428717	.52047
Residual	7.479572	19	.393662		
Lack-of-fit	5.501963	15	.366798	.74190	.70183
Pure error	1.9776096	4	.4944024		

Total (Corr.) 7.648432 20
Correlation Coefficient = -0.148547 R-squared = 2.21 percent
Std. Error of Est. = 0.627425

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
Bell 1984)

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes Independent variable: Black Unemp

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	5.03983	0.458062	11.0025	.00001
Slope	0.112534	0.0394686	2.85123	.02465

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	2.4916898	1	2.4916898	8.129508	.02465
Residual	2.1454961	7	.3064994		
Lack-of-fit	1.2495624	6	.232451	.232451	.91659
Pure error	.8959337	1	.8959337		

Total (Corr.) 4.6371859 8
Correlation Coefficient = 0.733027 R-squared = 53.73 percent
Std. Error of Est. = 0.553624

(CSO 1954,1956,1986,1989,1992;DOM 1970-1992;NMC 1987;
Bell 1984)

TABLE 3

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes

Independent variable: Wages 1985

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	1.56167	0.380706	4.10204	.00020
Slope	6.97831E-3	7.60952E-4	9.1705	.00000

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	29.393281	1	29.393281	84.09802	.00000
Residual	13.630974	39	.349512		
Lack-of-fit	13.516012	37	.365298	6.3511	.14503
Pure error	.1149618	2	.0574809		

Total (Corr.) 43.024254 40
 Correlation Coefficient = 0.826547 R-squared = 68.32 percent
 Stnd. Error of Est. = 0.591196

(CSO 1954,1956,1986,1989,1992;DOM 1970-1992;NMC 1987;
 SARB 1960-1986)

TABLE 4

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes Independent variable: BlackWag 85

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	2.66447	0.298357	8.93047	.00000
Slope	8.87039E-3	1.09166E-4	8.12563	.00000

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	27.047755	1	27.047755	66.02588	.00000
Residual	15.976499	39	.409654		
Lack-of-fit	15.861537	37	.428690	7.45796	.12506
Pure error	.1149618	2	.0574809		

Total (Corr.) 43.024254 40
 Correlation Coefficient = 0.792883 R-squared = 62.87 percent
 Stnd. Error of Est. = 0.640042

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
 SARB 1960-1986)

TABLE 5

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes			Independent variable: Inflation		
Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level	
Intercept	3.73882	0.170397	21.9417	.00000	
Slope	0.154294	0.0179249	8.60777	.00000	
Analysis of Variance					
Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	28.187489	1	28.187489	74.09378	.00000
Residual	14.836766	39	.380430		
Lack-of-fit	14.192948	33	.430089	4.00818	.04394
Pure error	.6438177	6	.1073030		
Total (Corr.)	43.024254	40			
Correlation Coefficient = 0.809415		R-squared = 65.52 percent			
Std. Error of Est. = 0.61679					

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992;
SARB 1960-1986)

TABLE 6

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes

Independent variable: Wages 1985

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	1.65133	0.399902	4.12935	.00020
Slope	6.48563E-3	7.87682E-4	8.23381	.00000

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	23.085662	1	23.085662	67.79560	.00000
Residual	12.599188	37	.340519		
Lack-of-fit	12.581440	35	.359470	40.50751	.02437
Pure error	.0177483	2	.0088741		

Total (Corr.) 35.684850 38
 Correlation Coefficient = 0.804321 R-squared = 64.69 percent
 Std. Error of Est. = 0.58354

(CSO 1954,1956,1986,1989,1992;DOM 1970-1992;NMC 1987;
 SARB 1960-1986)

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Strike Volume Independent variable: BlackUnem

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	2.61077	0.763335	3.42021	.01113
Slope	0.201713	0.0657722	3.06684	.01815

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	8.0056149	1	8.0056149	9.405526	.01815
Residual	5.9581257	7	.8511608		
Lack-of-fit	4.7136434	6	.7856072	.631272	.74507
Pure error	1.2444824	1	1.2444824		

Total (Corr.) 13.963741 8
Correlation Coefficient = 0.757175 R-squared = 57.33 percent
Std. Error of Est. = 0.922584

(CSO 1954, 1956, 1986, 1989, 1992; DOM 1970-1992; NMC 1987;
Bell 1984)

TABLE 7

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes Independent variable: Union Memb

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	4.13062	0.245202	16.8458	.00000
Slope	1.40295E-6	1.63954E-7	8.55698	.00001

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	4.7680520	1	4.768020	73.22197	.00001
Residual	0.5860561	7	.0651173		

Total (Corr.) 5.354065 10
Correlation Coefficient = 0.943684 R-squared = 89.03 percent
Std. Error of Est. = 0.255181

(CSO 1986,1989,1992;NMC 1986)

TABLE 8

TABLE 9

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Quart.Strikes Independent variable: Quart.Unrest

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	4.66341	0.359129	12.9853	.00001
Slope	7.17939E-5	8.33839E-5	0.861002	.42230

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	.1954194	1	.1954194	7.741325	.42230
Residual	1.5816490	6	.2636082		

Total (Corr.) 1.7770684 7
 Correlation Coefficient = 0.331613 R-squared = 11.00 percent
 Stnd. Error of Est. = 0.513428

(Star 11/6/1987; NMC 1986; CSO 1992)

TABLE 10

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Productiv Independent variable: BlackWag85

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	4.51317	0.212933	21.1952	.000000
Slope	2.63825E-4	5.63903E-4	0.467854	.65101

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	.0002977	1	.0002977	.218888	.65101
Residual	.0122400	9	.0013600		

Total (Corr.) .0125377 10
 Correlation Coefficient = 0.154089 R-squared = 2.37 percent
 Std. Error of Est. = 0.0368782

(CSO 1986,1992;DOM 1981a-1991a)

TABLE 11

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: STRTOTD.Wages85 Independent variable: STRTOTD.TUMemb

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	6.41214	0.0360954	177.644	.00000
Slope	2.76416E-8	2.41351E-8	1.14529	.28163

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	.0018509	1	.0018509	1.311684	.28163
Residual	.0126997	9	.0014111		

Total (Corr.) .0145506 10

Correlation Coefficient = 0.356656

R-squared = 12.72 percent

Std. Error of Est. = 0.0375644

(CSO 1986, 1989, 1992; NMC 1986; SARB 1989-1986)

TABLE 12

Regression Analysis - Exponential model: $Y = \exp(a+bX)$

Dependent variable: Total Strikes			Independent variable: Business Cycle	
Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T Value	Prob. Level
Intercept	6.1722	0.219948	28.0621	.00000
Slope	-0.0405175	0.0338961	-1.19534	.26250

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Prob. Level
Model	.7335571	1	.7335571	1.428847	.26250
Residual	4.6205193	9	.5133910		

Total (Corr.) 5.3540765 10
 Correlation Coefficient = -0.370147 R-squared = 13.70 percent
 Stnd. Error of Est. = 0.716513

(CSO 1986, 1989, 1992; NMC 1986; SARB 1989-1986)

PRINCIPAL STAYAWAYS: 1950 - 1990

Key

1. Called by	:	2. Region
3. Support	:	4. Demands
1 May 1950		
1. ANC	:	2. PWV
3. N/A	:	4. Low Wages/Sub. of Communism Act
26 June 1950		
1. ANC	:	2. First nationwide in SA's history
3. 70-80 % in PWV	:	4. "Day of Mourning"
7 May 1951		
1. Franchise Action Comm.	:	2. Nationwide
3. N/A	:	4. Franchise
26 June 1953		
1. ANC	:	2. Nationwide
3. N/A	:	4. "People's Struggle"
26 June 1955		
1. ANC	:	2. Nationwide
3. 80 % in PWV	:	4. Freedom Day
28 February 1957		
1. Congress Alliance	:	2. PWV
3. N/A	:	4. Bus boycott/ L1/day
26 June 1957		
1. ANC	:	2. Nationwide
3. 50 % in Jhb, also E. Rand, P.E!	:	4. Freedom/L1 per Day

14 - 15 April 1958

1. Congress Alliance	:	2. Nationwide
3. Not widely supported	:	4. "Nats Must Go"

26 June 1959

1. Congress Alliance	:	2. Nationwide
3.	:	4. "Day of Sacrifice"

March 1960

1. Congress Alliance	:	2. Nationwide
3. 95% of Africans in C.T., 90% in Jhb, 25% in Dbn.	:	4. Police shootings

29-31 May 1961

1. All-in-All African Council	:	2. Nationwide
3. 40-75% on 29th, 30% on 30th, nil on 31st	:	4. Repression

4 - 6 August 1976

1. Soweto SRC	:	2. Jhb.
3. 50-60% on Reef	:	4. General political

23 - 25 August 1976

1. Soweto SRC	:	2. Jhb. & C.T.
3. 75% in Jhb. Area; 20-60% C.T.	:	4. do.

13 - 15 September 1976

1. Soweto SRC/SASO	:	2. Jhb. & C.T.
3. 40 - 80 %	:	4. do.

1 - 5 November 1976

1. Soweto SRC/SASO	:	2. Jhb.
3. Unsuccessful	:	4. do.

17 - 19 August 1984

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. Mass Meetings:Vaal Triangle | : | 2. Vaal Triangle |
| 3. 2000 Vaal residents | : | 3. Service charges |

17 September 1984

- | | | |
|--------|---|----------------------|
| 1. RMC | : | 2. Soweto |
| 3. (?) | : | 4. Local authorities |

22 October 1984

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------|
| 1. Unknown | : | 2. Springs |
| 3. "Highly successful" | : | 4. (?) |

March 1985

- | | | |
|------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. FEBCO | : | 2. P.E./Uitenhage |
| 3. "Total" | : | 4. Price increases |

November 1985

- | | | |
|--|---|-------------------|
| 1. National Initiative:Reconcil.: | : | 2. Uitenhage |
| 3. General call, only supported in Uitenhage | : | 4. Reconciliation |

1 May 1986

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. COSATU, CUSA, AZACTU | : | 2. National |
| 3. 67% in PWV, 100% Africans in East Cape; 51% Africans in C.T. | : | 4. May Day (since then, de facto public holiday). |

16 June 1986

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------|
| 1. Political organizations | : | 2. National |
| 3. 1.5 million | : | 3. Soweto Day |

14 July 1986

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. COSATU | : | 2. National |
| 3. 12 % Africans PWV; 39% E.Cape; | : | 4. Decl. of SOE |

15-28 July 1986

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1. Anon. Pamphlets | : | 2. KwaNdebele |
| 3. 100% in region | : | 4. Anti-independence |

31 July 1986

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. COSATU | : | 2. Uitenhage |
| 3. 79% Africans; 43% coloureds | : | 4. Forced removals |

14 August 1986

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Community Groupings | : | 2. Mdantsane/Duncan Vil |
| 3. "Partial success" | : | 4. 1985 "unrest" deaths |

4 September 1986

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1. Soweto Civic Association | : | 2. Soweto |
| 3. 85% of Sowetans | : | 4. "Unrest" funerals |

15 September 1986

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. Community groups | : | 2. Vaal Triangle |
| 3. "Partial success" | : | 4. Rent evictions |

1 October 1986

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. NUM/COSATU | : | 2. Countrywide |
| 3. 300 000 miners/ some short stoppages in PWV/PE | : | 4. Kinross Mine Deaths |

17/22 November 1986

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Anonymous pamphlet | : | 2. KwaNdebele |
| 3. Most African workers in area | : | 4. Detentions in area |

21 November 1986

- | | | |
|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. Community groups | : | 2. Mamelodi (Pta.) |
| 3. 80% | : | 4. Police shootings |

12 March 1987

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Detainees' Parents Sup. Comm. | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. 20% in P.E. for 1 hour | 4. State of Emergency |

15 April 1987

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. FAWU | 2. Transvaal |
| 3. 4000 in food industry | 4. Detention of TU memb |

22 - 24 April 1987

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Anonymous | 2. Soweto |
| 3. 10 - 50% | 4. S.D.E./Rent Eviction |

5 - 6 May 1987

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. TUs, Community Orgs. | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. 1 million | 4. All-white elections |

16 June 1987

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1. TUs, Community Orgs. | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. 60 % of African workers | 4. Soweto Day |

15 October 1987

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Anti-Eviction Comm. | 2. Tembisa (Springs) |
| 3. "Widely observed" | 4. Rent Evictions |

1 February 1988

- | | |
|------------|----------------------|
| 1. Unknown | 2. Ashdown (Fmb.) |
| 3. 100 % | 4. Vigilante attacks |

21 March 1988

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Unknown | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. 80 % PWV & E. Cape | 4. Anniversary of Langa shootings |

6 - 8 June 1988

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. COSATU/NACTU | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. 3 million | 4. LRA Amendments |

16 June 1988

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. No organizational initiative | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. Widely observed, except on mines | 4. Soweto Day |

June 1989

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. MDM | 2. Pietermaritzburg |
| 3. 30% in Fmb. | 4. Violence in Natal |

16 June 1989

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. No organizational initiative | 2. Nationwide |
| 3. Widely observed | 4. Soweto Day |

August 1989

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Unknown | 2. Venda |
| 3. Widely observed | 4. Political arrests |

5-6 September 1989

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. COSATU | 3. Nationwide |
| 3. 2 days, first day only observed on mines, second day widely observed with 80% support in E. Cape, 70% in PWV, 40% in W. Cape | 4. LRA/White elections |

2 July 1990

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1. COSATU & ANC | 3. Nationwide |
| 3. 3 million | 4. Violence in Natal |

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Cillie Commission (1977:135-297)
Dorabji (1984:159-160)
Green (1986a:95)
Indicator SA (1985:6-8)
Indicator SA (1988:72-73)
Kane-Berman (1978:112-131)
LMG (1985a:87)
LMG (1986:78-89)
LMG (1987a:49-51)
LMG (1987b:52-56)
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Note

A comprehensive summary of 1984-6 stayaways, and discussion of the use of this tactic in the later 1980s has been provided by Adler, Maller and Webster (1986:306-34).

PRINCIPAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION

OF RELEVANCE TO STRIKES 1950 - 1990

Master and Servants Acts

The successor to Elizabethan anti-vagrancy laws, certain Master and Servants Acts (mostly dating to the pre-1900 period) restricted the right to strike.

Industrial Conciliation Act (no. 11) of 1924

This act established a series of statutory collective bargaining institutions, the most important being industry level bodies, the Industrial Councils. Only trade unions which met certain legal requirements for registration could participate in the system. Most Africans were excluded from the act - the term "employee" did not cover workers whose services were regulated by the "Native Pass Laws" or similar measures. In practice, that meant that only certain Africans and/or African trade unions in the Orange Free State and Cape could make use of the bargaining machinery. In practice, it seems that very few did so.

Industrial Conciliation Act (no. 36) of 1937

Agricultural workers, domestic workers, and civil servants explicitly excluded from the Industrial Conciliation machinery.

Wage Acts (nos. 25 & 44) of 1925 and 1937

The objectives of these acts were to limit black competition with poor whites in terms of wage controls. Unions or employer associations could make applications to the Minister for legally binding Determinations governing minimum conditions of employment in a particular sector and/or region. The matter would be referred to a Wage Board (established in terms of the legislation), which would make rulings in this regard.

War Measure no 145 of 1942

Prohibited strikes by black workers.

Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act (no. 48) of 1953

Set up separate industrial relations mechanisms for Africans. At factory level Works Committees consisting of representatives of black workers could be established. These Committees could elect representatives to Regional Committees, chaired by white officials, in turn accountable to an all-white Central Bantu Labour Board. The prohibition of strikes by blacks was confirmed. Very few Works Committees were established. By 1957, only seven were in existence, by 1961, sixteen and by 1973, twenty-four.

Industrial Conciliation Act (new) of 1956

All Africans now explicitly excluded from the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Statutory job reservation was now possible, whilst controls were placed on mixed trade unions. In practice, this meant the establishment of racially exclusive parallel unions or branches.

Wage Act (no. 5) of 1957

The Minister, on recommendation of the Wage Board, could determine the minimum conditions of service in certain sectors at regional or national level. Unions or employer associations no longer had the right to make applications to the Minister in this regard. Public servants, and domestic and agricultural workers were excluded from the provisions of the Act.

Black Labour Relations Act of 1973

An amendment and renaming of the 1953 Native Labour Act. Important amendments included provision for the establishment of Liaison Committees, consisting of worker and employer representatives at plant level, and the legalisation of strikes by blacks if a complex range of procedures were adhered to, including a statutory "cooling off period" of 30 days. A further amendment in 1977 made the agreements reached at Liaison Committee legally binding.

Industrial Conciliation (Amendment) Act of 1979

Redefined the term "employee" to include Africans, other than migrants, giving them access to the Industrial Council system. Provided for the establishment of an Industrial Court. Whilst legal strike action by blacks was facilitated, the dispute had to be referred first to the relevant Industrial Council. Should there not be an Industrial Council for the relevant industry, parties could apply to the Minister of Manpower for the establishment of a Conciliation Board. If the Minister refused to establish a Conciliation Board, or the relevant Council or Board failed to resolve the dispute, a legal strike could take place after a 30 day "cooling off period".

Labour Relations Act of 1981

Renamed and amended the 1979 Act. Migrants were now included, whilst the role of the Industrial Court was clarified. The restrictions governing registered trade unions were also extended to unregistered unions.

Labour Relations Amendment Act (no. 83) of 1988

The powers of the Industrial Court to define an Unfair Labour Practice were greatly constrained. Union officials were defined as the authorised agents of the trade union. Trade unions themselves were liable for damages should they interfere with any contractual rights.

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Botha Commission (1951: 15-45), Horner (1976: 127), NMC (1984:31-45), Rand Daily Mail (192/1942), Thompson (1988: 67-75), Thompson (1989: 620-642), Wiehahn Commission (1979:29-31).

Summary Statistics for Contingency Tables (Page 1)

Chi-square	D.F.	Significance		
27.6925	10	2.02151E-3		
Statistic	Symmetric	With rows dependent	With columns dependent	
Lambda	0.03714	0.06353	0.00000	
Uncertainty Coeff.	0.01865	0.01528	0.02391	
Somer's D	-0.06132	-0.06943	-0.05490	

Skill vs attendance at union meetings

TABLE 15

TABLE 16

Skill level versus attendance at union meetings

Attendance at union meetings	Never	1X Week	1 X Month	1 X Year	Totals
Skill level					
Unskilled	22.7	26.4	35.5	42.1	30.5
Semi- skilled	30.7	35.6	25.4	34.2	30.2
Skilled	30.7	22.2	16.3	13.2	20.7
Supervisory	3.4	.9	5.8	5.3	3.7
Clerical	10.2	10.2	10.5	2.6	10.1
Other	2.3	4.7	6.5	2.6	4.8
Totals	14.5	34.7	44.8	38	100

n = 616

Major Consumer Boycotts Over Workplace Issues: 1950-1990

"Nationalist Goods Boycott"

Inter alia, this boycott extended to Langeberg Kooperatief goods, impelling that company into negotiations with the FCWU in 1959.

Potato Boycott

Led to very limited improvement in the service conditions of certain farmworkers in 1959.

Fattis & Monis Boycott

Dismissal of trade union workers led to a seven month long strike and consumer boycott. Widely supported in the Western Cape. Led to a settlement in mid 1979.

Red Meat Boycott

Victimization of trade union members led to a strike and consumer boycott in 1980. This boycott was poorly co-ordinated - it was abandoned in the Western Cape, just as it was being instituted in other parts of the country - and was ultimately unsuccessful.

Colgate-Palmolive Boycott

Following the outbreak of a strike on that company's East Rand plant, a highly successful consumer boycott was instituted in neighbouring townships during 1981. Mobilization around this boycott may have facilitated the organization of community support around the later metal industry strikes.

Wilson-Rowntree Boycott

Following the unionization of workforce of this Eastern Cape factory, at least four strikes took place during 1980 over discipline and pension issues. Finally, a 1981 dispute led to the dismissal of all striking workers and a subsequent consumer boycott. Although of relatively long duration, this boycott failed to extract any managerial concessions.

Simba-Quix Boycott

Following a 1984 strike, a highly successful consumer boycott forced management concessions.

BTR Sarmcol

Following a series of bitter recognition disputes between management and the workforce, a 1985 strike led to the dismissal of virtually the entire workforce. A blanket consumer boycott was instituted in the neighbouring townships of Pietermaritzburg. Despite pressures from other employers, BTR management refused to grant any concessions.

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Lodge (1983:1983-348)
Rand Daily Mail (5/12/1959)
WIP (1985:43)

TABLE 18

Knowledge of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)
versus participation in its formulation

Knowledge of RDP Participation in its formulation	Yes	No	Totals
N/R	.6	26.8	19
Yes	52.9	2.7	15.2
No	46.5	70.4	65.8
Totals	24.5	74.5	100

n = 632

TABLE 19

Regional variations in support for tri-partite alliance

Region	PWV	W.Tvl	S. Natal	E.Cape	W.Cape	Total
Support Alliance						
N/R	2.5	0	0	1.4	4.5	2
Support Alliance	81.3	100	87.9	89.4	59.8	81.6
SACP Only	2.5	0	.9	.5	3.6	1.7
Independent COSATU	13.6	0	11.2	8.7	32.1	14.6
Totals	30.8	1.6	18	32.2	17.4	100

n = 643

TABLE 20

Knowledge of National Manpower Commission (NMC) versus participation at a union report back

Knowledge of NMC Participation at Report Back	Yes	No	Totals
N/R	.7	.7	1.1
Yes	31.5	31.5	12.6
No	67.8	91.9	86.3
Totals	23.2	76.9	100

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Alec Erwin, NUMSA Educational Officer, Grahamstown 1990.

L.J., former SAAWU local leader, Grahamstown 1993.

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