

CHAPTER 2

*SWING THE ASSEGA! PEACEFULLY? : THE AFRICAN PROLETARIAT
AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN DURBAN

Populist Organisation and the Quest for Power

The growth of assertive shantytown communities and a growing confidence and militancy gave to the ordinary African, whether worker, lumpen or newly migrant, a vital control over the substance and pace of African political and organisational advance. Any organisation which succeeded in sustaining itself achieved proletarian support because it maintained a localised grass-roots support base. Such organisations were critical and often impatient of the principles of trade unionism, viewing trade unions as potentially divisive and narrowly focussed around the factory floor of established industry and commerce. These new organisations also operated outside established political groupings such as the African National Congress or the Congress Youth League. Furthermore all attempts to rejuvenate old organisations or start new city-wide groupings were to fail.

Throughout the late 1940s many, including Champion,¹ were to strive for the revival of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.² Such attempts were aimed at providing the Natal branch of the African National Congress with a new popular support that would both marginalise the established trade unions³ and other bodies such as the Congress Youth League,⁴ and provide Champion with greater national legitimacy.⁵ Despite numerous public appeals for support these attempts failed. In 1947 the African National Congress attempted to organise an "African Week".⁶ While Champion appears to have promoted the idea in Durban, as part of his desire to "squash all who were against him" and gain the support of an increasingly militant populace. But the event never even took place.⁷

During the same period the Daughters of Africa split up because of the eagerness of some members to use the movement as a vehicle for starting a Natal branch of the African National Congress Women's League. The Daughters of Africa had started in 1939⁸ and by 1946 was well supported by women in the

1. CKM; reel 15A 2:XL9:30/80, the ICU and the Natal Native Congress, n.d.

2. Ilanga lase Natal, 8 November 1947.

3. Ibid and interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

4. Ibid.

5. CKM; reel 3B 2:XC:30/84; Minutes of the Conference of the Natal African Intelligentsia, October 1945 and the Verulam Press - A W G Champion, 25 November 1949.

6. Ibid, Minutes of the African National Congress (Natal Branch), 1946.

7. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1982.

8. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mzimela, 21 July 1982.

Durban and Pinetown areas.⁹ The movement was concerned with developing African women's self-worth and dignity, the advancement of women's particular roles in a society, and with discussing the problems of maintaining a household in a city environment.¹⁰ Local branches of the Daughters of Africa started craft clubs making and selling "boys clothing", formed fruit and vegetable co-operatives, endeavoured to get Indian shop-owners to employ Africans and thereby reduce social animosity, and generally attempted to establish the woman's role in controlling a decent household, and to legitimise her influence in broader political issues.¹¹

While it appears that most of the members of the movement were "congress supporters",¹² distinct rifts appeared in the movement during and after its annual conference held in Durban in February 1946.¹³ At that meeting it appears that some members, including Mrs A. L. Luthuli and the widow of Dr J.L. Dube, who were active on the committee,¹⁴ attempted to direct the movement towards eventual incorporation into the A N C Women's League, which had been formed in 1943.¹⁵ Whilst this latter organisations' aims were in many substantive ways similar to the aims and activities of the Daughters of Africa, there were many who were reluctant to allow their organisation to be subsumed within a broader national body. As a result of these disagreements and, to a lesser extent, the intervention of White welfare bodies who attempted to influence them, the Daughters of Africa, as a movement, gradually faded away.¹⁶

While it has been claimed that such reluctance was due to the supporters of the Women's League being over eager, and that members of the Daughters of Africa were reluctant to become political in the face of police harassment, the issue is rather more complex.¹⁷ It is certain that many of the branches of the Daughters of Africa never experienced any police harassment.¹⁸ Furthermore, while there had been many attempts to start a Women's League branch in Durban with meetings being postponed and the proposed visit of Madie-Hall Xuma cancelled through lack of support,¹⁹ the failure to elicit the support of the Daughters of Africa was not the result of Women's Leaguers' tactical errors or a general lack of political consciousness amongst the Daughters of Africa. The real difference was one of political strategy. Many within the Daughters of Africa

9. Ilanga lase Natal, 16 February 1946.

10. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mzimela, 21 July 1982. For different analysis see Walker, Women, p 91.

11. Interview with Mrs H Sibisi, 11 November 1985.

12. Mbutso Papers; C D S Mbutso, A History of Clermont, "Of Clermont I Sing of Thee", and Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 7 July 1985.

13. Ilanga lase Natal, 16 February 1946 and interview with Ms D Nyembe, 7 July 1985.

14. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mzimela, 21 July 1982.

15. See Walker, Women, p 91.

16. Interview with Ms D Nyembe, 7 July 1985.

17. Ibid.

18. Mbutso Papers; C D S Mbutso, A History of Clermont, "Of Clermont I Sing of Thee" and Ilanga lase Natal, 16 February 1946.

19. Ibid.

were more interested in initiating various independent women's groups in the various shantytowns and townships than in seeking to promote an all-embracing city-wide or national movement. One such independent group was the Health in the Home women's group in the freehold area of Good Hope.²⁰

Furthermore many of these groups were active in promoting non-racialism through discussions with Indian Women's groups, convincing Indian leaders and traders to assist in the development of African enterprise and through co-operation with Indian women in anti-Black marketeer activities.²¹ While it is true that African women who were "ANC supporters" did play a central role in trying to protect Pelwane during the January 1949 Riots,²² others - such as Women's League supporter Bertha Mkhize - had formed the Bantu Women's Craft Society in premises on Booth Road near Chesterville and actively encouraged a narrow populism based on the idea of African women withdrawing from all contact with prospective employers in Indian and White residential areas.²³ The complexities of politics during this period mitigated against a focus that was not localised. The only movement with which the Daughters of Africa sustained closer contact was the Nabantukop co-operative society.²⁴

During the same period all attempts to start a provincial federation of African independent trade unions failed. In 1946 twenty-three African trade unions, with support in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, formed a Natal branch of the Council for Non-European Trade Unions, but the unity could not be sustained.²⁵ In reality it appears as if the move was led by trade union leaders with little grass-roots awareness. Stanford Mtolo remember the events:

That was in fact before my time in the Union. I was still at the dairies. I never really heard about it until just before. We all acted - workers' unity was good but it did not come easily then. All kinds of things...The whole CNETU started in Johannesburg and probably it was an attempt to build us up through bringing it down to Durban - but I really don't know.²⁶

By 1948 the federation, now comprising five unions and called the Natal Federation of Trade Unions, was badly run and so poor that it was unable to send a single delegate to the annual conference of CNETU in Bloemfontein.²⁷

A striking lack of support for any broader unity was also evident in rank-and-file attitudes to other new organisations. In August 1947 many of the leaders of these new movements started the New Africa

20. *Ibid.*

21. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mzimela, 31 July 1982. Madie-Hall Xuma, while within the national organisation, also appears to have favoured a strategy which was more localised. Walker, *Women*, p 91.

22. Interview with Mrs J Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

23. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Mzimela, 31 July 1982.

24. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 22 February 1947.

25. *Ibid.*, 16 March 1946.

26. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

27. Ringrose, *Trade Unions*, p 55.

Progressive Alliance whose pamphlets espoused the ideas of 'New Africa' and called for unity between all African political organisations. The attempt failed to attract any support.²⁸

In 1948 H A van Rooyen contested Senator Edgar Brookes' re-election to Senate as one of the four representatives of Africans.²⁹ As part of his strategy van Rooyen formed an alliance with various leaders of the co-operative movement in Durban.³⁰ These leaders were given funds and would form the Bantu National Congress in the early 1950s. A pro-apartheid and anti-Indian body, this organization pictured itself as being the successor to the tradition of politics started by J.L. Dube.³¹ The movement failed, gaining support mainly only from herbalists,³² even though many popular co-operative leaders advanced the cause of the movement.³³

During the late 1940s it is clear that the Africans proletariat was both becoming more politically assertive, confident in the need for mass awareness, and effective in opposing initiatives not of its own choosing. There were few African leaders, whether part of the established educated elite or self-styled proletarian militants, who could afford to ignore the proletariat's new position in politics.

The only evident backlash from "the exempted" against the proletariat's perceptions of the position of the African elite appear to have come from a small group of Africans who self-consciously referred to themselves as "educated Africans". They attempted to form themselves into a literary and cultural club, based at the Bantu Social Centre, and declared that they wished to have nothing to do with either "politics" or "the ordinary native".³⁴ Interestingly enough the attempt failed, mainly the result of tsotsis invading their ballroom dance meetings,³⁵ and drunken jasbaadjie minstrels barging into their musical recitals.³⁶ After attempting to regroup at Ma Phillips' nearby classy shebeen they eventually abandoned their efforts.³⁷

Indeed the pressure on many scheduled educated African who felt the desire to become politically expressive to be wary of African workers even caused many to stop attending or speaking at meetings held by the Joint Councils.³⁸ Mtolo recalls the general mood of the times:

Those were incredible days. All you hear about now is how bad it was. Dirt, wages and the Nationalist victory and the Riots of 1949. But...it was a time when normal people ruled the

28. Ilanga lase Natal, 2 August 1947 and interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1982.

29. CKM, 2:XC9:30/84; A W G Champion - H S Msimang, 5 April 1948 and Ilanga lase Natal.

30. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985, and Kuper, African Bourgeoisie, p 305.

31. Interview with Mr C D S Mbutho, 3 April 1983.

32. Kuper, African Bourgeoisie, p 305.

33. Interview with Mr H C Sibisi, 11 November 1985.

34. Ilanga lase Natal, 23 March 1946.

35. Ibid.

36. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 5 May 1985. Kunene, then a leading jasbaadjie, claims to have been involved in some of the incidents.

37. Ilanga lase Natal, 6 April and 29 July 1946.

38. Ibid., and interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1982.

roost. I was a worker then and sent into the union. It was like that all round. Those of us, Africans, who were already exempted would ignore their brothers at their peril. Now they had to watch it. Even us in Youth League had to be very careful.³⁹

In a period of rising militancy when many existing political organisations were becoming increasingly aware both of their lack of real support and ineffectual political strategy, Durban's African proletariat was determined to direct its support to certain types of new organisation.

The Moral Economy of Proletarian Power

There existed four inter-related but conflicting cycles of accumulation and redistribution in Durban.⁴⁰ First, the dominant process of capitalist accumulation and wage employment. Second, although being steadily more and more marginalized, the various barter markets which thrived within the city during the later 1940s revealed the city not to be completely capitalist.⁴¹ Third, the municipality's own profiteering networks upon which the Native Revenue Account was totally dependent.⁴² The municipality gained profits from both leasing and trading premises to Africans in municipal eating houses and beerhalls, and from its monopoly over the manufacture, distribution and sale of sorghum beer in Durban. Finally, within the African population of the city there had for long existed an illicit but extensive nexus of petty commodity production and exchange. These various economic structures were inter-related in ways which were often highly conflictual and even directly contradictory.

Throughout the later 1940s the municipality was attempting to gain increased profits from its own trading activities which centred entirely around the city's African population. Not only were beer prices raised, but the rentals charged for trading on municipal property increased steadily.⁴³ Central to increased municipal profits was the need to curb if not completely destroy the operations of those African entrepreneurs whom, according to city bye-laws, were illegal traders. There was thus continual conflict and competition between the municipality and illicit African commercial operations in the city.

The attitudes of local representatives of commerce and industry were probably more ambivalent than those of municipal officials. During the later 1940s, employers were concerned about the way in which Africans seemed to be able to avoid total subjection to wage labour by relying on the profits from various entrepreneurial ventures conducted mainly in shantytowns. Employers also complained that shebeens and illicit liquor consumption were directly responsible for low productivity, absenteeism and the inability of Africans to

39. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

40. For useful perspectives see M Santos, *The Shared Space*, (London, 1979).

41. See Cooper *Struggle*, p 34.

42. P Maylam, 'Municipal fraud: the operation of the Native Revenue Account in Durban', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, no XI (1988), (forthcoming).

43. Mayors' Minute, 1947-1948.

afford basic household food requirements.⁴⁴ Consequently many employers called for a crackdown on illicit trading, particularly in liquor. Some even supported the city's Medical Officer of Health in calling for wages to be paid on Wednesdays as opposed to Fridays in order to prevent excessive drunkenness and consequent impoverishment. However, employers also believed that increasing African purchase of commodities produced by capitalist industry was the key to increased capitalist profitability. Paydays should thus not be altered as every person had the right to dispose of earnings in the manner of their own choice.⁴⁵ Behind such gracious concern for individual rights lay a desire to increase the level of consumer spending. Similarly, although desiring to see the "African as the future customer" many employers recognized that many essential commodities required by Africans in the city could be more cheaply acquired in the shantytowns. Employers were indeed heartened when they could prove the opposite.⁴⁶

The contradiction between the structures of capital accumulation and wage labour and increased commodity consumption within the African population was clearly evident in employers' attitudes towards providing increased opportunities for licensed African traders. Although the West and Smith Street commercial area was to remain the almost total preserve of White custom, industry desired to increase African consumer spending. Nevertheless, many employers were to question the benefits of creating a larger African trading class. Willson, then a municipal influx control inspector recalls the issue:

All this bloody palaver about the traders and politics. If we had got the thing together then and made a better class of bloke in the township things would have been better. They all say that now in 1980. But when people said it then, who was saying 'No'? Employers, No, we want workers not traders.⁴⁷

Even after African licensed traders started operating in the Cato Manor Emergency Camp the vast majority of commercial wholesalers refused to consider delivering goods to such shops. Their reluctance was not merely due to the dangers of driving through the area.⁴⁸

Furthermore, even the standards of work which industrial employers desired of their African labour was resented by African workers. During the later 1940s, there were no artisan training opportunities for African workers, with skilled labourers being predominantly White and Indian. Furthermore the vast majority of Africans were employed in unskilled and casual capacities.

The predominantly Indian traders in the Warwick, Grey, Alice and Victoria streets locale, which both straddled the largest African bus terminus in the city and was the centre of most African commercial spending, expressed different concerns. However here again are indications of the complex and very contradictory ways in

44. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), annual report, 1949-1950.

45. Durban Chamber of Commerce, annual report, 1949-1950.

46. Natal Chamber of Industry, annual report, 1952-1953.

47. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 15 December 1980.

48. MNAD; Cope Trading Report, September 1953.

which particular structures of accumulation inter-related. In the Indian-owned shops in Cato Manor Farm various basic items would be sold at "cut price" while customers could also purchase "on the slate".⁴⁹ In the heart of the Indian-owned business district credit was commercial suicide and instead "of having sales, they gave you socks with our trousers, and handkerchiefs with our shirts."⁵⁰ With competition among traders being fierce, and African custom valued, such traders operated on stock turnover rather than lowered prices. Such enforced consumerism was often resented by African customers. Constance Matiwane remembers how

You could buy a jacket and the Battersby hat with the feather and all. ... Look at my husband. He did this! And when he comes home, he shows these things to me. "Smart?" But then there are the shoes, and the shirt and the socks and ... No! All these things.⁵¹

Some would take socks and other unwanted items to the barter markets and swop for food.⁵²

For Africans, the force of ethnic consciousness in trade was clearly evident. Not only had highly ethnically conscious immigrants from Europe assumed control of various commercial ventures. Within the shopping areas frequented by the African proletariat the inter-connections between employment and various forms of ethnic consciousness was starkly apparent. Although Indian-owned shops had names which evoked images of inter-ethnic affiliation, African desires that Indian shop-owners employ Africans in the shops seemed to have gone unheard. In the Cato Manor Farm area, established Indian trading and transport businesses complained, not unreasonably, that the granting of sole trading rights to Africans in African residential areas would destroy their long existing businesses.

African proletarianization occurred in the context of these four differing structures which were all inter-related in often highly contradictory and conflicting ways. But for the African proletariat there were lessons to be learnt from the various economic structures which seemed to be the fundamental base to so much of city society. The central characteristics of particular African struggles within the city were in many important ways based on differing ways of perceiving the various economic structures within the city. During the later 1940s the African proletariat was asserting its right to remain permanently in an urban industrializing area. An acceptance of the power of industrialization did not however mean passive acceptance of the detrimental social consequences of industrialization which were so evident in proletarian daily life. However, an acceptance of the compelling force of industrialization did not necessarily mean that struggles around gaining increased material security within the city were always based around conflict within the production process.

In January 1946 Victor Maillie started the African Industrial Central Society. The aim of the society was to collect funds, through the purchase of shares in the society by wealthy Africans for the construction near Durban of a technical school and two hostels for male and female apprentices. The school, which would train

49. *Ibid.*

50. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985.

51. Interview with Mrs C Matiwane, 23 April 1983.

52. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 21 April 1985.

Africans as clean, Christian, law-abiding, productive workers, would then be responsible for allocating such labour to the African business sector.⁵³

The principles behind the move were threefold. First, African men were exploited in the factories and commercial sector of the city while African women were unable to find any 'proper' employment except in degrading and badly paid work in Indian shops or in Indian or White residential areas.⁵⁴ Furthermore, there were no apprentice schemes for Africans in Durban;⁵⁵ thus Africans should commence such schemes in order to compel industry and commerce to accept the legitimate rights of African workers in the city.⁵⁶ Second, Maillie believed that while the emerging African business sector was intent upon calling all Africans to trade only with Africans where such an alternative did exist, they often appeared to ignore the conditions under which the majority of African lived. Profits derived from African business activity should be directed in ways that would allow the African working class to both strengthen and advance.⁵⁷ Thirdly, Maillie, who had apparently been loosely associated with many African trade unions in earlier years,⁵⁸ asserted that workers should demand a clear voice in African political movements. Throughout the period Maillie, who was a member of neither the ANC nor the CYL, was engaged in laying the groundwork for such a policy through his attempts to mediate between the CYL and the ANC.⁵⁹ Mtole remembers that

He would often tell Champion a thing or two. Champion did not like that kind of behaviour...but he also told us where to get off. You had to listen - we didn't really disagree really. He was respected by all. He had friends in the trade unions but he would often tell workers not to leave their jobs, but to go to night schools.⁶⁰

In general the plan was a combination of certain principles of craft unionism and mission school education which had been integrated into a general notion of developing the economic base of a broad Africanism in which ordinary Africans would play a, if not the, influential role. Embodied in the idea were certain elements of a separatist Africanism. Maillie's initial strategy asserted that African women should withdraw from work in shops and residential areas. However, two essential issues must be emphasised. Firstly, it appears that many Indian business and political leaders were receptive to such plans.⁶¹ Secondly, the ideology of a militant 'New

53. These aims were clearly indicated on this organization's letterheads. See CKM; reel 15 A; 2: XC 9: 30/69; V L D Maillie - A W G Champion, 15 May 1950.

54. Ilanga lase Natal, 26 January 1946.

55. Ibid., 14 September 1946.

56. Ibid., 26 January 1946.

57. Interview with Mr S S L Mtole, 10 June 1983.

58. Ibid.

59. Father B Huss Papers, Catholic African Union meeting, 12 December 1943.

60. CKM; Reel 3B 2 : XC9:30/84; V L D Maillie - A W G Champion, 15 January 1950 and interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1982.

61. Interview with Mr S S L Mtole, 10 June 1980.

Africa' did embrace a concept of revenge as part of its strategy of transforming the position of Africans in Durban.⁶² Revenge, Africanism and anti-Indian feelings were closely related. It was but a small step to the Riots of January 1949.

While the African Industrial and Central Society was ultimately unsuccessful it was to create a favourable reaction from workers who were constantly being enticed into all kinds of self-help schemes which were really intended to advance a new African entrepreneur class. Thomas Shabalala recalls worker attitudes to these latter activities:

People get wise after a while. There were always ideas, often put forward by people who never had education but who were sharp. You would listen because they looked like Africans - but you never got bugger all. They were careful - they never showed their money...always in rags but you knew they had yours.⁶³

Many such schemes were started in Durban in the late 1940s, offering shares in freehold land companies⁶⁴ and prospective bus companies.⁶⁵ All such enterprises, whether initiated by the established elite or the 'bush lawyer' were to fail in their attempts to secure anything but an often meagre initial capital. While it cannot be denied in analysing the failure of such movements that the legal and political obstacles in the way of African business activity were enormous,⁶⁶ it is significant that these particular schemes never really attracted sustained support. In essence such activities ran counter to the principles espoused by the African proletariat.⁶⁷

In Durban, the period from 1946 to 1950 was the heyday of the Africans co-operative movement.⁶⁸ In Natal agricultural co-operatives and land banks had long been a dominant part of African rural life.⁶⁹ Many of these groups had been initiated by Father Bernard Huss and the Catholic African Union as a means to promote rural self-sufficiency and a Christian communalism to counter the growth of more radical ideologies.⁷⁰ Among Durban's African population, which had always maintained close links to the rural areas and was continually attempting to sustain a populist-orientated consciousness, there had always been self-help and co-operative schemes.⁷¹

62. Jacoby, *Wild Justice*, pp 301 - 2.

63. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 30 June 1985.

64. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 25 May 1946 and interview with Mr H C Sibisi, 11 November 1985. Sibisi was one of the 'directors' of the company; along with Dr Pixley Ka Izaka Seme and the Rev. A Mtinkulu, then a member of the Joint Councils and legal advisor to the ANC.

65. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 April 1947.

66. Kuper, *African Bourgeoisie*, pp 261-307.

67. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 21 April 1985.

68. For important perspectives on co-operatives, see M Mellor, J Hannah and J Stirling, *Workers Cooperatives in Theory and Practice*, (Milton Keynes, 1988).

69. L Brouckaert, 'Better Homes, Better Fields, Better Hearts : the Catholic African Union, 1927-1939' (Honours thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985).

70. Father B Huss, Lecture notes on land banks, n.d..

71. Interview with Mr H C Sibisi, 11 November 1985.

However in the late 1940s, the confidence imbued through the proletariat's own actions created in the co-operative movement a new political dimension. In the same way as 'New Africa' gained a material base in the co-operative movement, so the co-operative movement acquired a more fervent ideology. During the late 1940s African workers saw in the co-operatives not merely a single element in their everyday lives, but the vital organisational structure through which they could commence the task of transforming their economic and political position in the city. Gerhard Bhengu, the artist who was to illustrate *Ukuhambisana*, the Nabantukop Co-operative magazine, comments on co-operatives in Durban in the late 1940s:

We had always needed to trust one another...We had to have these ways of keeping together - even if it was small - you and your neighbours in Cato Manor... We all knew about these things from being farm boys - you know at home. But in the forties when I started drawing - Nabantukop's magazine - those people in Durban were cross - very cross. They wanted to do all kinds of things. There were these co-operatives all over the place - many even in a place like Cato Manor. It was something new that was happening and people went to the co-operatives.⁷²

In April a meeting of the Durban Co-operative buying clubs was held at the Msizini Hall despite harassment by municipal officials.⁷³ The meeting was chaired by W J Mseleku, a member of the Committee of the Natal branch of the ANC,⁷⁴ so-called 'father of the co-operative movement'⁷⁵ and composer of numerous songs urging Africans to wake up, unite and remember the dignity of their forebears.⁷⁶ In the early 1940s Mseleku had also, like Victor Maillie, been loosely associated with the African trade union movement.⁷⁷ He in fact approached Father Huss eager to discuss alternative strategies.⁷⁸ At the meeting were 109 representatives of co-operative clubs from Msizini, Dalton Road Hostel, Chesterville, Mayville, Umlazi, Maydon Wharf, Klaarwater and Clermont. While some complained of intimidation by the municipal Native Affairs Department,⁷⁹ this, it appears, actually rebounded in favour of the concept of co-operative clubs. Charles Khumalo has his recollection:

It often happened that KwaMuhle would try to stop you registering your club or holding a meeting but there was just too much going on and people were so against KwaMuhle that they carried on.⁸⁰

72. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1982.

73. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 6 March 1946.

74. Interview with Mr B B Cele, 18 August, 1947.

75. Couzens, *New Africa*, p 250.

76. W J Mseleku *Izingeniso*, n.d.

77. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

78. Father B Huss Papers, File: "Catholic African Union Minutes Durban", August 1944.

79. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 6 March 1946.

80. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 17 April 1985.

Some of the societies were quite prosperous, with the Sizanani Credit Bank in Mayville having capital reserves of 230. The Chesterville society, the Blackhurst Co-operative Buying Club run by C K Nakasa, had a capital of 300 and 190 worth of stock.⁸¹

These co-operative clubs were generally one of three types.⁸² First people would often endeavour to reduce the time and costs of providing household items by contributing to a common fund and then taking turns to journey to town where bulk purchases could be made. Other clubs operated along similar lines, except that the items were intended to be re-sold by each particular member of the co-operative. The third type of society was in essence a co-operative loan bank where each prospective member would have to pay a percentage of his salary to join and then "around 1 or 10 shillings each month depending upon how much he could afford or wanted to."⁸³ For supplying this capital the member was entitled to secure loans from the society. As Charles Khumalo remembers

Each month you would dress up in your smartest and there would be a meeting of the club. The Treasurer would tell all about the finances and then people could stand up and ask for loans. If you wanted to build a house, children's school, hospital - not silly things - but fine that was OK. Then the treasurer would tell everyone how you had contributed and we would all discuss it. After the meeting you would go and get drunk - it was because you were so happy things were coming right.⁸⁴

Underlying the functioning of the co-operative clubs were two economic principles which workers felt particularly eager to develop in their own ways. While the concept of profit was always accepted, it is clear that the popularity of the idea of a proper and acceptable profit⁸⁵ led to people criticizing the existing industrial and commercial sectors with a new-found militancy. Charles Khumalo explains the position:

Look if you go into an Indian store and want to buy something you know that you are being cheated. That Indian also has a family and has to live but so does the African who works there. You knew your brothers were getting peanuts so you were getting cheated.⁸⁶

Here was the essence of workers' perception of the city economy. Africans believed that their inability to secure sufficient earnings was a result of the imperfections, and indeed, the built-in bias, of the market. Hence the realisation through the co-operative movements of the power of controlling at least a segment of the city's redistributive cycle of capital. With the evidence of the success of Indian and later the newly immigrant traders

81. Ilanga lase Natal, 6 March 1946.

82. For a general analysis see M Ballinger Papers C1.2.5-13, "The Native and the Economic Question", n.d. and "Questions on Co-operation" and Father B Huss Papers, File "Co-operatives in Durban" *passim*.

83. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 30 June 1985.

84. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 7 July 1985.

85. U G 36/49; Evidence of A Mchunu and J Shandu.

86. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 19 July 1985.

and the way in which Afrikaans-speaking people were then boycotting non-Afrikaner shops, Africans saw in control of commercial capital the key to power in the city.⁸⁷

From this perception came the co-operatives' attitude towards Africans who were employed in the city. A distinction was generally made between those who were employed as domestics or shop assistants and those who laboured in industry. In order to extract revenge against shop-keepers and domestic employers and teach them the value of African labour, all Africans so employed should withdraw from such labour.⁸⁸ They should then receive education at the co-operative schools held each summer and winter⁸⁹ and either be employed by an African businessman or operate as an independent entrepreneur with the assistance of the co-operative.⁹⁰ While a strike or boycott tactic was upheld for such workers it was accepted that these tactics were clearly inappropriate for the majority of the working class. Gerhard Bhengu comments: "How could you do that. It's nonsense. There were no African industries anyway. We could teach the Indians and the madams a lesson but not the bosses - no we never said that".⁹¹ Instead the attitude was similar to that advocated by the African Industrial Central Society: Africans should learn the dignity of labour and work in the factories while bettering themselves at co-operative skills.⁹²

This approach is interesting, not only with regard to the inherent weakness of the co-operatives in the face of organised industry, but also in view of the fact that during this time capital/labour relations in the city were being strained by, amongst other things, a productivity crisis.⁹³ Many of the struggles waged during this period were aimed at attacking the dominant ideology in the city. With the limited scope available for co-operative movements, such movements accepted the need to work harder to change the ideology.

The second economic principle which underlay the co-operative movement was the belief that the faster money, goods and services could circulate the more economic wealth would be enhanced.⁹⁴ The velocity of capital circulation was crucial.⁹⁵ Workers should bring into the community as much of their salary as possible, and involve themselves in selling and buying. It was through this cycle of selling and buying that a community of workers, families and 'unemployed' would unite. Viewed from this position the value of wages from African labour employed in organised industry and commerce was central to the whole task of

87. For details see D O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme : Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948*, (Johannesburg, 1983) , pp 113-114.

88. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 30 November 1946.

89. M Baillinger Papers, C1.2.14. File 3; 'The Co-operative movement among South African Natives', and *Ilanga lase Natal*, 13 April 1946.

90. *Ukubambiswano*, November/December 1947.

91. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1985.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Natal Chamber of Industry, annual report, 1950-1951.

94. *Ukubambiswano*, June/July 1946.

95. See B K Short, 'The velocity of money and per capita income in developing economies : Malaysia and Singapore', *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol 9, no 1 (1973).

transforming African city life. However one of the implications of the approach was to dilute the class consciousness of workers.

A similar dilution of class perception was however not discernible in the co-operative societies' policy towards so-called "independent African business". To the co-operative movement such enterprises should be destroyed, by violence if necessary, because they saw themselves as merely part of a whole economy and felt no obligations to other Africans.⁹⁶ While this approach was criticised by some who felt that the future of co-operatives was uncertain because they were at "a disadvantage in a capitalist economy",⁹⁷ the general attitude among African workers seems to have been one that viewed such African business as being identical to White and Indian enterprise.⁹⁸

Throughout the late 1940s the number of co-operatives continued to grow. The main force behind the movement was Mseleku, leader of the Nabantukop Co-operative. This co-operative had been formed in 1945⁹⁹ but proved to be popular in Durban even before it officially started in the city in May 1947 when over 800 people attended the inaugural meeting.¹⁰⁰ Through Mseleku's guidance, probably after consultation with Father Bernard Huss,¹⁰¹ a Natal Bantu Co-operative Advisory Council was formed in April 1946; annual general meetings began to be held; and a series of winter and summer schools were organized.¹⁰²

At the second winter school held in Durban from 2 to 21 July 1946 prospective organizers of co-operatives were taught the following subjects: economic virtues, the principles and practice of cooperation, social hygiene, bookkeeping, music and drama, and various other topics.¹⁰³ While many of the lessons appear to have been given by Huss himself,¹⁰⁴ it is clear that neither Mseleku nor the co-operatives themselves felt any reluctance in gaining advice from more militant people and organisations. A colleague of Huss remembers:

Father Huss was involved in teaching, yes, but there were a lot of communists around and a great many of the African co-operatives did not appreciate a tight rein. They talked to whosoever they pleased and as a result became rather radical. I do not believe that there was much that anyone could have done.¹⁰⁵

96. Ilanga lase Natal, 30 November 1946.

97. Ibid.

98. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1985.

99. Ukubambiswano and Ilanga lase Natal, 13 April 1946.

100. Ibid., 28 July 1947.

101. Father B Huss Papers, File: "Durban" Father B Huss - W J Mseleku, n.d.

102. Ilanga lase Natal, 12 July 1947.

103. Ukubambiswano, December 1949.

104. Father B Huss Papers, File: "Pondoland" passim.

105. Interview with Father St George, 10 September 1985.

While other schools were held for new organisers,¹⁰⁶ the co-operatives also offered literacy classes,¹⁰⁷ a music festival where the municipal orchestra explained and then played various classical pieces,¹⁰⁸ and other evenings of dancing, choral recitals and music played by *jasbaadjie* bands.¹⁰⁹

The views of the African co-operatives were, rather strangely, to accord with and be influenced by the ideas of Roman Catholics and communists, who were both at that time conducting a running battle over whether the Communist Party of South Africa was anti-religious.¹¹⁰ While this often bitter debate ensued,¹¹¹ both the Catholic Church and the Party were eagerly sustaining and encouraging the co-operative movement.

For the Catholic Church the co-operative societies were the basis for future social harmony, at least in African society, and a counter to communism. For the church the co-operative movement would prevent the spread of trade unionism¹¹² while providing Africans with a new social structure suited to the needs of the urban environment.¹¹³ To the Catholic Church the conflict between "capital and labour" produced a situation where "not only wealth but despotic power is concentrated into the hands of a few". Furthermore, the tendency for capital to unite and "labour unions (to)...internationalise" resulted in the creation of "two opposing camps who consider their interests mutually antagonistic". The solution for Africans was a co-operative society which was, in Father Denis Hurley's view, "that form of society which is not organised according to positions in the labour market but according to the diverse functions which they exercise in society."¹¹⁴

The Communist Party of South Africa had developed a renewed interest in the political value of the co-operative societies during the latter part of the Second World War.¹¹⁵ In 1944 Moses Kotane, then Party secretary, wrote a pamphlet on how to operate co-operatives. Noting that "it is harder to break 20 matches than it is to break 1", Kotane saw in the societies the organisational means whereby people "learn how to do it together".¹¹⁶

106. Ilanga lase Natal, 13 April, 1946.

107. Ukubambiswano and Ilanga lase Natal, 12 July 1947.

108. Ibid., 8 February 1947.

109. Ukubambiswano, December 1949.

110. Father B Huss Papers, File : "Communism"; J R Khumalo "A Report on Communism in Durban" n.d. The Guardian and interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

111. See Edwards, "Recollections", pp 70-1.

112. Father B Huss Papers, File : "Durban", Father B Huss - Father A Kerautet, n.d.

113. Interview with Father St George, 10 September 1985. These attitudes are strikingly similar to those upheld and defended by Huss in the 1930s. Despite the criticism then levelled against them, the Catholic Church remained intransigent. See P B Rich, White Power and the Liberal Conscience : Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921-1960, (Johannesburg, 1984), pp 47-9.

114. Father B Huss Papers, File : "Issues", Father D Hurley "The Catholic Faith in South Africa", n.d. Emphasis added.

115. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

116. M Kotane, Lets do it Together, (Cape Town, 1944).

In the period after the war the Party in Durban still maintained close links with trade unions¹¹⁷ but became even more eager to sustain and promote a militant grass roots nationalism that would pressure the then leadership of the ANC in Natal into becoming both more democratic and more militant.¹¹⁸ This thinking was in line with the general theoretical debate within the Party which was best articulated in a Party report issued shortly before dissolution in 1950 :

...the national organisations can develop into powerful mass movements only to the extent that their contents and aims are determined by the interests of workers and peasants. The national organisations, to be effective, must be transformed into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie....In this party the class conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned would constitute the main leadership. It would be their task to develop an adequate organisational apparatus, to conduct mass struggles against race discrimination, to combat chauvinism and racialism in the national movement, to develop class consciousness in the people and to force unity in action between the oppressed people and between them and the European working class.¹¹⁹

As was often the case such statements obscured as much as they revealed. In Durban there was a certain amount of disagreement over the relationship between the ANC and radical nationalism; nationalism and class and particularly on the question of whether a militant but small organised working class could assume the desired role of vanguard influence.

It was in this context that the strategic role of the co-operative movement appears to have been discussed. While there were some who saw the co-operative movement as developing an economic base for a racist and generally reactionary nationalism the matter never seems to have been resolved. However at least one Party member was actively engaged in assisting the movement. Arenstein explains the rationale:

The national question usually arises in the market. It arises particularly when a group which is economically backward starts trading and goes into business and then starts trying to get its own people to buy from it in preference to buying from others. The Afrikaners did that on a big scale when they started their Reddingsdaadbond in 1938.... Africans also began to use this Africanism to try and build up their business.¹²⁰

However while both the Catholics and communists were keen to see the importance of the co-operatives, it is fair to say that while both were able to assist the movement, the thrust behind the co-operatives came essentially from a grass roots level.¹²¹

The co-operative movement was to be the real site of organisational growth in Durban in the period from 1946 to 1950. While older overtly political or trade union bodies remained static and lacked a really

117. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

118. Informant to remain anonymous. Whilst this informant was only to become closely involved with ex-Party members in the early 1950s his testimony is generally extremely reliable.

119. UG 10/53; Report of the Select Committee on the Suppression of Communism Act.

120. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.

121. Interview with Mr G Bhengu, 2 February 1982.

coherent support base, the co-operative societies were to develop and sustain a growing militancy which was intended to provide ordinary Africans with confidence, skills and a belief in their economic power to transform their position in society. Stanford Mtolo recalls:

It was a real beginning. You tell me how many groups - African political groups...can now ignore their people. Ja none. Well they could then and always did. Look at what Champion was doing. You laugh at the societies holding concerts, but the Africans are a part of the city - it was their money that bought the orchestra. We demanded our legitimate place in Durban. All that stuff about us being dirty and things. That really offended people. So we had to teach people a lesson. Showing our power to ourselves was the beginning. Up till then no other body had brought Africans to that stage.¹²²

The radical nature of the co-operative movement was to be clearly seen in an article written by a Chesterville co-operative leader which appeared in Ilanga lase Natal on 16 August 1947:

As an oppressed group there is a tendency, natural and understandable to place too much accent on politics. In a sense this cannot be avoided. The vote, however useful it is, is not everything. There are other powerful forces at work besides the vote, one of them being economic power. The man who wields a financial whip is often the master, the ruler, the law. We therefore congratulate the growth of the Co-operative Movement in Durban.¹²³

Having thus set out the perceived limitations which were embodied in other African political strategies and explained the economic dimension of politics, the writer then went on to offer a thinly veiled criticism of the ANC: the co-operative movement "is much more powerful, in membership and accumulated funds, than the Congress". Focussing on the city as a whole the article asserted that "this movement can easily penetrate the enemy camp and strike telling blows".¹²⁴

The tone of these articles then changed noticeably. The writer went on to declare in a rather sinister fashion that if the wishes of Africans, expressed through the co-operative movement, were not gained then a second stage would have been reached: "The authorities will only have themselves to blame if in their desperation, Africans resort to underground movements. History has shown that you cannot oppress a whole community without this happening. Already there are whisperings...."¹²⁵

There were more than whisperings. Many of the African proletariat felt frustrated and angered with an increasingly repressive city society. Taking to the streets in open revolt appeared to offer clear benefits. The outbreak of the January 1949 Riots was merely one indication of the changing tempo of proletarian struggle.¹²⁶

122. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1980.

123. Ilanga lase Natal, 16 August, 1947.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid.

126. For an important analysis of these riots see T Nuttall, "It seems peace but it can be war: The Durban Riots of 1949 and the struggle for the city". Paper presented at the South African Historical Association conference, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, January 1989.

In Mkhumbane there was considerable enthusiasm for the abortive general strike call made by Zulu Phungula.¹²⁷ Although lacking both effective trade unions, having an ambivalent relationship to the Congress Youth League and specifically trying to avoid conflicts in the sphere of formal employment, the 1950 'Stay-Away' was relatively successful.¹²⁸

But there was more. In the proletariat there was a small group who desired to take to the streets in armed rebellion. Shack leader and staunch African nationalist Ashmon Nene explains:

Just a few people. Maybe twenty. They were mad. 'This country must be liberated' - you know like with the rest of Africa, by guns. 'The time has come - Vukani!' They even used our motto but the Congress Youth League was not part of that.¹²⁹

In the immediate aftermath of the January 1949 Riots the aspirant insurrectionists were in Mkhumbane, encouraging shack-dwellers to embark on a larger scale rebellion.¹³⁰ These attempts were to fail.

In a similar manner, by 1950 most of the more militant and idealistic of the co-operatives had either disappeared or changed into relatively profitable groups having no interest in transforming society. Often those that had never sustained a militant outlook also disappeared, due to both managerial incompetence or the very fact of their success. The availability of large sums provided people with the opportunity to embezzle or leave the co-operatives and set up individual enterprises. A number of the African independent traders who operated in Durban from the 1950s onwards had their origins in the co-operatives.

Many of the co-operatives became integrated into the expanding Nabantukop movement which had always been more middle class in orientation. As time went by they focussed more on bureaucratic issues leaving the more visionary aspects by the wayside. As the Nabantukop foundered it also became involved in such operations as the 'selling' of letters of exemption.¹³¹

As the co-operatives developed, prospects for transforming the whole concept into a more communalist socialism disappeared as they remained concerned just with marketing. While manufacturing co-operatives are generally accepted to be more difficult to develop than marketing ones, with lack of capital and technical knowledge being primary constraints, no-one ever attempted to develop upon the ideas of Victor Maillie.

Indian-owned shops and merchants effectively competed with African co-operatives through offering credit facilities and in offering certain goods, like paraffin, or bars of soap, at vastly reduced prices.¹³² Under

127. See Hemson, 'Dockworkers', p 371.

128. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

129. Interview with Mr A Nene, 29 January 1984.

130. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 22 January 1949.

131. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 5 May 1985. By 1952 the Nabantukop operation had collapsed into bankruptcy.

132. MNAD; Cope Trading Report, September 1953.

the guise of assisting African co-operatives in the face of Indian competition, wealthy African traders then started "wholesale" business which began to compel small co-operatives to trade with them.¹³³

By 1949 the "fertilizer ran out". With workers earning declining real wages and the City Council halting, in 1950, the entry of Africans from any area but those reserves which surrounded Durban and still maintained a certain level of viable agricultural production, the amount of money available for redistribution within the city declined drastically. Shabalala, a resident of Mkhumbane explains:

After the Riots (of January 1949) was the time when the fertilizer ran out. That was the start of people becoming poor. No food, no jobs and lots of sickness. Then you had to look after yourself.¹³⁴

It was then that class tensions within the African proletariat became increasingly more evident.

Conclusion

The notion of 'New Africa' was intended to stimulate mass unity among ordinary Africans. The idea of mass movement means a diverse leadership, but the leaders were never really able to clearly define the ideology and lacked a real notion of how the city could be restructured. Many of the ex-peasants, while providing insights into capitalist market relations, lacked real experience in the city. Many were trying to steer clear of formal wage relations. While having charisma and able to make political capital out of the weaknesses apparent in the African elite's belief in the clear distinctions between righteousness and lawlessness, many of the new leaders were perhaps more jealous of the position of the elite than they were prepared to admit. Within the proletariat the notion of a broad mass unity was in contradiction to the deepening class contradictions then developing amongst the city's workforce. The working class had foregone struggles at the workplace, accepted the existence of the capitalist economy, and tried to sustain a notion of what it meant to be a worker through struggles outside the factory floor. While the proletariat was able to exert a clear and vociferous constraint over political expression in the city during the later 1940s, their failure to produce either radical or social democratic gains and the way in which African society had developed during the period was to result in a generally reduced level of political consciousness that was to last well into the 1950s.

133. Interview with Mr A Nene, 29 January 1984.

134. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 21 June 1985.