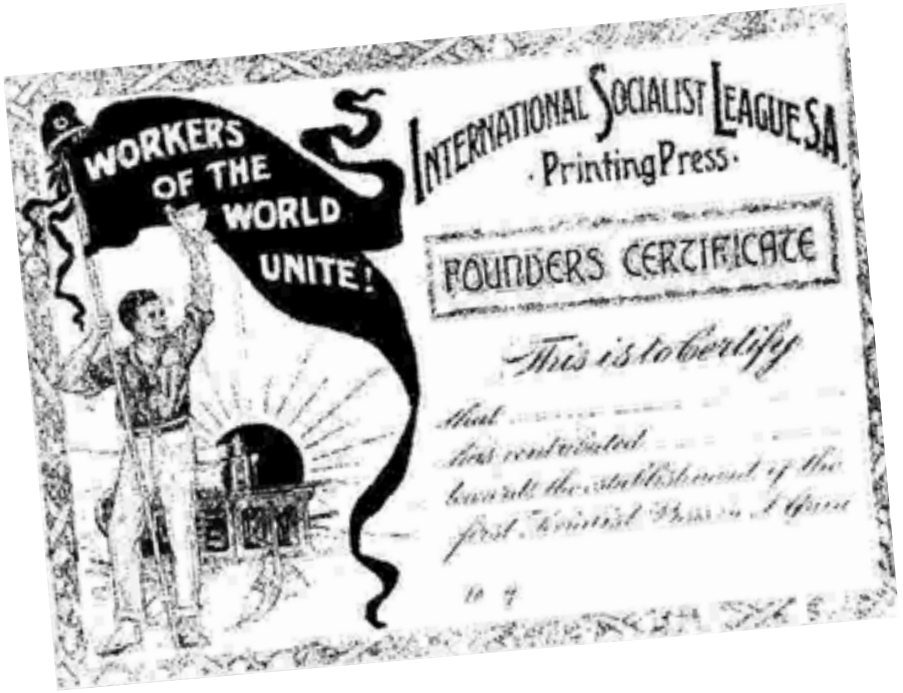
"Sifuna Zonke!"

Revolutionary Syndicalism, the Industrial Workers of Africa, and the Fight Against Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1915-1921



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A South African Anarchist Pamphlet

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“Sifuna Zonke!”

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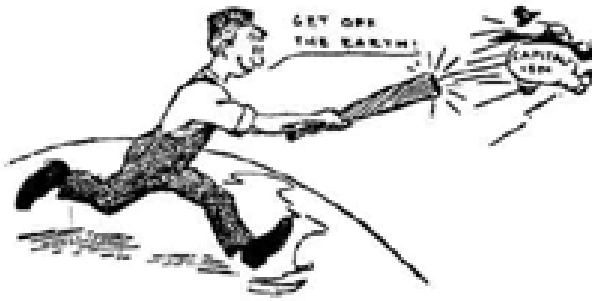
Bikisha Media Collective
South Africa

The rich live like princes, waited on by liveried flunkies, rushing about in their motorcars, entertaining, receiving, squandering money like water, growing richer day by day. What wonder that they care little for the condition of the poorer portion of the city?[1]

In common with the Labour movement elsewhere in the world, South Africa passed through a period of vigorous reaction against politics on the working class front ... The disillusion of the workers' movement in the value of parliamentary reform was now spreading from Europe, from Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand ... From America came the ringing call to action of Haywood and Eugene Debs of the IWW, while from France was spreading an enthusiasm for the doctrines of the revolutionary Syndicalists with their faith in the industrial struggle and the general strike and their mistrust of politics ...[2]



The Best Strike of All.

Revolutionary syndicalism - the strategy of bringing about a stateless socialist society through a revolutionary general strike in which organised labour, through its trade unions, seizes and places under self-management the means of production - played a central, but today, largely forgotten, role in the early twentieth-century South African labour movement.

Before the 1920s, it was revolutionary syndicalism, which is rooted in the classical anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin, rather than the dry Marxism of the Second International, which dominated the thought and actions of the radical left in South Africa. And so it was, ultimately, classical anarchism that pioneered labour organising and anti-racist work amongst workers of colour in South Africa: the nationally oppressed Coloured, Indian and African proletariat.

This pamphlet examines some of the history and legacy of the "red-and-black tradition" in the South African working class. One reason is simply to recover an important part of anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist history. Little is known about the history of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in Africa generally, and in the British Empire, particularly.

More importantly, however, there is much to learn from the history of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa. While the local movement was never as large as many other "third world" anarchist/revolutionary syndicalist movements, it did have some very important accomplishments, not least of which must be counted founding of the Industrial Workers of Africa in 1917: the first trade union for African workers in South African history.

This union was only one of a number of revolutionary syndicalist unions established in the 1910s by South African revolutionary syndicalists on the model of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the United States. These unions included an official South African section of the IWW (1910), the Indian Workers Industrial Union (1917), the Industrial Workers of Africa (1917), the Sweet and Jam Workers Industrial Union (1918), the Clothing Workers Industrial Union (1918), and the Horse Drivers' Union (1918/9). This young revolutionary syndicalist union movement was distinguished by its focus on organising workers of colour labouring under racist and colonial rule.

Africa, 19 June 1918 by unknown detective, in Justice Department files, 3/527/17, National Archive, Pretoria.
23. Quoted in Callinicos, *op cit*., p. 90.
24. Cited in Forman, 1992, *op cit*., p. 59.
25. P.L. Wickens, 1978, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa*. Oxford University Press. Cape Town. p. 27.
26. The 1925 ICU constitution, which includes the preamble in question, may be found in Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, 1972, *From Protest to Challenge: a documentary history of African politics in South africa, 1882-1990*. Hoover Institution. Stanford. Volume one. pp. 325-326.
27. For example, Forman, 1992, *op cit*. Also see, for example, Brian Bunting, 1975, *Moses Kotane: South African revolutionary*. Inkululeko. London; Eddie Roux, 1948, *Time Longer than Rope: a history of the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa*. V. Gollancz. London; Jack and Ray Simons, 1969, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950*. Penguin. Harmondsworth; South African Communist Party [?Jeremy Cronin], ?1990, *The Red Flag in South Africa: a popular history of the South African Communist Party*. Johannesburg.

ISL Graphics

Page 2:- "The Best Strike of All"
The revolutionary strike defeats capitalism in "The Best Strike of All".
SOURCE: *The International*, 2 April 1920

Page 3:-
"The Employer (as Labour grips the new shield): “Heaven help me! The rascal's getting wise, and taking a leaf out o' my book!”
SOURCE: *The International*, 6 February 1920.

Page 6:- "OBU" cartoon 1920:
Cartoon from *The International* under heading "South African Labour Must Unify Its Forces".
Caption reads “Industrial Unionism in South Africa demands solidarity with the Native and Coloured Striker”.

Notes

1. Pratt, The Real South Africa, 1912, quoted in Luli Callinicos, 1981, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*. Ravan Press. Johannesburg. p. 16.
2. R. K. Cope, [? 1940] n.d., *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W. H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town. Stewart Printing. pp. 108-110.
3. In 1908, the IWW in the United States split into a "Chicago" faction, associated with "Big Bill" Haywood and Vincent St. John, and a "Detroit " faction, associated with Daniel De Leon. The IWW in South Africa was associated with the former, and the Socialist Labour Party with the latter.
4. *The International*, 7 January 1916, "League Conference"; *The International*, 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League".
5. *The International*, 16 June 1916, "Inviting Jim Sixpence to Tea".
6. *The International*, 16 June 1916, "Inviting Jim Sixpence to Tea".
7. *The International*, 16 February 1917, "The Poor Whites' and a Page From History"; 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union".
8. Lionel Forman, 1992, *A Trumpet from the Housetops*. Mayibuye Books. University of the Western Cape. p. 54.
9. *The International*, 5 April 1918.
10. *The International*, 19 October 1917, "The Pass Laws: organise for their abolition". My emphasis.
11. *The International*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban". For more details, see E. A. Mantzaris, 1983, "The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920", in *Journal of Natal and Zululand*, VI.
12. *The International*, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Waking Up".
13. Doreen Musson, 1989, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working-Class: a political biography*. Buchu Books. Cape Town. pp. 17-18.
14. *The International*, 27 June 1919; 4 July 1919.
15. *The International*, 2 January 1920, "Kimberly Strikes: more white scabbing".
16. *The International*, 21 December 1918, "Cape Notes".
17. Record in the Department of Justice, "The ISL and Coloured Workers," police reports kept in National Archives, Pretoria, JD 3/527/17.
18. In *idem*.
19. Police report on Industrial Workers of Africa, May 1918 (full date illegible), in Justice Department files, 3/527/17, National Archive, Pretoria.
20. Talbot Williams, 4 January 1918, *The Burning Question of Labour in South Africa* (International Socialist League: Johannesburg). The African Peoples Organisation issued the speech in a separate edition. Talbot Williams, 4 January 1918, *White Trade Unionism, or a call to the Non-European Workers of South Africa* (African Peoples Organisation).
21. F. A. Johnstone, "The IWA on the Rand: socialist organising amongst black workers on the Rand 1917-8", in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, Townships and Protest*. (Ravan, Braamfontein, 1979), p. 260.
22. Police report on meeting of Transvaal Native Congress and Industrial Workers of

★INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's industrial revolution can be dated back to the discovery of diamonds in 1867, and of gold in 1886, in the interior. Prior to the mineral discoveries, the South African interior was a relatively undeveloped area. It was divided between warring Afrikaner republics and African chiefdoms, based on low-technology farming systems, neighbouring two coastal British colonies, and scarcely integrated into the world capitalist system beyond a small ivory trade.

All of this changed in the 1880s. Vast sums of capital flooded into the country. The Witwatersrand area, site of the gold discoveries, and a farming area, became overnight the site of a vast new urban complex, centred on Johannesburg, but stretching from Randfontein in the west to Benoni in the east. In the mid-1880s, Johannesburg had about 3,000 prospectors; ten years later, it was a city of 100,000, and by 1913, it housed 250,000 people. The British Empire began to pay close attention to the region, and, through a series of conflicts, most notably the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) against two surviving Afrikaner republics, took power and founded the modern South African state as a white dominion.

Locked deep underneath the new towns, hidden under tons of rock, was the world's largest gold-bearing reef. It was no place for the small independent prospector. By the 1890s, mining operations were concentrated in the hands of a few giant companies, which were also linked to one another through the Chamber of Mines established in 1887. The largest company, Wernher-Beit and Eckstein, employed more people than the combined railways and harbours of both British colonies and both Afrikaner republics combined. And ruling these giant companies were the "Randlords," the big mine-owners.

THE EMPLOYER (to Labour grips the new shield): "Hooray, help me!" "The swords getting wise, and taking a leaf out of my book!"

Only such companies could afford the machinery needed to haul tons of rock from hundreds of meters underground to the surface for milling and processing, and do so on the scale needed to make mining the generally low-grade ore profitable. Given a fixed international gold price, the companies decided to economise on labour costs, saving on wages and working conditions. Health and safety was one major area of savings: in the 1910s, mineworkers, as a whole, lived ten years less than other men.

A large number of white workers had flooded into the country from Australia, America, Europe and the countryside of South Africa: by 1913, there were 40,000 on the Witwatersrand, 22,000 of whom worked on the mines. For the white workers drawn

to the mines and cities of the vast new Witwatersrand complex from across the world, the mines offered unmatched wages for skilled men. For poor white Afrikaners, the mines offered employment as local sharecropping and family farming systems disintegrated in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War and the rapid commercialisation of agriculture in response to massive demand from the Witwatersrand.

But the bulk of the workforce was drawn from the African population within the Afrikaner republics and in the surrounding British and Portuguese colonies and protectorates. These workers came to the mines to raise money for taxes, and to support their small farming homesteads, which were situated on ever-smaller, and poorer, parcels of land as white landlords expropriated the best lands for large commercial farms. They entered the cities as a conquered people, their lands under imperial authority, their chiefs colluding in labour recruitment to the mines. In short, the African working class was ideal for exploitation by the Randlords.

African workers entered the mines as indentured workers, forbidden to strike; they lacked basic political rights and trade union rights; their movement was controlled by the "pass law" internal passport system; and they were housed on the mines in large, closely regulated, single-sex hostels. And they were migrant workers: their families stayed in the countryside, farming, whilst they completed their contracts on the mines. By 1913, there were 195,000 African mineworkers on the Witwatersrand, and a further 40,000 African workers in other sectors.

There were also smaller communities of Indian workers, concentrated in the Natal colony, and descended from indentured Indian plantation workers, who were brought out in the 1860s, and Coloured workers, a racially mixed group descended, in large part, from slaves in the old Cape Colony. They, too, were subject to racial discrimination, albeit on a lesser scale than the Africans.

Andrew Dunbar in 1960 at the age of 80

★REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1908-1916

It was in this context that a South African revolutionary syndicalist movement emerged. As was the case in much of Latin America, many of its founders were immigrants: almost all were white workers from Britain and east Europe.

The first local socialist paper on the Witwatersrand was the *Voice of Labour* founded in 1908. By 1909, this weekly newspaper carried regular features and debates on revolutionary syndicalism. In 1910, a local section of the IWW was founded, as well as a local section of the Socialist

Appendix:

LISTEN, WORKERS, LISTEN!

(Manifesto of the Industrial Workers of Africa, issued in Johannesburg, September 1917, in Sesotho and isiZulu)

Workers of the Bantu race: Why do you live in slavery? Why are you not free as other men are free? Why are you kicked and spat upon by your masters? Why must you carry a pass before you can move anywhere? And if you are found without one, why are you thrown into prison? Why do you toil hard for little money? And again thrown into prison if you refuse to work? Why do they herd you like cattle into compounds?

WHY?

Because you are the toilers of the earth. Because the masters want you to labour for their profit. Because they pay the Government and Police to keep you as slaves to toil for them. If it were not for the money they make from your labour, you would not be oppressed.

But mark: you are the mainstay of the country. You do all the work, you are the means of their living. That is why you are robbed of the fruits of your labour and robbed of your liberty as well.

There is only one way of deliverance for you Bantu workers. Unite as workers. Unite: forget the things which divide you. Let there be no longer any talk of Basuto, Zulu, or Shangaan. You are all labourers; let Labour be your common bond.

Wake up! And open your ears. The sun has arisen, the day is breaking, for a long time you were asleep while the mill of the rich man was grinding and breaking the sweat of your work for nothing. You are strongly requested to come to the meeting of the workers to fight for your rights.

Come and listen, to the sweet news, and deliver yourself from the bonds and chains of the capitalist. Unity is strength. The fight is great against the many passes that persecute you and against the low wages and misery of you existence.

Workers of all lands unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win.

in South Africa. A thin red-and-black line runs through the IWW, via the International Social League, through the Industrial Workers of Africa and other syndicalist unions that organised workers of colour, through the early African Peoples Organisation and Transvaal Native Congress, to end up woven into the complex political fabric of the gigantic ICU.

Another important conclusion must also be drawn: the notion that classical anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism lacked an analysis of national oppression and colonialism is simply, quite wrong.

Revolutionary syndicalism (and anarchism) played an important role in the struggle against both capitalism and colonialism in early twentieth-century South Africa. Nor was it alone: not only did its counterparts in the Western countries oppose racial segregation and imperialist adventures - witness the campaigns of the IWW, the Spanish anarchists and the Japanese anarchists - but in other "third world" regions - in Argentine, Brazil, in China, in Cuba, in Korea, in Ireland, in Mexico, Nicaragua, in the Ukraine - anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists were in the forefront of fighting imperialism and racism.

In its heyday, the 1890s to the 1930s, the classical anarchist/revolutionary syndicalist movement was not just an international, and multi-national movement. It was also openly and consistently internationalist, and anti-racist.

Pass protestors gather outside Johannesburg pass office in March 1919

Labour Party, aligned to a rival IWW group.[3] The IWW, founded by the fiery blacksmith Andrew Dunbar, grabbed headlines after organising militant strikes amongst tramway workers in Johannesburg in 1911.

IWW tramway strikers pose just before coming out in 1911

These groups disappeared around 1913, and were superseded by the International Socialist League in September 1915. The International Socialist League emerged out of a split in the South African Labour Party. Although nominally linked to the socialist parties of the Second International, the South African Labour Party was, in fact, a racist organisation that supported racial segregation, the expulsion of Asians from South Africa, and race-based job reservation. The same policies were supported by almost all South African trade unions at the time, which were based almost entirely amongst white workers and structured, in the main, as craft unions open to artisans only.

However, the South African Labour Party included in its early years, a left-wing minority, radicalised by the events of 1913 - when a militant showdown between white workers and the government in July led to armed clashes in the streets, over thirty dead, and humiliating concessions by government - and 1914 - when a second general strike was suppressed with martial law. After failing to reverse the South African Labour Party's decision to support World War One, the left-wing minority walked out and joined forces with the veterans of the IWW and the Socialist Labour Party to form the International Socialist League in September 1916.

By January 1917, the International Socialist League had adopted revolutionary syndicalist principles, declaring at its first conference that the "the significant implication of our anti-war stand" was "That we encourage the organisation of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, colour or creed, as the most effective means of providing the necessary force for the emancipation of the workers."[4]

This meant, in practice, that the existing structure of the South African labour movement had to be radically restructured: the racially-exclusive craft unions had to be superseded by industrial unions open to workers of all races; the focus on parliament had to be replaced by a focus on mass action and the revolutionary general strike.

Industrial Unionism in South Africa demands solidarity with the Native and Coloured Striker.

Drawing on arguments developed by the revolutionary syndicalists associated with the defunct *Voice of Labour*; the International Socialist League argued that revolutionary change in South Africa required unity between white and African workers, a struggle against the racial prejudice of white workers, and a struggle against the racist form of labour control that enslaved African workers.

"Socialism," commented the organisation's weekly newspaper, *The International*, "can only be brought about by *all the workers* coming together on the industrial field to take the machinery of production into their own hands and working it for the good of all".[5] "The man who talks about a Socialism which excludes nine-tenths of the workers is not being honest with himself".[6] White workers had to choose between becoming a "closed guild of favoured white workers to police it over the bottom dog, the great mass of the unskilled," or "giving up… craft and colour vanity" to join their fellow workers in the struggle for the "control and administration of industry".[7]

The International Socialist League also believed that capitalism was directly responsible for the national oppression of African workers because the system of African labour control was designed to provide the "employers generally and particularly industrial employers, that most coveted plum of modern Imperialism, plentiful cheap labour".[8] This implied working-class methods of struggle against racial oppression: "the one weapon the ruling class fear - the organisation of the native workers".[9]

> Once organised, these workers can bust-up any tyrannical law. Unorganised, these laws are iron bands. *Organise industrially*, they become worth no more than the paper rags they are written on.[10]

★ORGANISING WORKERS OF COLOUR INTO REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALIST UNIONS, 1917-1921

The International Socialist League tried to reform the white craft unions from within, but met with little success.

From 1917, it placed increasing emphasis on itself initiating labour unions amongst African, Coloured and Indian workers. In March 1917, Gordon Lee of the

Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, or ICU. The ICU would grow explosively from 1924 onwards - a time when the International Socialist League and most of the revolutionary syndicalist left had been absorbed into the new Communist Party of South Africa - and reach a peak of about 100,000 members, the biggest single African trade union or political organisation until the 1950s.

The ICU never had the clear political programme or strategy of the Industrial Workers of Africa. Its militants espoused a range of ideologies, from mission Christianity, to Africanist separatism, to a vulgar Marxism. Nor did it have a proper democratic structure: power was concentrated in the hands of middle-class leaders, rather than being based on shop-floor assemblies and committees, as revolutionary syndicalism argued.

Yet the Industrial Workers of Africa, and revolutionary syndicalism, had left an imprint on the ICU. The constitution of the ICU was modelled on that of the IWW, calling on "workers through their industrial organisations" to "take from the capitalist class the means of production, to be owned and controlled by the workers for the benefit of all, instead of for the profit of a few … This is the goal for which the ICU strives along with all other organised workers throughout the world."[26]

Even the more conservative ICU leaders continued cherishing a vision of one big revolutionary strike in which capitalism and white supremacy would be dethroned, and a millennium of well-being and equality ensue. Perhaps the ICU was not syndicalist enough - it lacked a clear strategy and a properly democratic structure - but it was, at the very least, quasi-syndicalist.

★CONCLUSION: THE THIN RED-AND-BLACK LINE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Revolutionary syndicalism, and so, anarchism, so long forgotten and wished away by mainstream histories of the left in South Africa - in particular, by the writings of Communist Party activists and supporters[27] - needs to be recognised as an integral and central part of the history of the labour, socialist and civil rights movement

Ngojo, Cetiwe, Mvabaza and Kraai at the time of the 1918 trial

for incitement to public violence in July: S. P. Bunting, T. P. Tinker and H. C. Hanscombe of the International Socialist League, Cetiwe, Kraai and J. D. Ngojo from the Industrial Workers of Africa, and L. T. Mvabaza and D. Letanka from the Transvaal Native Congress. According to the *Black Folks Who's Who*, "For the first time in South Africa, members of the European and Native races, in common cause united, were arrested and charged together for their political activities"[24]. Perhaps as important: most delegates in this treason trial were activists in the revolutionary syndicalist movement.

The case fell through, but mass struggles continued. On the 30 March 1919, the Transvaal Native Congress launched a campaign against the pass laws on the Witwatersrand. Again, Cetiwe and Kraai were in the forefront, and were part of the delegation that meet the Chief Pass Officer in Johannesburg to demand the abolition of the pass laws. The campaign continued for three months, with an estimated 700 Africans arrested and charged by May, despite the best efforts of the International Socialist League to provide legal aid. At this point the conservatives in the Transvaal Native Congress regrouped, and managed to shut down the campaign and return the Congress to its traditional, quiescent role and moderate approach.

Following this debacle, Cetiwe and Kraai left for Cape Town in July 1919 to establish an Industrial Workers of Africa branch. On the 17 December 1919, the Industrial Workers of Africa, and another independent union, the industrial and Commercial Union, organised a strike by over 2000 African and Coloured dockworkers. This was part of a campaign initiated by the craft union-based Cape Federation of Trade Unions - which was influenced by members of the Industrial Socialist League at the time - against food exports, which were seen as contributing to the high cost of living, but the two unions also added demands for wage increases. The strike collapsed after Christmas although the wage demand was later granted.

★FROM THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF AFRICA TO THE ICU, 1919-1921

Nonetheless, relations between the two unions, which had previously been "somewhat cool,"[25] now became closer, and by 1920, the two unions appear to have merged, and in 1921, both were part of a new union movement, the Industrial and

International Socialist League helped launch an Indian Workers' Industrial Union "on the lines of the IWW" in Durban.[11] Indian members of the League, Bernard L. E. Sigamoney and R. K. Moodley, managed the Union, and it was active in a number of industries, including printing, tobacco, laundry and the docks. It also attracted the interest of waiters, mineworkers and sugar plantation workers.[12]

The International Socialist League also noted a "great awakening of industrial solidarity among the Coloured workers" in the diamond-mining town of Kimberly, and sent Sam Barlin to organise a Clothing Workers Industrial Union there, which recruited several hundred mainly Coloured clothing workers; it was chaired by two Coloured workers, a Mr. Davis in the chair with Fred Pienaar as secretary.[13] Another young militant was Johnny Gomas, later a prominent unionist and communist. By 1919, the new union had won recognition from the employers and secured substantial wage increases for its members. At least fifteen union members also joined the International Socialist League, which ran a small office in the town. A section of the union was established in Johannesburg in June 1919.[14]

In the meantime, Sam Barlin also established a Horse Drivers' Union in Kimberely, again amongst Coloured workers, who struck in late 1919.[15] In Cape Town, the Industrial Socialist League, a second revolutionary syndicalist group founded in May 1918 and which maintained fraternal relations with the Johannesburg-centred International Socialist League, organised a Sweets and Jam Workers' Industrial Union amongst mainly Coloured factory workers.[16]

Johnny Gomas in 1931

Three months after the launching of the Indian Workers' Industrial Union in Durban, the International Socialist League advertised a meeting in Johannesburg to "discuss matters of common interest between white and native workers". The meeting, held on the 19th July 1917, was attended by ten white International Socialist League members, and twenty Africans,[17] and became the basis of a night school for African workers, held on Thursday nights in Neppe's shop, corner of McLaren and Fox streets (down the road from the International Socialist League offices), Johannesburg. The focus of the study sessions was on the operation of capitalism, the need for class struggle against capitalism, and the need for revolutionary trade unionism. Key activists from the International Socialist League included S. P. Bunting and the fiery Andrew Dunbar, former general-secretary of the IWW in South Africa.

On the 27 September 1917, the weekly study groups were transformed into South Africa's first labour union for African workers, the "Industrial Workers of Africa," with an all-African organising committee. Asked in one study group what they wanted, the African workers' present had replied "Sifune zonke!": "we want everything!"

This was adopted as the slogan of the new union, and a leaflet was issued urging all African workers to join. "Workers of the Bantu race," it asked, "why do you live in slavery? … Because the masters want you to labour for their profit." So "There is only one way of deliverance for you Bantu workers. Unite as workers … deliver yourself from the bonds and chains of the capitalist."[18]

★THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF AFRICA, FROM JOHANNESBURG TO CAPE TOWN, 1917-1919

Reuben Cetiwe, one of the main organisers, made the aims of the new union clear:

> We are here for Organisation, so that as soon as all of your fellow workers are organised, then we can see what we can do to abolish the Capitalist System. We are here for the salvation of the workers. We are here to organise and to fight for our rights and benefits.[19]

Whilst its numbers were small - perhaps never exceeding two hundred - the Industrial Workers of Africa had an enormous impact. Its activists were prominent in the wave of labour unrest that broke out between 1918, and its ideas made a real imprint on the civil rights and labour organisations active at the time, even persisting, as we shall see, although in diluted form, in the African labour movement of the 1920s.

Cetiwe at time of the 1918 trial

In late 1917, the Industrial Workers of Africa met with the two main black nationalist organisations: the African Peoples Organisation and the Transvaal Native Congress (a section of the South African Native National Congress, nowadays known as the African National Congress, which had been founded in 1912 as, essentially, a voice for the struggling African middle-class and chiefs).

The Industrial Workers of Africa certainly made a large impact on the African Peoples Organisation: in his next public speech, Talbot Williams of the latter organisation argued at length for non-racial, industrial unionism, focussing on the "the organisation of black labour, upon which the whole commercial and mining industry rests today."[20] Reprinted in at least two editions, the speech achieved a wide circulation and remains one of the most outstanding pro-labour statements of the period. Relations with the Transvaal Native Congress, were initially more strained: the delegates from the Industrial Workers of Africa and the Congress sat apart at the joint meetings, and clashed in discussions. In their own meetings, members of the Industrial Workers of Africa complained loudly about

meeting with the Transvaal Native Congress because "they are the men who organise rich and high people who are the men who suck our blood and sell us."[21]

However, some of the key Industrial Workers of Africa members such as Cetiwe and Hamilton Kraai were active members of the Transvaal Native Congress. Here, they played an important role in forcing that organisation, which had traditionally relied on the extremely moderate strategy of petitioning the English Crown for relief from racial oppression, to pay greater attention to labour issues and the use of direct, mass, action in battling the State and employers.

In 1918, an unprecedented wave of strikes against the rising cost of living, by both white workers, and workers of colour, swept the country. The Industrial Workers of Africa was well placed to give a lead. In June 1918, 152 African workers, employed by the municipality of Johannesburg to collect night soil from the white districts, went on strike for a one-shilling-a-day increase in their tiny wages. They were jailed, and quickly sentenced by the notorious Judge McFie - "a bear on the bench," in the words of the International - to "do the same work as they had been doing" but now to "carry out the employment with an armed escort" from jail.

The sentence, harsh even by the standards of the time, outraged African and progressive white opinion across the Witwatersrand. On the 10 June 1918, the Transvaal Native Congress called a mass rally of African workers in Johannesburg to protest. When old-guard Congress leaders suggested a letter of protest to the government, the audience disagreed loudly, and took its lead from an Industrial Workers of Africa member present, Mtota, who called for a general strike to demand the release of the workers. An organising committee made up of members of the International Socialist League, the Industrial Workers of Africa, and the Transvaal Native Congress was then set up to plan for the proposed strike.

At the next meeting, held on the 19 June, and attended by over 1000 people, the organising committee made its recommendation: Not only should the municipal workers be released, but employers must "pay every native 1/- per day" increase, or a strike would follow on the 2 July 1918."[22] "The capitalists and workers are at war everywhere in every country," commented the speaker for the committee, and "The white workers do not write to the Governor-General when they want more pay. They strike and get what they should."[23] And so should the Africans!

But weak organisation - and perhaps nerves and inexperience - lead the committee to call off the strike at the last minute (although several thousand African miners did not receive news of the cancellation in time, and came out anyway).

July 1918 mass IWA / SANNC / ISL rally

Government soon arrested seven activists