

The South African Newspaper and Printing Industry and its Impact on the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924

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Introduction

Various theoretical approaches to evaluating the impact of the media on society have been drawn on over the past decades, ranging from Marxist media critiques, a culturalist approach and discourse analysis, to media effects and political culture theory. The divergent frameworks and their frequently contradictory findings have resulted in “see-sawing estimates of media power”¹ which have characterized the field over the years. This article adopts an approach that attempts to consider questions of the power of the press in terms of a “concrete analysis of economic relations and the ways in which they structure both the processes and results of cultural production.”² In media scholarship, this approach would ordinarily be described as part of the Marxian political economy paradigm, as it deliberately focuses on the economic decisions and relations that underpin the industry, rather than on the textual, cultural or symbolic attributes of the newspapers themselves. There naturally is a considerable overlap between a political economy methodology when applied to a media product and traditional studies in institutional labour history. Both delve into matters of class, power, capital and the labour process. Both consider the political and social context. Both attempt to understand history by examining underlying and complex patterns of ownership, control and economic location.

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1. J. Curran (ed), “The study of the media: theoretical approaches,” in M. Gurevitch (ed), *Culture, Society and the Media* (Methuen, London, 1982), p 22.
2. Curran, “The study of the media”, p 25.

The South African newspaper industry is thus analysed in this article as an industry operating within a specific economic and political context. It is argued that the economic decisions and “relations” characteristic of the newspaper and printing industry have determined the shape and direction of its development, as well as its impact on the broader socio-political context itself. And just like in any good labour history, a critical player in this analysis is a trade union, the South African Typographical Union (SATU).

By the 1920s, the SATU claimed (not always with complete justification) to be the sole, legitimate representative of the newspaper and printing industry’s workforce and guardian of its training, skills and conditions of employment. As SATU President and Member of Parliament for Jeppe, Harry Sampson, argued in the House of Assembly’s Select Committee on Industrial Conciliation in 1923:

I do not think it would be a wise thing in the interest of industrial peace to register several unions which are functioning in the same industry and probably in the same area. You would simply have chaos. One thing to be insisted upon would be that the union with the largest representation is the one to be recognised and registered, and refusal of registration should be given to any other union in the same industry.³

Though this was not incorporated into the Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA) of 1924, the SATU suffered only one rival, namely the African Printing Workers’ Union (formed in the late 1930s), in the organisation of the industry’s labour.

As a craft union, determined to preserve its elitist traditions and scope, yet labouring under an obligation to strive for the benefit of its working class members, the SATU faced the same, sometimes contradictory forces and dynamics at play within developing South African secondary industry as its fraternal craft colleagues in the clothing, engineering and building sectors. The manner in which the union coped with the economic and political by-products of rapid industrial expansion, and the strategies and perceptions invoked, all contributed to the shaping of South African economic development.

The newspaper, as a product manufactured within the context of South Africa’s developing secondary industry, needs to be considered as

3. From: *Report of the Select Committee on the Industrial Conciliation Bill, 23 February - 19 March 1923* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1923), p 24.

an integral component of that context, subject to the same processes, alliances, contradictions, whims and strategies as other industrial sectors. From 1925 onwards, every newspaper, magazine or journal published for profit in South Africa, was legally obliged to make use of a labour force ostensibly regulated by the SATU. The printing industry “closed shop”, made statutorily binding by the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, rooted the newspaper industry in the broad milieu of the South African economy. It also linked the industry to the ancillary fortunes of craft unionism.

Newspaper company reliance on members of the SATU went further than the actual manufacture of their most obvious and visible product, the newspaper. For many newspaper companies, it was the extra printing work – the stationery, books, pamphlets, envelopes, and even cardboard boxes and packaging materials – that made the difference between profit and loss. By 1953, 90 per cent of newspaper companies engaged in private printing with an average of more than 50 per cent of newspaper company turnover accruing from this extra “jobbing” work.⁴

There is, of course, a considerable body of work reflecting the development of South African labour policy in the early decades of the twentieth century and concerning the role of craft unions within that process. One of the fiercest debates has surrounded the question of the relative importance of race and class as determinants or consequences of the production process. Liberal theorists such as Horwitz and W.H. Hutt⁵ argue that the irrationality, or dysfunctionality of the racial division of labour is ultimately overcome by the rationality of the market:

There is not only chronology of event but a seeming compulsion of choice, which links the polity to the market in a composition of circumstance. Sociologically, the market integrates human relations more and more widely and more and more intimately.⁶

Contrary to this stance are Marxist theorists such as Johnstone, Legassick, Lewis, Phillips, Bozzoli, Davies and Webster, who maintain, in Johnstone’s words, that class domination, as evidenced by the “ultra-exploitable of non-white labour”, assumes only the specific form of racial domination:

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4. Board of Trade and Industries Report 353: *The Printing Industry* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1956), p 75.
 5. See W.H. Hutt, *The Economics of the Colour Bar* (Deutsch, London, 1964).
 6. R. Horwitz, *The Political Economy of South Africa* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1967), p 2.

The system of class domination thus assumed the specific form of a system of racial domination, which, by thoroughly restricting the property and political rights of non-whites, and ideologically attributing this system of domination to innate racial differences, served to perpetuate the economic dependence of the non-white population and to secure and maintain the ultra-exploitability of non-white labour.⁷

A central premise of this article is that class struggles over control of the means of production guided the industry's development. As a result, the racial division of labour was "generated and determined by the economic system of which it formed a part."⁸ The ambivalence of the SATU towards the workings and limits of colour bars (referred to below) provides evidence that, far from being dysfunctional, racial (and indeed gender) classification was perceived as just part of the mechanism by which labour, or a politically and industrially organised section of the labour force, could retain a measure of control over the production process. This article also supports Phillips's contention that the legislation which determined the pattern of industrial relations in South Africa did not have its origins in the ideology of the white or civilised labour policies: "It originated out of the realities of a developing economy linked to the growth of a differentiated, radicalised labour movement in the union."⁹

This article acknowledges the many critiques of the political economy method¹⁰ and the author agrees that for a holistic impression of the media's influence on society at any particular moment to be gained, a study of media content, meaning and impact would need to be garnered along with conclusions about its political economy. However, this is

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7. F.A. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976), p 24.
 8. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold*, p 215.
 9. I.M. Phillips, "The Civilised Labour Policy and the private sector: the operation of the SA Wage Act, 1925-37." PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 1984, p 125.
 10. See for instance the culturalist critiques of political economy, for example S. Hall, "Cultural studies: Two paradigms", in R. Collins, J. Curran, N. Garnham, P. Scannel, P. Schlesinger and C. Sparks (eds), *Media, Culture and Society. A critical reader* (Sage, London, 1986), pp 33-48; C. Mouffe, "Hegemony and new political subjects: Toward a new concept of democracy", in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of culture* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1988); L. Steenveld, "Transforming the media: A cultural approach", *Critical Arts*, 18, 1, 2004, pp 92-115.

beyond the scope of this article which sets out merely to tell an untold but important story of how a small, but powerful sector of the economy succeeded in manipulating the political process for its own ends and with lasting consequences. It also presents a slightly different answer to the oft-asked question, namely whether the South African media was helpful¹¹ or harmful¹² to the establishment and maintenance of the apartheid system. South African commentaries on the press are generally divided over this question. Few, however, in coming to their respective conclusions, give any real consideration to the important structural dynamics at work at every level of what is essentially a manufacturing industry. Since 1990, South African political economy analysis of the media has focused principally on the ownership and control of media companies. There has historically been little discussion about how the South African press itself, anchored in a changing and complex environment, develops and affects other institutions and processes, or about the “complex relations and multiple contradictions”¹³ that underpin newspaper production.

The extent of the South African newspaper industry’s role in the creation of apartheid is particularly identifiable when considering the influence of the industry on the development of State labour policies. This process finds its clearest expression in the newspaper and printing industry’s role in the formulation and implementation of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. In the course of this article, it will be shown that this Act, the statutory “cornerstone”¹⁴ of South African labour relations policy for several decades, came about largely as a result of

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11. Among those who considered the press to have been “helpful” to apartheid: C.C. Chimutengwende, *The Press and Politics of Liberation* (Barbican Books, London, 1978); W.A. Hachten and C.A. Giffard, *The Press and Apartheid* (MacMillan, London, 1984); K. Tomaselli, R. Tomaselli and J. Muller, *The Press in South Africa* (Richard Lyon & Co, Johannesburg, 1989).
 12. Among those who considered the press to have been “harmful” to apartheid: J. Mervis, *The Fourth Estate: The History of Times Media Limited* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1989); H.L. Smith, *Behind the Press in South Africa* (Stewart Press, Cape Town, 1945); E. Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African newspapers* (Chatto & Windus, Toronto, 1975).
 13. Tomaselli, Tomaselli and Muller, *The Press in South Africa*, p 33.
 14. Statement by the Southern Transvaal Local Committee of the South African Trades and Labour Council: “The ICA ... has often been called the cornerstone of industrial legislation in South Africa.” Trade Union Council of South Africa files, Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA) library, University of the Witwatersrand.

initiatives proposed, motivated and implemented by the newspaper and printing industry.

Industrial conciliation and the South African newspaper industry

The introduction of industrial conciliation in the mid-1920s marked the beginnings of a new era in South African labour relations. For the first time, the resolution of disputes between employers and employees in many organised industries became compulsory and tightly regulated. The Industrial Conciliation Act provided for industrial councils to be set up in each sphere of industry, representing both employers and employees, in order to eliminate piecemeal negotiations and curb soaring industrial unrest. Closed shop agreements, previously a source of frequent economic conflict, were not only permitted, but became enforceable by law. “If any event in 1924 was crucial to the South African state, it was the passing of the ICA,” says Yudelman, arguing that the passage of the legislation was more significant even than the election of the Pact government itself.¹⁵ While various accounts, including those of Yudelman and Lever,¹⁶ identify the printing industry’s importance in connection with the Industrial Conciliation Act in passing, none delve into this connection in any substantive manner. This article aims to rectify this misconception.

Both industrial peace and the closed shop were considered by sectoral protagonists to be of vital importance to the financial health of the South African newspaper and printing industry. The introduction of new technology at the turn of the twentieth century led to frequent, sometimes violent, struggles over control of the labour process. Strikes, often successful though costly, were common within the newspaper and printing industry through to the end of World War I. Industrial action was particularly ill-affordable for newspaper managements for whom the slightest disruption in the production process meant the non-appearance of newspapers on the streets. It is, for instance, impossible to stockpile daily newspapers, which are perishable on a daily basis. It was therefore essential for newspaper capital to come up with a framework of negotiations that would stabilise the industry and prevent disruption.

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15. D. Yudelman, *The Emergence of modern South Africa: state, capital and the incorporation of organised labour on the SA gold fields, 1902-1939* (Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1983), p 40.
 16. See J. Lever, “Capital and Labour in South Africa: The Passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1924”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 3, 10, December 1977.

Prior to the Industrial Conciliation Act, the 1909 Industrial Disputes Prevention Act (Transvaal) was the only piece of legislation attempting to deal with the problem of controlled industrial bargaining. This, however, was to prove woefully inadequate.

Labour, on the other hand, saw the traditional union restrictive practice of the closed shop as crucial to its interests. It formed the basis on which the union could retain skills, prevent dilution by unskilled workers, regulate the entrance of apprentices, and bargain on a collective basis for wage rates and benefits. It was a principle to which the SATU was to direct considerable effort and its place within the labour legislation of the period is testament to the value which the printing industry craft unionists set on it.

It was the SATU's Cape Town branch attempting to enforce its closed shop in 1911 that led to the industry's most significant conflict.¹⁷ This industrial action of 1911 illustrated the inadequacy of the 1909 Industrial Disputes Prevention Act most clearly. In an attempt to circumvent the closed shop, Cape Town employers imported a considerable number of overseas printers in 1911. When a strike erupted, bringing printing in the Cape to a standstill, employers transferred the work to Johannesburg. The strike spread to both *The Star* and the *Transvaal Leader* in Johannesburg and a conciliation board, the first to be appointed under the 1909 legislation, was established.¹⁸ The partial resolution of the conflict satisfied neither capital nor labour. Labour continued to cling to the closed shop concept, while capital became aware of the inability of its contemporary legal apparatus to cope with a situation of this nature. The establishment of the industry's National Industrial Council in 1919, and its pressure on the State for the implementation of appropriate legislation, was an attempt to incorporate both the requirements of newspaper labour and capital. The implications of the resultant Industrial Conciliation Act, however, were to be far-reaching.

The Act intervened, for instance, in the operation of the "colour bar" within different sectors of the South African economy. By excluding black workers from the scope of its definition and consideration, the Industrial Conciliation Act dealt a severe blow to black workers' rights. The Act effectively marginalized black worker and

17. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 20.

18. L.J. Picton, "NicPrint 50: The History of the Printing, Packaging and Newspaper Industry of South Africa." MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1969, p 185.

union participation in the framework of labour process regulation, and secured a high level of protection for the skilled and semi-skilled white workforce. As a result the Industrial Conciliation Act, which was passed into law by J.C. Smuts's South African Party, became an important component of the Labour Party-Nationalist Party Pact government's "Civilised Labour Policy" of the mid- to late 1920s.

The many implications and consequences of the Industrial Conciliation Act were to have a significant impact from the early 1920s on every sector of the South African economy, and were to lay the foundation for post-1948 apartheid labour policies. As Lever argues, the Act "gave major impetus to the tendency towards the separationist or exclusionist tendencies in white labour's activities and must therefore be accounted as one of the major factors giving rise to South Africa's partial labour movement."¹⁹ Subsequent amendments to the Act, neither of which altered its fundamental objectives, occurred in 1937 and 1956. Where the initial Act and its first amendment essentially ignored the question of black representation, the 1956 amendment, for instance, specifically excluded that sector from bargaining structures and procedures.

It is important, then, to investigate the circumstances surrounding the implementation of the Industrial Conciliation Act and, in particular, to study the role of the newspaper and printing industry within the process. This article will consider a number of areas necessary for a full assessment of the newspaper industry's impact on the development of labour legislation. These include discussions of the dynamics of labour and the context within which labour policy came to be framed; the local and international trend towards industrial conciliation; the formation of the newspaper and printing industry's National Industrial Council and its impact on industrial organisation; the development of the industry's own labour dynamics and its access to State power; as well as the effect of the legislation on the industry's internal structure and the pattern of relations between capital and labour.

It will be shown that the newspaper and printing industry's contribution to the creation of a new and influential South African labour relations policy was critically important. In this manner an improved understanding of the role of the press in the creation and maintenance of apartheid – an objective of this article – may be ascertained.

19. Lever, "Capital and labour in South Africa", p 27.

The dynamics of labour

Upon the Pact government's acquisition of power in 1924, three significant concerns had to be addressed, namely the plight of the white farming community; the provision of jobs for the poor (mainly Afrikaans), newly-urbanised whites; and the protection of skilled white workers.²⁰ An agricultural policy based on farmers' co-operatives and a system of controlled marketing went some way towards tackling the farming issue, but it was the "poor white" dilemma that caused most concern. With the number of "poor whites" estimated at between 200 000 and 300 000 by the late 1920s, the problem "was rising like a thundercloud and casting an ominous shadow across the political and economic landscape."²¹

The post-war expansion of secondary industry, and in particular the manufacturing sector, provided the means for disarming or at least recruiting the potential political and social power of aggrieved "poor whites" through employment opportunities. The mining industry, faced by gold standard imperatives of maximising production and minimising costs, relied increasingly on job fragmentation, deskilling and the employment of migrant labour to offset production costs. It was left to secondary industry and the State to absorb white unemployment while protecting skilled workers through the racial division of labour and tightly-regulated apprenticeship schemes.

A sharp rise in consumer prices, together with a fall in the rate of profit on capital, argues Davies, resulted in "a period of intense struggle within the newly important secondary manufacturing sector."²² Manufacturing employers "responded to the post First World War crisis by seeking primarily, not modifications to the pattern of production relations, but cuts in real (and sometimes in monetary) wage levels."²³ Wage cuts, inflation, mine labour restructuring and lay-offs, together with the threat of State intervention in the labour process, caused considerable industrial conflict in the years following World War I.

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20. D. Hobart Houghton, "The Unstable Years, (1919-1932)", in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), *Oxford History of South Africa II* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971), p 28.
 21. Hobart Houghton, "The Unstable Years", p 25.
 22. R. Davies, "The class character of South Africa's industrial relations legislation", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 2, 6, 1976, p 7.
 23. Davies, "The class character", p 8.

In some instances, this was crushed by State repression including martial law; the use of troops and police to break strikes; the deportation of strike leaders; and the enactment of laws prohibiting “riotous assemblies”. “However, it was increasingly becoming apparent that direct repression alone would not succeed in eliminating strikes, particularly those by well-organised and militant white workers.”²⁴

The 1922 Rand Revolt was a watershed in attitudes towards labour policy and control. It demonstrated to Government, argues Yudelman, that a far more comprehensive, structured State role in the industrial order was essential.²⁵ But even in the wake of the rebellion, attention appeared to focus more upon the role of “agitators” within the union movement rather than on the specific issues – the colour bar and the threat of unskilled white and black labour to the employed workforce – that lay at the heart of the uprising. The Martial Law Judicial Commission of 1922, appointed to inquire into the events surrounding the strike of 1922,

... argued that the principal danger posed by the Rand Revolt was that it was led by a conspiracy of communists ... and saw ‘armed uprisings’ as a definite part of an overall strategy to induce the coloured as well as the European races in South Africa and elsewhere to adopt Communistic principles; and so prepare the way for the establishment of Soviet republics throughout the universe.²⁶

This, then, was the context of any proposed labour legislation. The priorities were the appeasement of unskilled and semi-skilled whites, the end of industrial turmoil, the stifling of trade union militancy, plus the reinforcement of employers’ interests and State control over the labour process. It is the task of this article to examine the ways and extent to which a single industry, namely the newspaper and printing industry, could influence the direction and content of South Africa’s complex labour legislation process. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to assess the general trends in labour control legislation in South Africa, as well as abroad, together with the many influences and forces acting upon the process. Only once these have been taken into account, can the impact of a single industry be considered more accurately.

24. Davies, “The class character”, p 10.

25. Yudelman, *The emergence of modern South Africa*, p 39.

26. Davies, “The class character”, p 9.

The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 – Genesis

The implementation of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924 was the product of a number of different forces and influences of varying significance. Indeed, Lever suggests that the Act was both “testimony ... to the trauma caused by the great Rand Strike of 1922” as well as “the outcome of the play of forces which had arisen around the gold mining industry.”²⁷ This article suggests that the model and impetus for the Act did not come principally from the gold-mining sector, as important as it was to the national economy. In South Africa, the newspaper and printing industry – fostering a desire to work its objectives of industrial peace and the closed shop principle into any potential legislation – was able to exert considerable pressure on the bureaucratic apparatus. The level of the industry’s access is discussed. Developments in British and Canadian industrial relations policy provided models with which to restructure local bargaining procedures.

Pressures at home

Unlike the mining sector, the newspaper and printing industry did not command a place of special importance within the South African economy (representing approximately 5 per cent of the country’s manufacturing output).²⁸ What the industry however lacked in economic power, it countered by its strategic place as a source of potential political power (through the pages of its newspapers) together with its willingness to participate in State labour machinery and policies.

The printing industry portrayed itself (and was officially accepted) as a bastion of “civilised” employment: a desirable resource both pre- and post-Pact. In 1920, more than 70 per cent of the industry’s employees were skilled and, more importantly, white. As Federation of Master Printers’ President, J.W. Miller, argued in the same year, the industry was “protecting the livelihood of good, clean, honest labour, almost exclusively white and an asset to any country.”²⁹ This appeal to racial solidarity, together with its moral imperative, was articulated effectively within the corridors of power by a number of influential figures from the industry. Two of the union leadership, H.W. Sampson and T.G. Strachan, were Members of Parliament (Labour Party) for considerable periods.

27. Lever, “Capital and labour in South Africa”, p 4.

28. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, schedule D.

29. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 192.

Sampson, in particular, served in the House of Assembly for more than thirty years (1906-1936) and was appointed as the Pact government's Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Public Works from 1928 to 1933. Sampson and Strachan represented the industry's interests, with significant success, on a number of crucial labour issues debated within Parliament.

The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1914 included a clause dealing with industrial diseases such as lead poisoning (an affliction of which many members of the SATU suffered). "A provision of that kind had been pressed for by the union on the government authorities for many years," reported the SATU's official journal in 1914, "much credit being due to Harry Sampson, Union President, for success."³⁰ Sampson and Strachan also participated in the framing of the Factories and Regulation of Wages Act of 1918; sat on the Apprenticeship Act Committee in 1923; served on the 1925 Commission into Tariff Revisions; proposed the 1927 Imprint Bill; and, of special relevance to this article, were both included in the Parliamentary Select Committee for the formulation of the Industrial Conciliation Act, which met in 1923. Sampson became a cabinet minister in 1928 while the General Secretary of the SATU, Ivan Walker, became the Minister of Labour in 1930.

Former SATU officials, such as Vice-President George Hills, a member of the East Rand's Provincial Council and Member of Parliament for Springs (1920), and Frank Fahey, Chairman of the Board of Trade (1924-1935), dotted the State's bureaucratic and administrative hierarchy. The minutes of the Executive Committee of the National Industrial Council indicate the access which union and industry officials had to the decision-making process:

It was reported that the Government had requested the council to submit nominations for an apprenticeship committee to be appointed under the new Act [1923 Apprenticeship Act], and it was decided to recommend that the Executive Committee should constitute the apprenticeship committee for the industry ... It is of special interest to note that Warrington Smyth, Secretary for Mines and Industries, was present at the subsequent discussion on apprenticeship matters and the functioning of committees under the Act; he evidently expected the printing industry to take the initiative and create the basis on which other committees would be required to operate ... and that is exactly what happened.³¹

30. A.J. Downes, *A Printer's Saga: A History of the South African Typographical Union* (Wallach's Printing & Publishing Company, Pretoria, 1952), p 307.

31. Downes, *A Printer's Saga*, p 452.

When government law advisers contemplating the provision of closed shops within the Industrial Conciliation Act showed “considerable reluctance to recommend, in effect, statutory backing for the principle”, it only needed a “personal undertaking” by the SATU leadership “that until public opinion became better acquainted with and perhaps more reconciled to the idea of compulsory trade union membership, the union would not avail itself of the courts to enforce the principle.”³² This undertaking, once enacted, was ignored on a consistent basis, most notably with *Knox versus Matthias* in December 1936, in which the South African Supreme Court found in favour of the closed shop principle.³³

The SATU, as a major craft union, and through its sporadic membership of bodies such as the South African Trade Union Council, could argue too that it represented the interests of not just its members, but also of other craft unions. The Amalgamated Engineering Union and the SATU had particularly close ties as illustrated by their Reciprocal Membership Agreement of 1927.³⁴ It was not only the union that had access to the corridors of power either. The employers’ organisations of the industry – the Federation of Master Printers and the Newspaper Press Union – through their close connections and financial dependence on the Rand mining houses (at least within the more predominant English-language press) also had access to influential administrators and the networks of capital.

Where important labour issues were discussed and legislation framed, members of the newspaper and printing industry occupied a strategic position from which they were frequently able to exert considerable influence on the content and passage of relevant legislation. The Industrial Conciliation Act is a prime example of the level of access achieved by the industry. This position was enhanced by the sector’s status as a “model” industry providing skilled work for a large proportion of white workers. What made the shaping of legislation easier in South Africa was the development of several different types of labour relations overseas. These provided the basis and direction towards which the newspaper and printing industry was to strive.

32. Downes, *A Printer’s Saga*, p 463.

33. See: *South African Law Journal*, 54, May 1937, p 258, for details of this case.

34. Downes, *A Printer’s Saga*, p 465.

Models for industrial conciliation

In Britain, industrial unrest during World War I, in particular the closing down of many sections of the munitions industry in the “May Strikes” of 1917, resulted in the formation of Whitley Councils.³⁵ A committee, chaired by parliamentarian J.H. Whitley, was charged to look into “relations between employers and employed” with the hope of improving the climate within British industry. The committee’s report, presented in 1917, proposed the creation of voluntary national industrial councils in which both employers and employees were represented in order to discuss “industrial problems” ranging from rates and benefits to wage bargaining procedures.³⁶

Received enthusiastically by the government, 56 industrial councils embracing some 3,25 million workers were in operation by 1920.³⁷ The inaugural meeting of the British Joint Industrial Council for Printing took place on 1 July 1919 with the following aims in mind: the promotion of good working relations; the maintenance of fair wages and prices; the establishment of uniform working hours and conditions; the minimising of unemployment; and the selection and training of apprentices.³⁸ “The setting up of Whitley Councils in England gave promise of a new spirit in industrial negotiations,” observed L.J. Picton, a member of the SATU and author of a MA dissertation on the history of the National Industrial Council for Printing in South Africa.³⁹

By the early 1920s, the Whitley Council system had all but collapsed. The district and local machinery set out by the committee was rarely established, major industries such as mining, the railways and engineering ignored the recommendations altogether and post-war unemployment diminished interest on both sides of industry. The system of Whitley Councils proved “far less [successful] than had been hoped for” and, after a few years, the majority had disappeared.⁴⁰

35. H.A. Clegg, *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1970), p 334.

36. C.L. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-40* (Methuen & Co Ltd, London, 1955), p 37.

37. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, p 37.

38. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 26.

39. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 199.

40. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, p 37.

H.A. Clegg argues that a prime intention of the Whitley Councils was to combat the shop stewards' movement that undermined traditional trade union leadership from around 1910 and led to a new militancy in British industry.⁴¹ The system of regional and district workers' committees, inherent to the Whitley Councils, were designed to circumvent shop-floor "agitators" by bureaucratising grievance procedures while restoring power to more conciliatory existing union hierarchies. A similar process became evident with the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act in South Africa.

The "voluntary conciliation" component of the Whitley Councils, however, wherein participation did not restrict workers' legal right to strike, was unacceptable in the South African context. The principle was seen as not only ineffective in preventing industrial unrest, but also made it "impossible to maintain discipline in industry."⁴² Whereas the structure and basic intent of Whitley Councils was an important model for South African development, support was more forthcoming for the Canadian idea of "compulsory conciliation". Compulsory conciliation provided that "while the use of these bodies [industrial councils] was not in itself obligatory ... their use was compulsory before any other means could be employed to obtain redress."⁴³

The move, then, to negotiations between employers and employees on a national, industry-wide basis in a bid to curtail the frequency of industrial disputes, was a trend discernible in several Commonwealth nations. The immigration of large numbers of skilled workers from the Commonwealth (Australia and New Zealand had also introduced new systems of "voluntary arbitration and compulsory awards" in their respective economies⁴⁴) to South Africa during the period, together with the still strong connections between many participants in the South African economy and overseas, gave some impetus to the principles inherent in the Industrial Conciliation Act. In the printing industry alone, some 800 skilled artisans were "imported" from overseas in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁵

While these developments abroad had an undoubted influence upon the methods of industrial conciliation in South Africa, the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act was an important milestone in a process of

41. Clegg, *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, p 334.

42. Davies, "The class character", p 12.

43. Davies, "The class character", p 12.

44. Davies, "The class character", p 12.

45. Downes, *A Printer's Saga*, p 682.

labour legislation begun at the turn of the century. It was a process that was to develop into the Pact government's "Civilised Labour Policy" of the late 1920s and, subsequently, to the apartheid labour policies of the 1950s.

The 1909 Industrial Disputes Prevention Act (Transvaal) was enacted primarily as a response to a period of industrial disruption in the preceding two years.⁴⁶ The Act included the creation of a statutory body, in which both employers and employees were represented, for the purpose of discussing and preferably resolving industrial disputes. In some instances, it suspended the right to strike unless procedures laid down had been exhausted. This Act, together with the shelved Industrial Disputes and Trade Unions Bill of 1914, formed the antecedents and legislative origins of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Both pieces of legislation were, however, limited in scope and fraught with shortcomings and loopholes. They were also, as mentioned above, impotent to deal with the mounting industrial conflict of the period.

The existence of various international models for industrial conciliation and a disjointed collection of South African industrial relations legislation were all important to the ultimate passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act, but perhaps the most critical influence of all was the fact that the printing industry actually managed to create and operate the first industrial council. In the process of its creation, in the effectiveness or otherwise of its activities, scope and contribution to industrial relations, the formation of the National Industrial Council (NIC) for the Newspaper and Printing Industry in 1919 was vital to the development of South African labour legislation. Here was an attempted solution for all kinds of perceived social and economic problems. The fact that it could work, flaws and difficulties aside, aroused massive interest within economic and especially governmental circles.

The creation of the first NIC was not a simple or trouble-free affair. From the start, it was faced by a host of seemingly insurmountable difficulties. On several occasions, the collapse of the whole concept was saved by the personal intervention of a few key figures. A discussion of the formation of the NIC is appropriate in order to achieve a fuller understanding of its role in the formulation of the industrial legislation of the period.

46. Davies, "The class character", p 11.

The formation of the National Industrial Council (NIC) for the Newspaper and Printing Industry

There are several accounts that pin the decision to launch a national council in the newspaper and printing industry onto a specific moment, or at least a particular train journey in 1918.⁴⁷ John Martin, General Manager of the Argus Company, is supposed to have met SATU organiser Ivan Walker somewhere on the track between Durban and Johannesburg during a particularly virulent period of strike action by the unionists:

John Martin asked Ivan Walker when he was going to stop causing trouble in the trade in one centre after another. Walker replied that the SATU was a national organisation and would be willing to negotiate a national wage agreement. With this encouragement John Martin took the initiative and within a year was successful in bringing both employers and employees to the council table.⁴⁸

Though this might have been an important moment in printing trade lore if nothing else, there was a lineage of precedents for the setting up of a national council dating back to the turn of the century. The introduction of linotype machines into South Africa had been a significant development within the industry. New basic rates and piecework scales had to be determined and a series of *ad hoc* local negotiating bodies had sprung up by the late 1890s.⁴⁹ Two years after the first annual meeting of the Transvaal Master Printers' Association in 1905, 23 master printers met a number of craftsmen and a "gentlemen's agreement" was concluded, binding the signatories for a period of twelve months.⁵⁰ It was the first agreement of its kind, including a specified time clause, within the printing industry, and was a harbinger of things to come.

In the early 1880s, two newspaper owners, Francis Dormer and R.W. Murray, discussed the possibility of finding a body which would "represent all South African newspapers irrespective of language or politics and would look after the business and technical aspects of newspaper production."⁵¹ The inaugural conference of the Newspaper Press Union of South Africa (NPU) was held in Grahamstown on

47. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 200. Also see the accounts in: L.F. Neame, *Today's news today: A History of the Argus Company* (Argus Printing and Publishing Company, Johannesburg, 1956); Downes, *A Printer's Saga*.

48. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 200.

49. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 111.

50. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 185.

51. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 151.

27 November 1882. The NPU resolved “that this Union is formed for the purpose of promoting all objects of common interest to the South African press, and for the protection of its members in the proper discharge of their public duty.”⁵² The NPU, which grew larger and more powerful throughout the period, was to play a critical role within the impending industrial council.

Webster has argued that the advent of mass production in the foundries of the South African engineering industry conferred a new level of bargaining power on unskilled and semi-skilled workers: “By increasing the proportion of workers strategically involved in the mechanised production process it increases the bargaining power of a large section of the workforce.”⁵³ In the newspaper and printing industry, the initial transformation to mechanical production occurred in the early 1900s. By securing control of the newly-mechanised labour process at this early stage in the development of the industry, the impact on the labour structure was quite different. According to former SATU head office organiser L.R. Findley: “There was very little deskilling with the new machinery. We just learnt new skills and adapted ourselves. Where once we did all our work with lead, now we moved onto rubber and typesetting.”⁵⁴

Little by little, the industry was organising itself. It was a process aided by Union in 1910, which broke down provincial bias; the strength and subsequent threat of the SATU, which had a full-time organiser by 1912; and the co-operation required during wartime in order to deal with the many government agencies. Once the printers, with the encouragement of the NPU, had founded the Federation of Master Printers (FMP) in 1916, the stage was set for broader negotiations. The next step, though, was the formation of Joint Boards – essentially a system of local negotiations between small groups of employers and employees, similar to that created by the Whitley Councils in Britain. The Witwatersrand Local Joint Board was established in 1918 and dealt mainly with the setting of wages, hours and working conditions. The Joint Board system was later formalised into the industrial conciliation framework by inclusion in the national council’s constitution.⁵⁵

It is likely that the train episode had something to do with the final decision to go ahead and attempt to forge a national council. It is certain

52. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 207.

53. E. Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1985), p 14.

54. Interview with L.R. Findley, SATU Head Office, Johannesburg, January 1991.

55. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 191.

that without the personal intervention of figures like Ivan Walker and John Martin, who became something of a legend for his intermediary and negotiating skills, things would probably have taken longer to happen, if at all: “Robert Allister [a member of the Federation of Master Printers’ delegation] recalled several years later that the meeting [to form the industrial council] very nearly broke up after 10 minutes, but it was saved from fiasco by John Martin who urged the necessity of making a fresh start.”⁵⁶

Throughout the industry’s organisation and negotiations among its constituent parts, the two central issues remained the institution of the closed shop for labour and the creation of industrial peace for capital. *The Star* newspaper of Johannesburg had maintained an open shop policy since the dispute of 1911.⁵⁷ Other newspaper companies and printing concerns had been lax about the closed shop principle so important to the union and to the union’s participation in the setting up of the industrial council. The willingness of *The Star* to endorse a nation-wide closed shop agreement, together with management’s consent to persuade all companies within the industry to abide by the concept, “was a material factor in creating an atmosphere favourable to the formation of the National Industrial Council.”⁵⁸

After several further near disasters, the NPU, FMP and SATU signed the first agreement of the National Industrial Council for the Newspaper and Printing Industry (NIC) on 19 November 1919. Among the dignitaries present was F.S. Malan, Minister of Mines and Industries. Walker and Weinbren, wrote in *2000 Casualties* that “it was in consequence of what he [Malan] heard and saw at this conference that he gave an undertaking that legislation would be framed to legalise agreements between representative bodies of employers and trade unions.”⁵⁹ A 1956 Board of Trade and Industry report also concluded that the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 was “generally thought to have been modelled in large measure on the pattern already established in the printing industry.”⁶⁰

56. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 183.

57. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 183.

58. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 193.

59. I. Walker and B. Weinbren, *2,000 Casualties: A History of the Trade Unions and Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa* (SATUC, Johannesburg, 1961), p 84.

60. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 29.

The immediate consequences of the formation of the new industrial council were to have a considerable impact on the attitudes of other industries, the government, as well as the participating organisations as to whether the concept was favourable or not. As the initial national agreement was only a “gentlemen’s agreement” without recourse to the law, members of the industry had to use the weapons at their disposal to convince printing shops and companies to participate. Attempts at recruitment to the council were first made “peaceably” through the existing Joint Board system. If this failed, the threat of withdrawing union labour from non-federated employers usually served as sufficient incentive. Such incidents were frequently discussed, and even planned, in meetings of the Board of Directors at the big newspaper houses from this period through into the 1930s and 1940s.⁶¹

As a direct result of the formation of the NIC, membership of the SATU boomed. A membership increase of 140 per cent was absorbed almost immediately in Cape Town, while the union gained 50 per cent more members overall within a few weeks.⁶² Union coffers, emptied during the preceding strike-ridden period to “barely enough to maintain the union’s membership on strike pay for two weeks”, were full again.⁶³ Full-time organisers were appointed in all branches, adding weight to the bureaucratisation process discussed below. An assured closed shop agreement; expanded control over the apprenticeship schemes; employer-backed pension and benevolent funds; rigid job protection; and reasonably high wages were the rewards to the union. For the employers, growing control over the union rank and file; participation within its operations; heightened regulation within the industry; and, most importantly, industrial “peace” in a period of expansion were the consequences of the move to industrial councils.

It was, however, to be a further five years before the Industrial Conciliation Act was finally passed into law, despite numerous assurances to the contrary. There are several possible reasons for the delay. Prime Minister Smuts was well-known for his dislike of the craft unions: “The Smuts government would have been unlikely to have

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61. See for instance: Sunday Times Syndicate, Board of Directors’ Minutes: 1931-39, September 1936, p 142: “Efforts [are] being made to induce the Sunday Express and Sunday Tribune to become members of the NPU ... If these efforts prove unsuccessful, steps will be taken to persuade the Typographical men to prevent union men from obtaining employment in non-member houses”.
 62. Downes, *A Printer’s Saga*, p 435.
 63. Downes, *A Printer’s Saga*, p 435.

favoured a measure specifically designed to increase the power of the craft unions. Significantly the 1922 [Apprenticeship] Act included a clause that prohibited apprentices from belonging to trade unions. This clause was certainly not to the liking of the unions, who had to wait for the Pact government to repeal it.”⁶⁴

Possibly other industries, as well as the government, wanted to see whether the NIC would work and what the consequences of such a move might be. The urgent need for some kind of industrial relations legislation provoked by the 1922 Rand Revolt, together with the election of the Pact government, undoubtedly eased the process and the Industrial Conciliation Act appeared in the *Government Gazette* on 13 March 1925. The newspaper and printing industry’s National Industrial Council was the first to be registered and “immediately there was a rush to persuade officials of the Labour Department to institute prosecutions against recalcitrants.”⁶⁵ Within months, the building, clothing, motor and general engineering, metal engineering and furniture manufacturing industries had followed suit with the setting up of their own national industrial councils.

The formation of the National Industrial Council for the Newspaper and Printing Industry in 1919 – five years before the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Act – presented a common front with which more effective pressure could be applied to any developments in State policy affecting the industry as a whole. From shortly after World War I, and especially after the formation of the National Industrial Council, the printing industry had positioned itself on the pulse of South African labour policy.

Implications and consequences of the Industrial Conciliation Act

The implementation of the Act in 1924 ostensibly achieved the twin objectives of the newspaper and printing industry. The closed shop agreement had been institutionalised within the industrial apparatus, and management was essentially assured of minimal industrial action. However, the legacy of the Industrial Conciliation Act went further than the achievement of these two goals and had an important bearing on the development of South African secondary industry. These involved the

64. J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation 1925-55: The rise and fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984), p 24.

65. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 210.

issues of excluding black labour from the negotiating process, and the potential bureaucratisation of trade union structures.

Black labour and the Industrial Conciliation Act

Black workers constituted a small, mostly unskilled, proportion of the newspaper and printing industry's workforce (less than 10 per cent in 1920).⁶⁶ Although this proportion increased over time (to 28 per cent by 1965),⁶⁷ little effort was made to incorporate black workers into the industrial council apparatus. At the SATU's Fourth Annual Conference in 1903 it was resolved that "no Kaffir or Asiatic labour be permitted which infringes on the work performed by members of the SATU."⁶⁸ This was subsequently overturned in 1914.⁶⁹ By their omission from the Industrial Conciliation Act, however, the Act was inherently discriminatory to black workers' rights and, containing no provision for black union recognition or participation, has been deemed a "deeply conservative measure."⁷⁰ According to Phillips, black labour largely fell under the auspices of the Wage Act of 1925, which concentrated on unorganised trades or sections of trades and which was also based on the principle of compulsory regulation.⁷¹

The Industrial Conciliation Act also, however, contained little that was openly in support of a rigid racial division of labour. Mechanisation, together with increased demand, meant that most of the new jobs provided were of an unskilled or semi-skilled nature and, subsequently, there was little displacement of skilled white workers. With no real threat perceived by the white workforce, attitudes to the colour bar and to black organisation within the SATU remained ambivalent. Decisions regarding black workers, and especially the growing number of Indian printers establishing themselves in Natal, took place on an *ad hoc* and often arbitrary basis. As Simons and Simons have pointed out:

A fraternal embrace could be as deadly as isolation. Natal Indians made the discovery after being admitted to the SATU early in 1929. "White printers on strike in Durban had been kept out for six weeks because the Indians remained at work", said Albert Downes, the

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66. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, schedule D.
 67. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, schedule D.
 68. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, schedule D.
 69. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 19.
 70. B. Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of the Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa, 1890-1933* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981), p 178.
 71. Phillips, "The Civilised Labour Policy", p viii.

general secretary, and he urged an open door policy ... At Cape Town, he claimed, "the number of coloured people employed in the printing industry had decreased since they had been admitted to membership."⁷²

This seeming ambivalence characterised not just the SATU and the printing industry, but also many of the craft unions. The unions "feared the unskilled and semi-skilled, both black and white, who stood to gain at their expense from any process of deskilling."⁷³ The resignation of the SATU's President, I. Haliburton, in 1929 as a result of the admittance of Indians to the union, was an indication that the issue at least had some ideological currency.⁷⁴ In general, though, the colour bar issue remained of secondary importance to what were seen as more pressing industrial conciliation concerns. The lack of specific provision for an enforced colour bar, and the exclusion of black representation within the ambit of the Industrial Conciliation Act, were both the natural products of the industrial context from which the legislation arguably emanated.

The formation of the National Industrial Council in 1919 generated a desire, with both employers and the SATU hierarchy, to regulate and standardise the whole spectrum of labour conditions and divisions. The growth of non-racial trade unionism in the 1920s – through federations like the South African Trade and Labour Council – together with the gradually increasing numbers of black workers within the industry, and particularly the growing desire for uniformity of wages and conditions, led to the creation of a subcommittee of the NIC in 1921 charged with considering "the question of admitting Natives to the union."⁷⁵

The sub-committee made few recommendations regarding membership, but concentrated instead upon the nature and conditions of the many printing establishments which lay beyond their jurisdiction:

The inspection report ... had disclosed the existence of small printing plants in many of the small towns, producing weekly newspapers under conditions far removed from those in operation in the principal centres, and care had to be exercised to ensure that any action of ours did not result in the wholesale shut-down of such plants.⁷⁶

72. H.J. Simons and R.E. Simons, *Class and colour in South Africa* (Penguin, London, 1969), p 380.

73. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation 1925-55*, p 13.

74. Downes, *A Printer's Saga*, p 499.

75. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 226.

76. Downes, *A Printer's Saga*, p 460.

The issue of black inclusion was put off until after the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924. In 1925, two members of the Industrial Council's Executive Committee were dispatched to "secure information with regard to the labour employed on native newspapers."⁷⁷ Reporting back to the Industrial Council, a system of exemptions (from council wage rates and benefits) was adopted aimed at mission presses that "limited their production to the production of religious literature not sold for profit."⁷⁸ By this method, sectors of the newspaper and printing industry that lay outside the immediate jurisdiction of the NIC could nevertheless be incorporated into its structure. Voluntary assimilation could be transformed into more direct control at a later date.

Bertram Paver, founder of the Bantu Press Limited, applied for the kind of exemption already held by mission presses such as Lovedale, Mariannhill and Morija, on the formation of his company in 1930:

With some difficulty, he managed to negotiate an agreement with the ... SATU giving Africans the right to operate composing machinery. Paver, in turn, had to agree not to branch out of the newspaper field – a decision he later regretted.⁷⁹

Until the 1940s, the newspaper and printing industry relied upon the exemption system, the closed shop and restricted apprenticeship schemes to control, rather than staunch, the increasing numbers of black workers. Minimum education requirements effectively ruled out the entry of blacks into the apprenticeship process. As a result, black workers remained outside the official structures of the union and the industry throughout this period.

In 1937, the SATU executive first noted the existence of a rival to their sole control of the printing workforce, the African Printing Workers' Union.⁸⁰ At the 1940 SATLC conference, Tommy C. Rutherford, President of the SATU, "bitterly attacked (Max) Gordon for 'interfering' in the printing industry by organising the African Printing Workers' Union."⁸¹ And it was this, the fear that "disaffected Bantu would become prey to agitators and possibly join unions controlled by disruptive

77. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, p 226.

78. Downes, *A Printer's Saga*, p 460.

79. I. Manoim, "The Black Press 1945-63." MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, p 45.

80. Picton, "NicPrint 50", p 226.

81. W. Stein, "Max Gordon and African Trade Unionism on the Witwatersrand 1935-40", in E. Webster (ed), *Essays in Southern African Labour History* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1978), p 155.

elements”⁸² that galvanised the SATU into action. In 1941, an industrial council sub-committee “recommended an arrangement formulating for the first time principles for the orderly training and employment of all classes of natives.”⁸³ The agreement, which included minimum wage levels (set at those already in place at Lovedale and the Bantu Press), overtime rates, holidays and training details, was put into effect from 1 January 1942. The sub-committee’s report stated:

It was accepted as a fact that the living expenses of natives are less than those of whites and the criteria adopted for the determination of fair native wages were the estimated value of work done, the ability of native presses to pay, the need to attract and retain natives of the required education and mental ability and changes in the cost of living.⁸⁴

Thus, the “ultra-exploitability”⁸⁵ of black labour was rationalised and incorporated into the printing industry’s labour structure. It was only in 1942 that provisions concerning wages and working conditions were included in the National Agreement of the NIC directed specifically at black labour (“labourers”) and further provisions relating to unskilled workers were embodied in agreements from 1944.⁸⁶ In 1943, the SATU hoped to make the incorporation of African labour official with the creation of an African Workers’ Section with branches in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Kimberley.⁸⁷ This resulted in a “warning from the Department of Labour that the union’s own registration was in danger, and the African section was wound up.”⁸⁸ A new tactic was tried with the establishment of a separate African Printing and Allied Workers’ Union, under the guidance of the SATU. But “this arrangement again attracted the unfavourable notice of the Department of Labour and the African Printing and Allied Workers’ Union was dissolved.”⁸⁹

By 1965, white skilled labour represented only 42 per cent of the total employment within the printing industry.⁹⁰ Recognised or not, there had been a significant change within the labour force. What used to be a predominantly white industry, now had a majority of black, Indian and

82. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 226.

83. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 227.

84. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 227.

85. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold*, p 24.

86. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 237.

87. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 227.

88. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 229.

89. Picton, “NicPrint 50”, p 229.

90. Board of Trade and Industry Report 353, *The Printing Industry*, schedule D.

coloured workers. However, as a direct result of the industry's own internal dynamics and the impact of the industry on labour relations policy, black labour was specifically excluded from participation in official bargaining procedures through into the 1970s.

Bureaucratisation of the craft unions

Where the issue of black labour was a cause of some concern across the industry (the NPU had excluded black newspaper proprietors from its membership from 1912⁹¹), there was a more subtle kind of conflict going on within the industry. Critics have argued that a fundamental objective, and goal, of industrial conciliation (both in South Africa and overseas), was the harnessing of trade unions through a process of bureaucratisation. Industrial conciliation, argues Lewis, "sought to enmesh trade unions in the bureaucracy of industrial relations machinery. The result was to be the incorporation of trade unionism and the isolation of the rank and file."⁹² Lever too notes that bureaucratisation was so effective as a result of the Act that "increasingly what was needed was less the militant union organiser than the adroit negotiator and adept office manager."⁹³

The importance, or even existence, of a cohesive incorporationist strategy in the determining of labour relations policy is difficult to assess. It is certain the concept had some currency, probably from at least the war years. Whether the intention was specifically to undermine trade union structures or just to encourage the unions to work within an employer-favourable framework is also open to question. Certainly, within the printing industry, "bureaucratisation" and the alienation of the rank and file became increasingly noticeable. The structures of industrial conciliation were the cause of the process while the frequent industry-regulating "National Agreements" became the target for open rank and file hostility.

In 1936, a new agreement was signed between the constituent members of the National Industrial Council. The clauses of the new agreement – including static wages and a new benevolent scheme for members over 65 – brought howls of anger from union members. The Johannesburg branch of the SATU declared that "after much discussion and criticism it was eventually resolved 'that this meeting expresses its

91. Mervis, *The Fourth Estate*, p 34.

92. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation 1925-55*, p 30.

93. Lever, "Capital and labour in South Africa", p 28.

extreme dissatisfaction with the new agreement.”⁹⁴ Letters flooded into the offices of the SATU’s official journal. One letter read:

Can you tell us why we have been tied down to a depression minimum wage for the next three years, when a boom period is at hand? ... In fact, in common with many others, I am gradually reaching the conclusion that the SATU lacks the most important attribute of trade unionism – moral guts!⁹⁵

The printing industry employers became as involved as possible in a whole range of areas usually reserved for union control. They participated “in the maintenance of union discipline” by entering into the enforcement of closed shops and by sitting on a committee of the Industrial Council which heard the final appeals of members in default against union rules.⁹⁶ This, says Davies, was “especially ironic in view of the fact that employers had been so insistent that conciliation boards should not serve as an appeal against management discipline.”⁹⁷

While the union leadership worked to secure protection levies, reasonably high wage levels, and provide a voice for perceived union and industry demands, the rank and file were deprived of full representation together with the means (strike action) to impose demands with which the industrial council might disagree. The bureaucratisation which industrial conciliation imposed upon union structures effectively disenfranchised the rank and file from the regulation of the labour process.

These were the conflicts and dynamics that affected the content and direction of labour relations reform. Mechanisation, the influx of white and black semi-skilled and unskilled labour, the expansion of the industry and the bureaucratisation of union structures were all important factors in determining the types and direction of pressure which could be applied to the system.

Conclusion

The newspaper and printing industry, though relatively small in terms of total manufacturing output and employment, succeeded in gaining considerable influence over the passage of South African labour relations

94. *South African Typographical Journal*, 37, 443, January 1936, p 9.

95. *South African Typographical Journal*, 38, 445, March 1936, p 17.

96. Davies, “The class character”, p 17.

97. Davies, “The class character”, p 17.

legislation from the 1920s. The proximity of the industry's representatives, both union and management, to the State's administrative structures provided voices to articulate and hands to shape any developments at their source. The printing industry, too, as a "model" industry unsullied by strikes since the creation of its industrial council – including an avoidance of any participation in the 1922 troubles – with a "model" trade union vehement in its antipathy towards agitators, portrayed itself as a bastion of civilised labour. As such, placed at the vanguard of a newly-developing labour policy, the industry claimed special protection and received anxious State attention. As a representative of the newly expanding, post-war secondary industry, replete with a largely white skilled workforce and an influential political voice, the printing industry's voice was given a weight far out of proportion with its economic significance.

It was mechanisation that forced the industry, at the turn of the century, to reorganise and restructure wage, rate and bargaining procedures. This, together with increasing post-war demand, black and white urbanisation, inflation, deskilling in other sectors of industry and a desire to protect the labour process, fuelled a need for a more regulated negotiating framework. With basic models provided by industrial relations developments overseas, the South African newspaper and printing industry formulated a plan for the creation of a system of national industrial councils. Central to the plan were the institutionalisation of the closed shop principle and the establishment of industrial peace. It was the realisation of this plan, with the formation of the National Industrial Council for the Newspaper and Printing Industry in 1919, which did more than anything to convince planners that this was the appropriate direction for future labour policy.

The consequences of the move to industrial conciliation were many. Employers achieved stability and industrial peace, heightened control over the unions and the labour process while retaining an autonomy from State interference and patronage. Employees, through their expanded unions, received high wages, various employer-backed benefits, job regulation and security. The exclusion of black workers altogether, the limiting of competition within some industries, increased bureaucratisation and the alienation of rank and file workers from union leaderships were the hidden costs of the new industrial conciliation policy. So too, argues Yudelman, were the new cleavages opened up

both within organised labour (between industrial and craft unions) and within capital (between primary and secondary industry).⁹⁸

Prior to 1924, labour legislation failed to deal adequately with the demands and conditions of post-World War I South Africa. Widespread industrial conflict, culminating in the 1922 Rand Revolt, made some alteration in national labour relations inevitable. It was this context, as well as the conflicts and dynamics that marked the internal operations of the printing and other secondary industries, which paved the way towards industrial conciliation. The newspaper and printing industry played a pivotal role in the formulation and passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. As such it had a critical effect on the whole pattern of labour relations in apartheid South Africa, particularly in secondary industry, for many decades. It is possible, therefore, to demonstrate a very direct connection between the South African newspaper and printing industry and the legislative roots of apartheid.

98. Yudelman, *The emergence of modern South Africa*, p 201.

Abstract

The South African newspaper and printing industry, though relatively small in terms of total manufacturing output and employment, succeeded in gaining considerable influence over the passage of key pieces of labour relations legislation from the 1920s. This article in particular focuses on the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, a corner-stone of South African labour relations policy for several decades. It is argued that the newspaper and printing industry had a very significant impact on motivating, drafting and implementing the Act, thereby implicating the industry in the whole pattern of South African labour relations, particularly in secondary industry, from the 1920s onward.

Opsomming

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Koerant- en Drukkersbedryf en die Impak daarvan op die Nywerheidsversoeningswet van 1924

Hoewel relatief klein in terme van totale vervaardigingsuitset en aantal werknemers, het die Suid-Afrikaanse koerant- en drukkerybedryf daarin geslaag om vanaf die 1920's 'n aansienlike invloed op die deurvoer van sleutel-geheeltes van arbeidsverhoudingwetgewing uit te oefen. Hierdie artikel fokus spesifiek op die deurvoer van die Nywerheidsversoeningswet van 1924, wat vir verskeie dekades die hoeksteen van die Suid-Afrikaanse beleid oor arbeidsverhoudinge was. Die argument is dat die koerant- en drukkerybedryf 'n besonder betekenisvolle invloed op die motivering, opstel en implementering van die Wet gehad het, en dat dié bedryf derhalwe sedert die 1920s in die hele patroon van Suid-Afrikaanse arbeidsverhoudinge, en meer spesifiek in sekondêre industrieë, geïmpliseer word.

Key words

Apartheid, media, labour policy, political economy, newspapers, printing, industrial conciliation, craft unions.

Sleutelwoorde

Apartheid, media, arbeidsbeleid, politieke ekonomie, koerante, drukkerybedryf, nywerheidsversoening, vakunies.