

politics in Venezuela and Mexico with other Latin American countries, such as Chile, where the left was able to mobilize the working class, or Japan, where industrialization was achieved without strong left-wing influences among the working class. Finally, the book does not prepare the reader for the strong performance of the left in the 1988 Mexican election.

The history of labour and the left in the two countries was not discussed. In Mexico, the Revolution of 1910 initially empowered both labour and the peasant class, thereby undercutting the position of the left with both groups. However, political elites quickly captured both groups for their own ends, and when left-wing parties emerged, they were subservient to foreign ideologies and disunited. In Venezuela, the immense wealth of the oil fields generated rapid economic growth and expectations of higher incomes for all workers, again undermining the appeal of the left. For all of their faults, the economic policies of these two countries produced substantial improvements for most workers in a climate of political stability during the adult lives of most workers surveyed. Other research has shown that Latin American unions frequently have objectives limited to economic gains in the workplace, findings which this study reinforces but does not acknowledge. In light of developments in Europe in 1989–1990, perhaps Latin American workers were more astute than foreign scholars thought.

This really is a book for specialists. The political systems of the two countries are not discussed. “*Concientización*” is not defined. There is only a brief explanation of the corporatist control mechanisms for labour and little background on the notion of strategic industries. For both countries, the strategic sector chosen was petroleum. In most nations, including Venezuela and Mexico, oil workers occupy special places of privilege, so conclusions based on other strategic sectors would have been more compelling. None of these criticisms is crucial to the book, but such omissions will limit its audience. On balance, Prof. Davis has produced an important study of labour in Latin America, one that deserves to be considered carefully by future scholars who consider the political role of workers in the region.

*Mark Thompson*

**HIRSON, BARUCH.** *Yours for the Union. Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930–1947.* Zed Books Ltd, London, Atlantic Highlands; Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg 1990. xiv, 230 pp. Ill. £ 32.95. (Paper: £ 9.95.); \$ 55.00. (Paper: \$ 17.50.)

In the years between the depression of 1929–1932 and the electoral victory of the National Party in 1948, South Africa witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in trade-union organisation and activity among African workers. In the 1920s the emergence of Clements Kadalie’s Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) had caused great enthusiasm among black workers and peasants all over South Africa, but the movement had faded away under the combined pressures of repression, internal dissension and mismanagement and only some local “Independent” ICU branches survived into the early 1930s. In the late 1920s, communist

activists expelled from the ICU began to organise the first African trade unions on industrial lines (the ICU was rather a “one-big-union” type of organisation which steadily developed into a popular protest movement). Some of the new industrial unions were revived after the depression in the 1930s, when more and more African unions were established, often by ex-communists (some of whom turned fiercely anti-communist) who had been expelled from the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and Trotskyists, activists belonging to the Workers Party of South Africa and the Workers International League: men like the able trade-union organiser Max Gordon and the one-time Trotskyite militant Baruch Hirson himself.

Hirson's new book should be particularly interesting for those who want to know more about the struggles of the urbanising African population (mainly on the Witwatersrand) in the 1930s and 1940s, struggles which occurred both on the workfloor and in the African locations and townships around the major urban centres. However, although Hirson provides some new factual material on some of these events, the overall picture of the period is – contrary to what he seems to claim – not really different from what one may learn from such works as Edward Roux's *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (1949) and H. J. and R. E. Simons' *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* (1969). Moreover, the book is perhaps too kaleidoscopic and lacking the more penetrating sort of analysis without which all accounts of the numerous “struggles” become somewhat meaningless, however brave and impressive in themselves some of these may have been. True, Hirson provides a general background to the making of the African working class by sketching the continual process of partial and permanent urbanisation, and particularly his account of the interaction of the new urban class consciousness and older forms of rural and ethnic identity is of interest. But what is missing is an analysis of the position of African workers within the labour process and the workforce of the different industries in which they were employed, and of the patterns of racial stratification and the often complicated relations between black and white workers in industrial employment. The fact of the matter is that, if a small number of white liberals, socialists and communists supported the efforts to build up African trade unions, the bulk of the white working class – as well as many coloured and Indian workers – did not, and this had far-reaching social, political and structural consequences. In order to understand the ultimate failure of African trade unionism in this period, it is not sufficient to point to the repugnant racial oppression to which Africans were exposed, or, for that matter, to the shortcomings of the “petty-bourgeois” African political leadership as provided, among others, by the African National Congress. It is imperative to situate this failure within the parameters of the structural weakness and instability of the economic and social position of the African working class, which was “contained” – the dependence of the South African economy on African labour notwithstanding – within the limits of the least skilled segments of the labour market. This entailed a high labour turnover and meant that African workers constituted an unstable group which was difficult to organise. This was true, first of all for the migrant workers in the mining compounds, but also for the more permanently proletarianised African working class in manufacturing industry. African attempts at organisation and economic betterment failed because Africans were poor, powerless, and oppressed, and, in the final analysis, because white workers

insisted on keeping them in their inferior position so as to avoid competition in the skilled and semi-skilled jobs they monopolised.

With renewed economic growth in the 1930s and the industrial boom during World War II (when South Africa was an important powerhouse for the Allies), the demand for labour increased substantially and African workers were occasionally in a position to wrest wage increases from private employers and a government that was keen to keep the industrial peace. White supporters of African trade unions – Trotskyists like Gordon and liberals of the South African Institute of Race Relations – used their access to the Wage Board (established under the Wage Act of 1925 and after 1937 also concerned with black workers) to press for investigations into the wages and conditions of groups of African workers and wage determinations laying down minimum rates of wages. Where the Wage Board machinery was successfully used and wage increases ensued, black workers flocked into the unions, although only a small proportion were able regularly to pay subscriptions. On the other hand, where African trade unions and their white helpers failed to gain concessions and strikes were lost, workers drifted away and lost confidence in their organisations. In the later years of the war the government used special War Measures to prevent strike action and tighten its hold on the African working class. Unfortunately, corruption and bad tactics further weakened the African trade-union movement. Then followed a series of defeats, culminating in the disastrous mineworkers' strike of 1946. The African Mine Workers Union and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), which only the year before had claimed to represent more than 150,000 organised workers, were seriously crippled and the short-lived period of relatively successful African trade unionism came to an end.

It is obvious that the African trade unions suffered from a great many disabilities. These related to the harsh exploitation and racial oppression of Africans in South African society, their virtual confinement to unskilled work (and even their exclusion from certain types of unskilled work through the “civilised labour policy” of job reservation for poor whites), their exclusion as “pass-bearing natives” from the operation of the Industrial Conciliation Act and the resultant non-recognition of their unions, the racist exclusiveness of organised white labour and, where African workers succeeded in organising themselves after all, the unions' dependence on Wage Board intervention and white outside support. In this connection, the role played by organised white labour and the different white-led radical political groups is of particular interest and importance. In contrast to the segregationist South African Labour Party, radical socialists clung to the belief in working-class unity across the colour line. But, as Hirson points out, in South Africa even militant socialist groups were “equivocal” in their attitude towards the African working class. Socialists and communists were quick to point to the divide-and-rule policies of capitalists and the State, but their own propaganda was frustratingly incapable of changing the white workers' hearts and minds. Even worse than that was the fact that white Marxists and revolutionary socialists found it difficult themselves to see the black working class as the real proletariat in South African society. Typical in this respect was a statement made in *The Spark*, the journal of the Trotskyite Workers Party of South Africa (1934):

The Native worker [. . .] coming from the Reserve or the Kraal, backward, down-trodden, uneducated, could not at once shake off his tribal way of life, his barbaric naivety, and his suspicion of the white man, who he could not imagine in any other role than that of an oppressor. Marxism was too much for him as a start.

As yet, the CPSA did not give up its belief that ultimately “the workers’ interests were necessarily identical” and the hope that white workers, if only in their own interest, would make common cause with the Africans. But in a pamphlet distributed among white workers in 1936 it was said:

the Party does not try to blink the facts or pander to mistaken beliefs. To many workers the barbarity, uncouthness and backwardness of the native is a serious deterrent. The individual worker may object to the native’s colour or his smell and may start by shuddering at the idea of being his “comrade” [. . .] The Native does not want to oust the white man in industry [. . .] He wants the European to help him and to lead him [. . .] It is absolutely necessary for your own preservation and for the maintenance of any Standard of Decency in South Africa.

Thus, even within radical leftist circles the African was often not taken seriously as a full-fledged “worker”, and racist notions, common among the white working class, abounded here too.

Hirson notes that the racism expressed by white workers “parroted that of the ruling class but was more virulent” (p. 29). Undoubtedly, this racism was fostered by fear of cheap labour competition. The social distance between the white artisan and the black labourer may have resembled that between skilled and unskilled workers in Europe, but it went also deeper than that. According to Hirson, in the South African context black workers could see little distinction between white workers and the bosses: indeed, both were addressed as “boss”. In 1936 the South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC), the major white-dominated trade-union federation of the period, suggested that a minimum wage of 10s per day for white workers and 5s for blacks be laid down. Such paternalistic propositions were typical for an organisation whose leadership included some socialists and communists. Meantime, the rank and file were usually more overtly racist: Hirson gives several examples of white workers, helping to break strikes of African workers. Even a union like the National Union of Distributive Workers, which was led by communists and their sympathizers, excluded African workers from membership. This forced Africans to form their own unions, and there can be little doubt that they had few illusions, if any, about the theoretical possibility of interracial solidarity.

Not surprisingly, white involvement in the African trade-union movement – often of a paternalistic kind – was one of the issues of contention within the CNETU. Black nationalists attacked both the Trotskyists and communists (whose mutual differences helped to split the Council) and the SATLC, which was criticised by ANC leaders for its failure to help African unions in their fight for recognition and the right of black workers to strike. Nevertheless, communists and others advocated affiliation of African trade unions to the SATLC, maintaining that it was possible to overcome colour exclusiveness and gain sympathy for African demands. Indeed, some members of the Central Committee of the CPSA were opposed to the formation of separate black unions, and on occasion it transpired that the Party did

not want to antagonise the white workers (at one point it was even suggested that white miners – notoriously racist – should organise the African mineworkers!). We may safely assume – and Hirson provides ample evidence for this – that African workers knew better. As it was, they were left in the cold by the white working class. This was one of the most important lessons they learnt.

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SWIFT, ANN. *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948*. [Monograph Series, no. 69.] Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca (NY) 1989. xii, 116 pp. Ill. \$ 9.00.

The revolt of some communist-led troops in East Java, which led to the occupation of the provincial city of Madiun on 18 September 1948 and presented a formidable challenge to the Republican government in Yogyakarta, constitutes a controversial issue. A number of opposing theories have been put forward to explain the events surrounding this revolt. Observers within the Communist movement are prone to see evidence here of an American-imperialist plot, in which the Dutch were also involved, which made use of “Trotskyist traitors”; on the other hand the prevailing political and military view in Yogyakarta was that the revolt represented an attempt on the part of communists to subvert and overthrow the legitimate Republican government – and within Masyumi circles the hand of Moscow was perceived to be the force behind events. The literature on the subject offers some slight variation on these two themes and provides more details, but essentially no new analysis of the political crisis of September 1948 has been presented.

The first scholarly attempt to deal with the “Madiun affair” was that of Professor Kahin, whose extensive on-the-spot research in the years 1948–1949 formed the basis of his book, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (1952). His view of the “Madiun affair” might be summarized as follows. In September 1948 the Hatta government and the Army High Command stepped up their drive to rationalize the heterogeneous armed forces; part of this process of rationalization involved the removal of officers from the regular army (TNI). Attempts to implement reforms within the IVth Division, which was stationed in Surakarta (a hotbed of radicalism) and commanded by lieutenant colonel Suadi (a communist sympathizer), led to skirmishes and to the expulsion of this division from the city. This alarming setback for the left precipitated an offensive reaction on the part of local commanders in East Java who feared an all-out campaign against their autonomy: they seized control of the city of Madiun on 18 September. The leadership of the PKI was presented with a *fait accompli*, which left them with very little alternative, “[. . .] they found themselves catapulted from the Gottwald-Plan phase of their campaign into the revolutionary phase [. . .]” Kahin characterized the general socio-economic and political conditions at that time as ones unfavourable for revolution, however, and for a long time this view has not seriously been challenged.

Benedict Anderson’s study, *Java in a Time of Revolution* (1972), has increased