“Histórias do Trabalho no Sul Global”
“Historias del Trabajo en el Sur Global”
“Labour Histories from the Global South”
I Seminário Internacional de História do Trabalho
V Jornada Nacional de História do Trabalho
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis
25-28 de Outubro de 2010

Revolutionary Syndicalists in Durban, South Africa, 1915-1921: race, class and Indian Ocean networks

Lucien van der Walt
Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA

lucien.vanderwalt@wits.ac.za
(+27) (0)73 1460 871

Presented at “Labour Histories from the Global South”, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 25-28 October, 2010

Draft only.

This paper examines the Indian radicals associated with the revolutionary syndicalist International Socialist League (ISL) and the Indian Workers’ Industrial Union in the Indian Ocean port of Durban in the Natal province of South Africa in the 1910s.[1] The city and the province had a large Indian minority, mainly descended from indentured Hindus, as well as a substantial African (mainly local Zulu) and white (mainly British-descended) populations.

[11] In 1910, the British colonies of the Cape Colony and Natal, the defeated Afrikaner republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and defeated African polities – notably the Zulu, Pedi and Xhosa kingdoms – were merged into the Union of South Africa, a self-governing British Dominion. The first colonies and republics became provinces, the African territories, subordinate Native Reserves.

The Indians occupied a position in the social order below the skilled white artisans, but alongside the poor whites, and above the largely unfree African labourers. They were always subject to substantial amounts of official and popular discrimination.

In the 1910s, a significant section of the Durban Indians was attracted to the revolutionary syndicalist movement of the ISL, joining the Indian Workers' Industrial Union which was active on the docks, in the restaurants and hotels, and in the factories. This paper examines its role in strikes (notably in the tobacco factories), its cultural interventions (notably the Indian Workers Choir), its key activists (notably Bernard Sigamoney and R.K. Moodley), its politics (notably its opposition to segregation, to capitalism and the Indian bourgeoisie), and its relationship to African and white workers. It also examines the diffusion of the union's IWW-style radicalism into Lahore, India, through the radical press and by example.

Context: the Indian working class South Africa

In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, extensive use was made of Chinese and Indian indentured labour across the British Empire. The numbers involved shipped around the world were comparable to those in the African slave trade. Indenture was, of course, a system of unfree labour that bore similarities to slavery and that was, as a result both ideal for cheap labour, and also highly controversial precisely because it was unfree and cheap.[2] From 1860, Indians were brought to Natal, then a British colony, to work in the coastal belt of sugar plantations, operated by mainly British planters. By 1880, there were 20,000 Indians, by 1885, 30,000,[3] and by 1911, when the system was ended, there were 133,420 Indians out of a Natal population of 98,114 Whites and 953,398 Africans.[4] While the total Indian population in the country was a mere 150,000 out of a total of just less than six million in 1911 (that is, around 2,5 percent), compared to 4,000,000 Africans, 1,276,000 whites (around 21 percent), and 525,000 Coloureds (around 9 percent),[5] it formed a much larger and more significant part of the Natal (and Durban) populations. (Another feature of Natal that bears noting is that the white population was predominantly English-speaking, and of British descent, and sometimes

[2] For instance, see D. Northrup, 1995, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Hugh Tinker, 1974, *A New System of Slavery*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[3] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 3-4
[4] Paul S. Thompson, 1990, *Natalians First: separatism in South Africa 1909-1961*, Southern, Johannesburg, p. 1; also see Lambert and Morrell, 1996, *op cit*., p. 68
[5] Van Duin, 1990, *op cit*., p. 640 note 38

inclined to British "jingoism": [6] elsewhere in the country, the more republican Afrikaners were the majority amongst whites).

The majority of the Indians in South Africa were low-caste Hindus from the Madras Presidency, brought out in indenture. Until 1895, these workers had the option of paid transport back to India, or of obtaining a plot of land locally; the great majority had elected to stay.[7] Most Indians in the turn of the century Durban were working class, although there was a significant population of market gardeners, a small number of Western-educated clerks, doctors, interpreters, lawyers and teachers, and a significant bourgeoisie, mainly Muslims who arrived independently.[8]

Durban was Natal's main port, and a booming Indian Ocean city by the turn of the century. Besides an excellent closed harbour, it had, from 1905, the shortest railway connection to the mining centres of the Witwatersrand, in the Transvaal province, the hub of the regional economy. Durban became the principal port in the country, and critically, the main port serving the mines.[9] It soon established itself as the most economically important port in East Africa. It also benefited from its proximity to Natal's own expanding collieries, which expanded in tandem with the growth of railways and power stations,[10] and the commercial farms, exporters of sugar and suppliers of wood to the mines. Access to cheap imported inputs enabled the city to develop a local manufacturing and service sector, with products like paint and soap.[11] By 1910, Durban had a population had a population of 65,000, of which slightly less than half was white,[12] roughly a third the size of Cape Town (the other

[6] Lambert and Morrell, 1996, *op cit*., p. 69

[7] From 1904 to 1910, the Witwatersrand mines used indentured Chinese workers on three year contracts. The system was extremely controversial, and soon discontinued, the last Chinese indentured worker repatriated in 1910.

[8] In the Umlazi district of Durban at this time, for example, amongst Indian men there were 3,474 farm labourers, 127 labourers, 77 railway labourers, as well as 256 skilled manual workers, 107 waiters and 53 clerks, in addition to 1634 market gardeners, 176 storekeepers, 169 small cultivators, and 38 grocers: see Freund, 1995, *op cit*., pp. 44-45, table 3.5. I have derived the category of "skilled manual labour" by collapsing together the following categories used by Freund: bakers and confectioners, barbers and their assistants, basket makers, bricklayers, carpenters and their assistants, jewellers, painters, and printers.

[9] Bill Freund, 1995, *Insiders and Outsiders: the Indian working class of Durban, 1910-1990*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, James Currey, London, p. 29

[10] Alexander, 2001 *op cit*., pp. 116-7

[11] Bickford-Smith, 1995, *op cit*., p. 130; Freund, 1995, *op cit*., pp. 29-31; also see Martin Nicol, 1984, "A History of Garment and Tailoring Workers in Cape Town, 1900-1939", PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, pp. 70-71

[12] John Lambert and Robert Morrell, 1996, "Domination and Subordination in Natal, 1890-1920", in Robert Morrell, editor, 1996, *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: historical and social perspectives*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, Indicator Press, Johannesburg, p. 66

main port, in the Cape province), and a quarter that of Johannesburg (heart of the Witwatersrand).[13]

During the First World War, there was a rapid expansion of Indian employment in the factories and hotels of Durban, as the clothing and textiles, food, furniture and other manufacturing industries expanded rapidly.[14] The number making a living in town as hawkers, market gardeners and independent fishermen fell quickly, while wage labour grew rapidly, living in multi-racial slum areas such as Grey Street alongside poor whites and Africans, or in shack settlements on the outskirts of the white areas. Many factory owners preferred settled Indians to migrant Africans as a source of cheap labour.

The Indian population was always subject to substantial amounts of discrimination. Indians were not allowed to reside in the province of the Orange Free State (formerly an independent republic), and excluded after 1910 from the franchise in the Orange Free State and Transvaal. The Cape and Natal had qualified franchises, based primarily on property ownership which did permit some Indians to vote, although in Natal, where most Indians lived, successive amendments to the qualified franchise not only excluded almost all Africans,[15] but significantly limited the Indian vote. Nonetheless, despite the 1896 Franchise Amendment Act, the Indian vote did remain important in several municipal wards in Durban, including working class Grey Street.

The Indian bourgeoisie, which managed to capture much of the African trade and expanded from there, alarmed white capitalists, who agitated for restrictions.[16] While the Indian capitalists continued, in fact, to be economically successful, they were firmly established by 1914 (like other Indians) as second-class citizens.[17] Nonetheless, From 1891, Indian capitalists began to organise against restrictions in the Orange Free State, the Transvaal, and Natal, using lawsuits and petitions: these focused on the claims of the commercial elite.[18] (The Indian commercial elite were highly visible by the end of the

[13] Cape Town had 170,000 by 1904: Bickford-Smith, 1995, *op cit*., p. 11, table 1. Johannesburg claimed 250,000 by 1913: Krut, 1988, *op cit.*, pp. 135-6.
[14] Marie, 1986, *op cit*., pp. 38-42
[15] In Natal, "Africans, by passing certain 'civilisation tests,' could become voters, but not more than two or three ever qualified, and for the last decade or more there been only one African voter": thus, Roux, [1964] 1978, *op cit.*, pp. 101-2. Similarly, John Lambert and Robert Morrell note that the actual number of African voters was uncertain, but probably no more than six: Lambert and Morrell, 1996, *op cit*., p. 72. . Ticktin gives similar figures: there were perhaps 150 Indian voters, 50 Coloureds and six Africans: Ticktin, 1973, *op cit*., p. 42
[16] Lambert and Morrell, 1996, *op cit*., p. 66
[17] Vishnu Padayachee and Robert Morrell, "Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy, C1875-1914," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991).
[18] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 40-49

nineteenth century, and dominated Indian politics over the next two decades).[19] The Natal state also discriminated against educated Indians in the civil service.

Growing state expenditure on Indian and Coloured education was tied to attempts to segregate schools, with *per capita* spending substantially lower than that on whites.[20] In 1902, the Cape government introduced an Immigration Bill that made knowledge of a European language a requirement for immigrants: this was designed to exclude Indians and East European Jews (the latter on the grounds, later challenged, that Yiddish was not a European language).[21]

Indian workers also faced opposition from many white workers who, determined to avoid displacement by cheap "coolie" labour, campaigned for job colour bars and Indian repatriation. Durban was a stronghold of the South African Labour Party, which was formed in 1909 with the backing of Witwatersrand and Natal trade unions, as well as a section of the Cape unions). The SA labour Party combined a platform of social democratic reforms and demands for racial segregation, sometimes called "White Labourism". Indian repatriation was one of the party's main demands.[22]

Resistance: From Gandhi to the IWW

An important strand of Indian politics was represented by the Durban-based Natal Indian Congress (NIC), formed by Indian merchants in 1894; despite its name, it was active in other states. A notable founder member was the young Mohandas Kamarchand Gandhi. Born to the *vaishya* (merchant) caste in Gujarat, the London-trained lawyer came to Natal in 1893 for work. Deeply shocked by discrimination against the Indians, Gandhi worked as a paid organiser for the merchants' campaign from 1894.[23] Over the next ten years, the NIC sought to block, and then ameliorate, discriminatory legislation. In 1903, Gandhi founded the local newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, which would run for many years.

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[19] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 39-78

[20] Segregated public schools for whites in Cape Town in the 1890s attracted twice the subsidy per pupil of mission schools, which were often integrated, and whites received five times more expenditure than the other races. See Bickford-Smith, 1995, *op cit*., pp. 31, 142.

[21] Bickford-Smith, 1995, *op cit*., p. 146

[22] South African Labour Party, [1910] 1960, "Programme of Principles", in D.W. Krűger, 1960, editor, *South African Parties and Policies, 1910-1960: a select source book*, Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, p. 73. The 1909 constitution and platform, the 1910 general election manifesto and several other policy documents may be found in Ticktin, 1973, *op cit.*, pp. 487-495, 526-533.

[23] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. xiii-xv, 48-49, 51, 57-59, 61

From 1904, Gandhi started to embrace the ideas of John Ruskin, a romantic socialist, and Leo Tolstoy, a radical Christian, rejecting capitalist industry in favour of handicrafts and peasant life, and rejecting rational modernity in favour of spiritual enlightenment and civil disobedience.[24] Maintaining correspondence with Tolstoy,[25] he also began to return to Indian religious ideas. It was in cosmopolitan Johannesburg, not colonial India, that Gandhi came to see himself as first and foremost an Indian.[26] In 1904 Gandhi established a commune near Durban, followed by another near Johannesburg in 1910. He started to initiate passive resistance campaigns, encouraging non-cooperation and mass protests against a poll tax on the Indians in Natal, against various restrictions on movement and immigration, and the state's failure to recognise Indian marriages.[27]

Even so, Gandhi usually stressed loyalty to the British Crown, and protesting the "non-recognition of the just place of the better class" of Indians (as distinct from the "coolies").[28] His movement did not really link to other groups, partly because Indian protest discourse often centred on criticising restrictions for "degrading" Indians to the level of the Africans.[29] African nationalist groups had emerged from the late nineteenth century, with much of their leadership drawn from the African "middle class" of prosperous Christian peasants, professionals and petty capitalists.

Faced with growing restrictions, this layer launched the South African Native National Congress in 1912 (SANNC, from 1923 the African National Congress). As the name suggests, the new group was inspired by India's Indian National Congress, as well as by the example of the NIC. The SANNC rarely engaged in direct action, although Josiah Gumede, secretary of the SANNC's Natal Native Congress, occasionally suggested Africans should

[24] On Gandhi's developing outlook, see Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 114-123, 145-148, 167-168. There is an extensive literature on the influences of these two men upon Gandhi: see, *inter alia*, V.V. Raman Murti, 1968, "Influence of the Western Tradition Upon Gandhian Doctrine", *Philosophy East and West*, volume 18, number 1/ 2; Beni Prasad, May 1944, "Influence of Modern Thought on India", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, volume 233

[25] *The War on War Gazette*, 10 October 1914, "Tolstoy and 'Anarchy'

[26] Philip Bonner, Jonathan Hyslop, and Lucien van der Walt, "Rethinking Worlds of Labour: Southern African Labor History in International Context," *African Studies* 66, no. 2/3 (2007)., p. 147

[27] Eddie Roux, [1964] 1978, *op cit*., pp. 101-108; A handsome study of these developments, with numerous illustrations, is provided by Eric Itskin, 2000, *Gandhi's Johannesburg: birthplace of satyagraha*, Wits University Press in association with Museum Africa, Johannesburg. Also of interest is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, n.d. [? 1968], *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol.3 on *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad

[28] Quoted in Swan, 1985, *op cit*., p. 63t

[29] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 118, also see 145-6

emulate Indian passive resistance.[30] Gumede edited the Zulu-language *Ilanga Lase Natal* (the "Sun of Natal"). Africans, as previously indicated, a conquered people, and in Natal there were systematic efforts to force the Zulu into the labour market. In 1906, there was an armed rebellion led by Chief Bambatha against a £1 poll tax on men, in which up to 4,000 Africans (and 24 whites), were killed, and a large amount of tribal land was expropriated.[31]

The other key strand in Durban's opposition politics was the radical left. Gandhi, who "declared himself a Socialist", sometimes spoke from the platforms of the Social Democratic Federation (a Cape-based radical group led by anarchists, formed 1904),[32] and the short-lived United Socialist Party (an amalgam of syndicalists, anarchists and state socialists, formed 1912).[33] Both formations explicitly rejected White Labourism in favour of genuine working class solidarity, with the SDF making great strides towards organising across the colour line through public meetings, trade unions and unemployed protests.[34]

In Durban, there was a small "Social Democratic Party", which had which opposed segregation although it did not do much work amongst people of colour. It emerged around 1907 from the local Clarion Fellowship, formed in 1903 around the *Clarion*, a paper edited by Robert Blatchford of Britain's Independent Labour Party.[35] The Fellowship sold pamphlets and books, and identified with the parliamentary socialist wing of the Labour and Socialist International.[36] Its key figure was Scottish immigrant trade unionist Harry Norrie, who spoke at the Town Gardens every Sunday night: for "seven years he was the only regular speaker, and he often held a crowd for four hours".[37] Besides running in elections (usually unsuccessfully), Norrie helped produce the short-lived *Socialist Spark* from 1906. Other key

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[30] Translated excerpt from *Ilanga Lase Natal* from the 13th June 1913, "A War of Strike", in "Strike on New Kleinfontein, Status of Native Labourers", Government Native Labour Bureau, GNLB 109 1238/13, National Archives, Pretoria

[31] William H. Andrews, 14 February 1918, "White and Black Labour in South Africa", *The Call* ; Lambert and Morrell, 1996, *op cit*., p. 87-8; Shula Marks, 1986, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: class, nationalism, and the State in twentieth-century Natal*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, pp. 29-30

[32] Harrison, [? 1947] n.d., *op cit.*, pp. 36, 143

[33] Gandhi's speech is discussed *The Voice of Labour*, 12 July 1912, "Heard and Said" and "At the Vaudette: Mr. Gandhi's Lecture"

[34] On the SDF and other Cape Town radicals, see Lucien Van der Walt, "Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City: The Revolutionary Traditions of Cape Town's Multiracial Working Class, 1904-1924," *Labor History* (in press).

[35] On the *Clarion*, see A.L. Morton and George Tate, 1979, *The British Labour Movement, 1770-1920*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, revised edition, pp. 198, 202-4

[36] James Kier Hardie, 17 April 1908, "South Africa: in Natal", *The Labour Leader*; Drew, 2002, *op cit*., p. 25; Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, *op cit*., pp. 172-3; Jack and Ray Simons, [1969] 1983, *op cit*., pp. 102-3; Ticktin, 1973, *op cit.*, pp. 10, 362-364; Visser, 2001a, *op cit*., p. 16

[37] Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, *op cit*., pp. 172-173; also see Boydell, [? 1947] n.d., *op cit.*, pp.x-xi; Grobler, 1968, *op cit*., p. 116

figures in the party were Harry Haynes, previously a militant Witwatersrand miner, and A.L. Clark, from 1918 president of the National Union of Railway and Harbour Servants (NURHAS), and advocate of interracial trade unionism in the *Railway Review*.[38]

A more radical left-wing formation was the local Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or Wobblies), affiliated with the international syndicalist movement of that name. The Johannesburg-based radical weekly, the *Voice of Labour* (launched in 1908), carried a good deal of syndicalist material; it was distributed in Durban. From February to April 1910, famed British syndicalist Tom Mann toured South Africa, with large and successful meetings in Durban and elsewhere.[39] In June 1910, an IWW was formed in Johannesburg: its stronghold the trams, it soon spread to the railway yards in Pretoria, the Transvaal capital.[40] In May 1911, the IWW, the Socialist Labour Party (another syndicalist group), the SDF, the Social Democratic Party in Durban and a small Socialist Party in Pietermaritzburg (the Natal capital) formed a short-lived "Industrial Freedom League" with a "united advocacy of Industrial Unionism" for all workers.[41]

By June 1912, a Durban IWW section was active.[42] A "comrade Webber", a fervent IWW supporter, who "roundly condemned political action",[43] went "down to Durban at the invitation of the Durban IWW".[44] A "very forceful and fluent" speaker, he specialised in "phrase-making, blood-curdling class war propaganda", and debated Tommy Boydell of the SA Labour Party at the Durban Town Gardens before a large crowd on the topic of "Syndicalism versus Socialism".[45]

The South African IWW proudly described itself as a "class-conscious revolutionary organization embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour,"[46] to "fight the class war with the aid of all workers, whether…skilled or unskilled, white or black."[47] However, while the organisation aimed to form an interracial union movement, it failed to move beyond

[38] Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, *op cit*., pp. 164-165, 169; Harrison, n.d., *op cit*., p. 47; Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, pp. 117-118; Ticktin, 1973, *op cit*., pp. 18, 72
[39] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 32
[40] Tommy Boydell, "Foreword," to Harrison, Wilfred *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903–47* (Cape Town: Stewart Printing, n.d.), p. xii; "Heard and Said," *Voice of Labour* 14 June 1912; T. Glynn, "'Recognition" and A.B. Dunbar, "I.W.W. Propaganda Notes," *Voice of Labour*, 24 November 1911; "The 'Sherman' Agitation," *The Voice of Labour*, 1 December 1911.
[41] Visser, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 247-8
[42] *The Voice of Labour*, 14 June 1912, "Heard and Said"
[43] Boydell, [? 1947] n.d., *op cit.*, p. xii
[44] *The Voice of Labour*, 14 June 1912, "Heard and Said"
[45] Boydell, n.d., *op cit.*, p. xii; *The Voice of Labour*, 14 June 1912, "Heard and Said"
[46] *Voice of Labour*, 22 July 1910.
[47] *Voice of Labour*, 25 November 1910.

its initial base amongst white workers, by the time of its decline in 1913.[48] In Durban as in Johannesburg, trade unionism was before 1917, basically a movement of white workers.

Nonetheless, the ideas of the IWW gained a hearing amongst the local Indians. In 1911 and 1912, for example, Natal Indians were campaigning against a £3 poll tax on those who had entered indenture after 1895; the tax was designed to discourage settlement. A.S. Aiyar, a leading figure in the campaign and the Indian educated elite, and a sometime member of the Natal Indian Congress and the Colonial Born Indian Association, praised the IWW in his paper, the *African Chronicle*. He concluded that "the time is not far distant when the evils of capitalism as we know it will be done away with, and a more rational and in every sense a sounder system of the employment of capital will be substituted".[49]

Radicals: revolutionary syndicalism amongst Durban's Indians

The year 1913 was something of a watershed, marked by three mass strikes by whites, Africans and Indians, respectively. In May 1913, white miners launched a violent general strike in which at least twenty strikers were shot dead, and strikers seized downtown Johannesburg. This was followed by three days of strikes by African miners, their largest coordinated strike action yet.[50] In October, Indian passive resistance took a new turn when 5,000 went on strike at the collieries, in the plantations and sugar mills, and on the railways.[51] A second general strike by white labour was suppressed with martial law in January 1914, while the outbreak of the First World War in August (South Africa's parliament voted to support Britain) sparked an Afrikaner nationalist rebellion that split the army,[52] and, the following year, led to anti-German riots and a split in the SA Labour Party. (The SANNC and NIC, by contrast, chose to demonstrate their loyalty to Britain by suspending ball campaigns, the SANNC recruiting African labourers for the war,[53] the NIC helping raise a corps of 700 Indian stretcher-bearers).[54]

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[48] On its racial politics, see *inter alia*, Peter Cole and Lucien van der Walt, "Crossing the Colour Lines, Comparing the Continents: the racial politics of the IWW in South Africa and the United States, 1905-1925", *Safundi*: *the journal of South African and American Studies* (in press).
[49] Quoted in Swan, 1985, *op cit*., p. 214
[50] Philip L. Bonner, 1979, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: a preliminary account", in Bozzoli, editor, 1979, *op cit*., p. 274
[51] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., pp. 246-256; also see Shamim Marie, 1986, *Divide and Profit: Indian workers in Natal*, Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, Department of Industrial Sociology, Durban, pp. 29-31
[52] Sandra Swart, 2000, *op cit.*
[53] Simons 1983, *op cit.*, p. 176-7
[54] Ashwin Desai, Vishnu Padayachee, Krish Reddy and Goolam Vahed, 2002, *Blacks in Whites: a century of cricket struggles in KwaZulu-Natal*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, pp. 48-9

Further unrest was *en route.* The South African economy boomed in the war, prospering into 1920, with manufacturing growing noticeably; Indian employment in this sector improved as many white workers were abroad in the British forces. There were perhaps 180,000 people employed in manufacturing establishments by the end of 1920.[55] By 1921, there were 6,000 recorded factories recorded under the 1918 Factories Act, with around 30,000 whites and 74,000 others.[56] The working class, faced with relatively low unemployment and employers' relative willingness to make compromises, went on strike and won important concessions. In 1915, for instance, the Witwatersrand gold mines, for the first time, agreed to negotiate with the white unions in return for no-strike agreements; a similar deal was struck on the collieries three years later.[57]

Strike action and unrest did not, however, decline. There was a massive wave of colonial and proletarian revolt internationally that inspired local struggles and activists. The Russian Revolution was but one component. There was an anarchist revolution in the Ukraine, for example, anarchists and syndicalists played key roles in mass struggles internationally, and syndicalist unions grew dramatically.[58] In Southern Africa, there was massive inflation from 1917, spurring a strike wave across the region, lasting into 1925.[59] Within South Africa, a sharp rise in the cost of living (part of an international trend) played an important role in the unrest. Prices rose from the start of the First World War, and inflation grew rapidly towards the end of 1917.[60] Prices for many commodities doubled by 1920, and inflation reached twenty percent, while nominal wages remained static.[61] Rising prices could perhaps be borne during war; afterwards, however, the "whole pent-up reservoir of frustration" start to "burst its banks."[62] 168 of 199 officially recorded strikes in South Africa for the period 1906-1920 took place from 1916,[63] with at least 175,664 workers out on strike

[55] Simons, 1984, *op cit.*, p. 220; Frederick Johnstone gives slightly lower figures: a growth in the number of manufacturing establishments from 2,400 to 7,000 from 1911 to 1921, with an increase in employees of colour from 44,000 to 116,000. See Johnstone, 1976, *op cit*., p. 97
[56] Simons, 1984, *op cit.*, p. 220
[57] Alexander, 2004, *op cit*., p. 126; Cope [? 1943] n.d., *op cit.*, p. 187
[58] Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (San Francisco, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009)., pp. 164-169
[59] On the regional strike wave, see van der Lucien van der Walt, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the Iww and the Icu, 1904-1934," *African Studies* 66, no. 2/3 (2007)., pp. 229-31
[60] See Bonner, 1982, *op cit*., pp. 273-6 including table 1
[61] Bonner, 1979, *op cit*., p. 279
[62] Bonner, 1979, *op cit*., pp. 279-280
[63] H.R. Pike, *A History of Communism in South Africa*, second ed. (Germiston: Christian Mission International, 1988)., pp. 103-5

from 1916 to 1922.[64] Government reported that union numbers rose from 9,178 in 1914, to 40,000 in 1917, to 135,140 in 1920, that is, 14 000 percent.[65] New sections of the workforce moved into action; new unions emerged in manufacturing, services and transport. [66]

It was in this context that an Indian Workers' Industrial Union was formed in March 1917 in Durban, "on the lines of the IWW,"[67] by members of the International Socialist League (ISL). It was a general union, and claimed a membership amongst workers in the docks, garment workers, laundry workers, painters, hotel employees and waiters, and tobacco workers.[68] It also reportedly attracted the interest of waiters, mineworkers (Indians formed a large sector of Natal colliers),[69] and the "sugar slaves" of the plantations.[70] The union has, however, been largely ignored in the literature.[71] Its history is important, as it was a pioneering example of people of colour unionising in Natal, and because it was a key component of the 1910s syndicalist movement in South Africa. It is not clear whether this was the first Indian workers' union in Durban, [72] but it was certainly one of the very first, and even more, the most important.

The ISL, a revolutionary syndicalist group launched in 1915 (it included many IWW veterans), and active in the Transvaal, Natal and parts of the Cape. It was committed to building One Big Union uniting the whole working class for the abolition of capitalism, the state and the national oppression of the non-white majority. [73] The One Big Union would be "the embryo of that Socialist Commonwealth." Cheap African labour was created by laws and regulations that made the blacks into "serfs",[74] for the benefit of "employers generally."[75] The

[64] Jack Simons and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, [1969] 1983)., p. 333
[65] Ibid., p. 333; also see R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader* (Cape Town: Stewart Printing, [? 1943])., p. 200 and van Pieter van Duin, "South Africa," in *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Koln: Brill, 1990). p. 640 note 3
[66] Walker and Weinbren, 1961, *op cit.*, pp. 59-85; Wickens, 1973, *op cit.*, pp. 43-5
[67] *The International*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban"
[68] Gordon Lee, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Waking Up", *The International*; also see Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002, *op cit.*, pp. 59-61; Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 117
[69] Alexander, 2001, *op cit.*, p. 507
[70] Gordon Lee, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Waking Up", *The International*
[71] The only real study of the union and its background remains Mantzaris' pioneering work from two decades ago: Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.* At the time, Mantzaris noted that the union barely registered in most accounts: unfortunately, this still remains the case.
[72] Some sources claim it to be the first e.g. Marie, 1986, *op cit.*, p. 45
[73] "The Break up of Capitalism," *The International*, 11 February 1916; "Branch Notes," *The International*, 24 March 1916.
[74] "International Socialism and the Native" The International, 7 December 1917.
[75] "Workers of the World Unite," *The International*, 18 February 1916.

One Big Union must sweep away these "tyrant laws,"[76] ensuring "the abolition of all forms of native indenture, compound and passport systems; and the lifting of the native worker to the political and industrial status of the white." [77]

Regarding the Indians, the ISL position was identical: equal rights in One Big Union for a common South African society based on a self-managed "Industrial Republic" ("an integral part of the International Industrial Republic") rather than the colonial racial hierarchy with its stratified working class.[78] From 1917, the ISL made systematic efforts to directly organise African, Coloured, and Indian workers into new syndicalist unions (and to recruit these workers into the ISL). Interest in organising Indians was always high in the Durban ISL. [79] Meanwhile, the Johannesburg ISL held meetings to discuss the "barbarities to which the Indians in Natal were treated".[80]

A key figure in these initiatives was Gordon Lee, chair of the Durban ISL from August 1917.[81] He was described by the ISL weekly, the *International*, as an "IWW organiser",[82] although it is not quite clear whether he had been involved in the earlier Durban IWW. Lee made contact with Bernard L.E. Sigamoney, a prominent urban Indian teacher who was radicalised by the rampant inflation of the war years, addressing a number of meetings on the issue of growing food shortages. Sigamoney was born in Durban in 1888, was part of the educated elite and was, unusually, an Indian Christian.[83] After serving as headmaster at Estcourt Indian High School, he taught at St. Aidan's Boys School, a church mission school, in the 1910s. He was also a keen sportsman, involved in the Durban and District Indian Cricket Union from 1910.

Lee initially served as chair of the Indian Workers' Industrial Union, but the ISL strongly encouraged to elect a committee from their own ranks to take care of day-to-day union business. By August 1917, the key union functions were being undertaken by local

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[76] "International Socialism and the Native," *The International*, 7 December 1917.
[77] *The International*, 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League"
[78] *The International*, "Industrial Unionism in South Africa", 22 February 1918.
[79] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., p. 116
[80] *The International*, 28 July 1916, "Branch Notes"
[81] F.A. Mouton, 1987, "Van Matroos tot Senator: the kleurryke and stormagtige politieke loopbaan van S.M. Pettersen", *Klio*, no. 19; *The International*, 10 August 1917, "Durban Notes"; Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002, *op cit*., p. 59. It should be noted that Desai *et al op cit*., incorrectly identify Lee as a member of the *Industrial* Socialist League.
[82] *The Internationa*l, 26 October 1917, "Indian Workers Union". The Simons call him a "follower of De Leon" i.e. of Daniel De Leon, late head of the Detroit IWW faction: Jack and Ray Simons, [1969] 1983, *op cit*., p. 293
[83] Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002, *op cit*., pp. 38, 42, 45-51, 57, 59-61, 69-70; Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., p. 116

Indians, most notably R.K. Moodley and Sigamoney, all considered to have a "good … grip on the class struggle".[84] The ISL actively recruited committee members, and Moodley, Sigamoney and a man called Ramsamy were among those joined the ISL. Similar union initiatives in other centres – Kimberley in the Cape, Cape Town and Johannesburg – saw groups like the ISL, which had been founded by white immigrant radicals (mainly British working class, especially Scottish, like Dunbar) become more and more multiracial, as Africans, Coloureds and Indians joined.

These new members were pushed to the fore: syndicalist cause. Sigamoney was soon "a committed socialist and a leading member of the ISL, and received fraternal support from trade-unionists and members of the same organisation".[85] Sigamoney quickly became the most prominent Indian trade unionist and anti-capitalist in the city. In August 1917, the ISL held a national conference in Johannesburg at its offices at the Trades Hall, to discuss an invitation for a South African delegate to a proposed socialist "peace conference" in Stockholm. Among the organisations that attended were the Indian Workers Industrial Union, in the person of Sigamoney, and the "Native Workers Union, Johannesburg".[86] The latter was presumably the nucleus of the Industrial Workers of Africa, an all-African syndicalist union on the Witwatersrand, modelled on the IWW and linked to the ISL. The presence of Indian from Durban, and several Africans, led to the ISL being evicted and barred from the Trades Hall.[87]

In October 1917, Sigamoney chaired a socialist conference in Durban on the relative merits of boycotting elections (the main IWW position), versus a tactical use of elections (argued by the IWW minority around De Leon, but favoured by many in the ISL).[88] The conference seems to have been organised by Sofus Maurits "S.M" Pettersen, a Norwegian ship's engineer, and former ISL Durban chair.[89] Pettersen had a keen interest in drawing in Coloured and Indian socialists.[90] Sigamoney was also present at the ISL's annual conference in January 1918, where "he spoke as an Indian worker protesting against the outrageous

[84] *The International*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban"
[85] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 116
[86] *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 14 December 1918, "South African Socialists: South Africa and the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference"
[87] William H. Andrews, 20 December 1917, "South African Freedom and General Smuts", *The Call*
[88] *The International*, 9 November 1917, "A Socialist Conference in Durban"
[89] All biographical detail on S.M. Pettersen is drawn from Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 29-33
[90] Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., p. 32

violation of the principle of civil equality contained in the new Railway Regulations as applied to natives, Indians, coloured people" – referring to the segregation of coaches.[91]

Bill Andrews of the ISL, the South African delegate to Stockholm, returned in mid-1918: he had not been able to proceed to Stockholm, but an inspiring few months with the British far left. Members of the Indian Workers Industrial Union and the Industrial Workers of Africa were present at his reception in Johannesburg in July 1918, and at the planning meeting that followed in August.[92] A more formal subsequent meeting was held on 11 August 1918, at which Sigamoney was again present.[93]

The overlapping membership between the Indian Workers' Industrial Union and the International Socialist League was one sign of the close links between the two organisations. A relationship between an Indian union and political groups was most unusual at the time, for the merchant-dominated NIC and its ilk had "very little contact" with workers.[94]

Record: the activities of the Indian Workers Industrial Union

In conjunction with the ISL, the Indian Workers' Industrial Union held open-air mass meetings of Indian workers at the corner of Grey and Victoria streets, where "the Indian Workers Choir entertained the crowds by singing the Red Flag, the International and many IWW songs". [95] There were also regular classes in the evenings, which pored over works by De Leon and Marx. David Ivon Jones, a leading figure in the Johannesburg ISL but now convalescing from tuberculosis in a Pietermaritzburg sanatorium, made several trips to Durban, where he shared the platform with Moodley and Sigamoney. Plans were also made to print ISL literature in Tamil, Hindi and Telegu, languages commonly spoken by local Indians. (in 1904, only five percent of Natal Indians were literate in English,[96] although a higher number could speak the language; there was a fair amount of Indian language publishing in the province).

While the Indian Workers' Industrial Union was particularly prominent, a number of Indian unions emerged independently amongst Indian drivers, dockworkers, hotel employees,

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[91] *The International*, 11 January 1918, "Our Annual Gathering"
[92] *The International*, 2 August 1918, 'Revolution in Britain'
[93] *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 14 December 1918, "South African Socialists: South Africa and the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference"; the full statement may also be found in *The Socialist*, 2 January 1919, "Protest against Labour Party"
[94] Marie, 1986, *op cit*., p. 62
[95] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, pp. 116-117
[96] Swan, 1985, *op cit*., p. 12

shop assistants, workers at the sugar mills, and waiters.[97] In July 1919, Indian waiters formed a union, which organised a strike later that year in Durban and East London (another port town). Initial plans to affiliate with the Natal Shop Assistants' and Commercial Workers Union, a left-leaning white union were shelved, and the waiters' union joined the Indian Workers' Industrial Union,[98] giving it a base in two centres. The waiters' strike was bitterly fought, as white workers scabbed. Only the Building Workers' Industrial Union, of all the white (or predominantly white) unions, supported the strike – it is significant that the BWIU had a marked syndicalist influence.[99]

There was also, at the time, a Tobacco Workers' Union amongst Indian workers, which was supported by Sigamoney and the ISL, who provided financial support and organisers.[100] Tobacco growing and processing was a profitable business in Natal, which has a sub-tropical climate, and was, following the South African pattern of highly centralised capitalism, soon controlled by a small interlocking group in farming, manufacturing and distribution, including Indian as well as white capitalists.[101] The biggest single grower and manufacturer was an Indian: R.B. Chetty of the Imperial Cigar Manufacturing and Trading Company, whose properties included tobacco factory in Durban employing 120 Indians. Chetty, it is worth noting, was vice-president of the NIC.

In October 1920 the tobacco workers struck for better conditions and higher pay, and against overwork.[102] They had been quiet for many years, afraid of losing their jobs, and the strike seems to have come as a shock. When Chetty brought in scab labour, the political temperature rose quickly: several strike-breakers were attacked, resulting in two strikers being charged with assault and fined £5 each, a very large sum for the workers. The workers then

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[97] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 118

[98] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 98; *The International*, 11 July 1919; cf. Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., p. 118. *The International*, 11 July 1919. It is not clear whether the Natal Shop Assistants' and Commercial Workers Union, was the same as "Distributive and Mercantile Workers Industrial Union" that the *International* reported was launched in 1918 by Haynes of the Social Democratic Party: *The International*, 11 October 1918, "Industrial Unionism"

[99] See Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 90. Formed in 1916, the BWIU included key ISL figures like George Mason and Charlie Tyler, and its stated aim was to organise all workers in the industry into one union, and to cultivate "sufficient knowledge and power to enable the Union ultimately to control effectively the Building Industry in the interests of the Workers": Quoted in Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, *op cit*., p. 71. Tyler became its secretary-general and organiser in 1921, having been a top figure from the start. In the Transvaal the union seems to have succumbed to the pressure of White Labourism, but its Natal and Cape sections organised and defended Coloured workers. See Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, *op cit*., p. 171; Peltola, 1995, *op cit*., p. 88; Walker and Weinbren, 1961, *op cit*., p. 191; Jack and Ray Simons, [1969], 1983, *op cit.*, p. 228; C.B. Tyler, 14 July 1916, "Union of all Building Workers", *The International; The International*, 31 January 1919.

[100] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., pp. 118, 120

[101] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., pp. 118-119

[102] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., pp. 120-125

elected a fifteen-person strike committee, which set out to win support in Indian and mixed neighbourhoods, managed to raise a substantial amount of money through donations, and held regular mass meetings. To Chetty's consternation, a number of scabs then joined the strike, and had to be replaced, in their turn, by yet more scabs.

The "Indian community" was split down the middle. Indian railway workers came out on a solidarity strike, while the owners of other tobacco and -related properties lined up with Chetty's. Conservatives businessmen called for a united front against trade unionism; an organisation called the South Africans' League used the strike to promote an anti-Indian programme. The white unions and the SA Labour Party ignored the strike, , which was concentrating on winning elections to the Provincial Council.

By contrast, the ISL and the Indian Workers' Industrial Union rallied to the strikers. Andrews and Ivon Jones of the ISL arrived in Durban, where they called on all workers to join the struggle against capitalism, and establish *soviets* in every workplace (including Chetty's factory).[103] Invited to share a platform with the South African Industrial Federation (the main white union body) and the South African League, the ISL slammed the Federation for aligning itself with the League, appealing for solidarity with Chetty's by the white workers.[104] Again, only the Building Workers' Industrial Union supported the strikers.

J. Kerr (now Durban ISL secretary), Ivon Jones and Sigamoney all tried to use the strike to promote radical views,[105] In fact, the ISL's Indian and white members had little influence within the strike committee at Chetty's.[106] Nor were those workers ready to establish *soviets*. The committee focussed on the wages and working conditions issues, avoiding "political" issues, and became entangled in a lengthy negotiations process. Happily, however, the final settlement was an outright victory for the strikers.[107] Subsequently, Andrews, Pettersen and Sigamoney were active in support of striking Indian furniture workers.[108]

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[103] This account fo events closely follows Mantzaris' excellent reconstruction: Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., pp. 122-123.
[104] J. Kerr, 15 October 1920, "White Worker vs. Indian: Durban Federation allies of the 'smellers out,'" *The International*
[105] For example, activities reported in David Ivon Jones, 15 October 1920, "Indian Workers on Strike: some piquant lessons", *The International*
[106] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., pp. 122-123
[107] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit*., p. 124; also see David Ivon Jones, 29 October 1920, "Indian Workers Win", *The International*
[108] *The International*, 7 January 1921, "Indian Furniture Strike in Durban"

There were several attempts to link the Industrial Workers of Africa in Johannesburg, and the Indian Workers industrial Union in Durban, albeit without apparent success. At the meeting of the Industrial Workers of Africa on 27 September 1917, Dunbar stated that the union would soon be linked to the radicals in Durban, where "the natives and Indians had formed their branch".[109] An African delegate was indeed dispatched to Durban but proved unable to make contact with Lee of the International Socialist League, or any other organiser of the Indian Workers' Industrial Union. Meanwhile, the Clothing Workers' Industrial Union, a mainly Coloured syndicalist union formed by the ISL in Kimberley in 1919, seems to have spread to Johannesburg around the same time, and then, reportedly, to Durban.[110] It is not clear whether this union was more successful than the Industrial Workers of Africa in making links to the Indian Workers' Industrial Union.

Networks: race, class and the Indian Ocean

Efforts to spread the One Big Union to the African workers of Durban were less successful than its work amongst the Indians, although there were definite attempts to develop an African syndicalist constituency. Pettersen was intensely active from 1915 to 1917: while this was mainly amongst Indian and white workers, he also joined Andrews on several trips into the countryside to address meetings of Africans.[111] ISL material seems to have been "warmly received" by many African workers.[112] In early 1919, Ivon Jones of the ISL and Laurie Greene of the Socialist Party wrote an ISL leaflet called "The Bolsheviks are Coming". This was issued in Pietermaritzburg and Durban in English as well as the African languages Zulu and Sesotho.[113] (The ISL enthusiastically supported the Russian Revolution, but for years stubbornly insisted it was a *syndicalist* revolution: *soviets* were "the Russian form of the Industrial Union",[114] Lenin and Trotsky "only the delegates of the Russian Federation of Labour,[115] which aimed to "destroy" the state "in step with the world wide movement of the working class").[116]

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[109] Wilfred Jali, report on meeting of 27 September 1917, in Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17
[110] *The International*, 27 June 1919; *The International*, 4 July 1919; also see Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 98
[111] Mouton, 1987, *op cit.*, pp. 29-33
[112] Hemson, 1979, *op cit.*, p. 166
[113] Reprinted in *The International*, 25 April 1919, "The Bolsheviks are Coming"; it is also included in Brian Bunting, 1981, editor, *op cit.*, pp. 38-40
[114] *The International*, 18 May 1917, "Russian Workmen Vindicate Marx"
[115] *The International*, 1 March 1918, "The Call of the Bolsheviks – League Manifesto"
[116] *The International*, 3 August 1917, "The Russian Drama"

Despite the title, "The Bolsheviks are Coming" was really just a restatement of standard ISL syndicalism: "combine in the workshops," "regardless of colour," for a "World-Wide Republic of Labour." The leaflet caused "great excitement" amongst the Africans in Durban, and an African who distributed he leaflet in Pietermaritzburg got into a fight with a white ex-soldier.[117] The authorities were alarmed;[118] the leaflet evidently resonated with the increasingly restive Africans of Durban, whose numbers had risen from 17,925 in 1918 to 29,011 in 1921.[119] Most lived in grim compounds (hostels) or shanties, and all faced a host of restrictions: besides a 9 pm curfew and a ban from the pavements, the *togt* system forced people to buy a badge before they could look for work.

In 1918, there were a series of strikes, centred on the African dockers. However, it was John Dube, head of the Natal Native Congress and onetime SANNC president, not the syndicalists, who provided leadership. Dube stressed petitions and appeals to "the sense of common justice and love of freedom so innate in the British character," not strikes.[120] This helped close down the space for Industrial Workers of Africa activity, as did the prosecution of Ivon Jones and Greene for he leaflet. [121] J.S. Warwick, manager of the Durban Municipal Native Affairs Department, testified that the "preaching of Socialism and syndicalism amongst the Natives in their present backward state is wholly undesirable".[122] Gumede also testified, affirming that British imperial rule was preferable to Bolshevism, Greene submitted a copy of the *Communist Manifesto* as his statement to the court,[123] but Ivon Jones stressed instead the ISL aim: "the establishment of revolutionary industrial organisations by workers to form the skeleton of the Social Commonwealth." [124] (The accused were sentenced to a £75 pound fine and four months in jail, plus a further £10 fine or one month in jail, but the sentence was overturned on appeal in the Supreme Court and the prisoners were discharged. Nonetheless, Greene and his wife were fired from their jobs, and Ivon Jones was evicted from the sanatorium).[125]

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[117] Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., p. 179
[118] Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., pp. 179-180
[119] Figures from Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., p. 162
[120] Quoted in Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., p. 167; also see Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., pp. 166-168, 170-172, 190. For more on Dube, see Skota, editor and compiler, [? 1930] n.d, *op cit*., pp. 144-5
[121] For details of the arrests and the trial, see David Ivon Jones, 18 April 1919, "Reflections on Remand", *The International*; *The International*, 25 April 1919; *The International*, 2 May 1919, "The 'White Mind' in Natal"
[122] Quoted in Hemson, 1979, *op cit*., p. 163
[123] *The International*, 1 October 1920, "Lo! The Poor Unemployed"
[124] Quoted in Hirson, 1988a, *op cit.*, pp. 117-119
[125] Eddie Roux, [1944] 1993, *op cit*., p. 86

Sigamoney was also investigated by the police at this time, apparently for mobilising the Africans, but officials were unable to find sufficient grounds for a prosecution. However, the successes of the Indian Workers' Industrial Union inspired the ISL in Durban, and drew attracted widespread attention, including interestingly enough in India itself. According to the *Indian Opinion*, which had carried many reports on the union and whichw as widely distributed in the global Indian *diaspora*, the "fame of the Indian Workers Union, and Comrade Sigamoney's activities therein" had "reached Lahore in India".[126] It cited with great excitement an article in an unnamed "Lahore paper", which had reported on developments in Durban, and had asked:

> Is there no lesson for this to the working classes in India? For in India the workmen are entirely unorganised for their mutual benefits.

Meanwhile, the ISL rejected an overture from the SA Labour Party, and decided to run Pettersen as a candidate for the Natal Provincial Council in 1920 for propaganda purposes.[127] He performed fairly well, winning a good deal of support amongst Indian voters, but did not win a seat. [128] Norrie, now a town councillor, threw his Social Democratic Party's support behind the SA Labour Party.[129] He would run again in 1921, this time for parliament: nominally an "independent", he was really as an ISL candidate.[130]

Conclusions: after syndicalism

In the 1920s, the syndicalist milieu in Durban started to change in important ways. Sigamoney declined to join the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), which was launched in mid-1921 by the ISL and other groups, and for many years retained a syndicalist influence.[131] At some point he embraced religion, and went to Britain in December 1922 to study as an Anglican pastor; on his return, he worked for St. Anthony's Indian Mission in

[126] Cited in *The International*, 9 November 1917
[127] *The International*, 10 December 1920, "The I.S.L. in Durban",
[128] Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 29-33
[129] Jack and Ray Simons, [1969] 1983, *op cit.*, p. 250
[130] *The International*, 10 December 1920, "Durban Notes"; *The International*, 21 January 1921, "Durban Notes"; *The International*, 21 January 1921, "The Union Assembly Elections: how to vote; Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 29-33; Jack and Ray Simons, [1969] 1983, *op cit.*, p. 250
[131] According to the official party history, "syndicalist concepts remained within the Communist Party for many years after its foundation; echoes of their approach and phraseology appear in many documents and journals": Harmel, 1971, *op cit.*

Johannesburg.[132] Pettersen was active in the Durban CPSA, and used his increasing success as a businessman to provide party offices and sponsor a political night school amongst local African.[133] He was deeply disillusioned when the party began t a series of purges towards the end of the 1920s, under Moscow instructions to "Bolshevise" and "purify" itself – a process that finally destroyed any lingering syndicalism in the party. Increasingly erratic, Pettersen ran as an anti-Indian candidate in 1932, winning first a municipal, then a provincial, and finally, a senatorial seat. He provided a crucial vote for the passage of the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act that banned the CPSA,[134] a strange political epitaph for a onetime syndicalist and Bolshevik.

One last gasp of syndicalism remained in Durban, and this was the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), a mainly African union. Originally formed in n1919 in Cape Town, the ICU merged with a number of other African and Coloured unions – notably the powerful Cape section of the Industrial Workers of Africa – in 1920. When Tom Mann (now a communist) addressed the 1923 ICU congress, reporting with "real joy" its commitment to "One big union movement for African Workers" and national liberation.[135] In 1925, the ICU adopted the *Preamble* of the IWW in its constitution, declaring itself part of the international anti-capitalist struggle.[136] The vision of the One Big Union remained a recurrent theme: "we will give you a damned good lesson, by putting a stop to all your railways, mines and harbours and domestic services; then you may do without us."[137] Like the local IWW before it, ICU militants maintained correspondence with the US IWW.[138] The ICU was syndicalist-*influenced*, but it was not exactly a syndicalist union, for besides the IWW, it was influenced by ideas like Garveyism, African Christianity, and liberalism.

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[132] Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002, *op cit.*, pp. 59-61; Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 84

[133] Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 34-6. It was t was Pettersen who recruited Johannes Nkosi, destined to become the Party's first African martyr when he was killed at an anti-pass protest in 1930. Nkosi joined the CPSA in 1926, becoming its Durban organiser in 1929. Also see "Nkosi, Johannes", in Verwey, editor, 1995, *op cit*., pp. 204-6; Albert Nzula, 9 January 1931, "Editorial", *Umsebenzi: the South African worker*

[134] Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., pp. 36-46. "Een van due kenmerke van Pettersen se termyn in die Provinsiale Raad was sy anti-Indiëruitsprake" (One of the characteristics of Pettersen's term in the Provincial Council were his anti- Indian speeches): Mouton, 1987, *op cit*., p. 41

[135] Tom Mann, March 1923, "S. African Natives and Colored Men", *All Power*.

[136] See Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, *Revised Constitution, as Amended by Conference at Johannesburg, 1925* (ICU: Cape Town, 1925).

[137] Report of private informer on 1926 ANC congress, appended to report by A.J. du Plessis to Divisional Criminal Investigations Officer, Bloemfontein, in Department of Justice file, JUS 915 1/18/26 part 1, National Archives, Pretoria.

[138] There is, for instance, material from the late 1920s in the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union folder, in the main IWW Collection at Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit.

Durban was an ICU stronghold until the late 1920s, where Allison W.G. Champion, full-time secretary for the ICU in Natal from 1925, built a formidable movement.[139] Champion was rather more conservative than Clements Kadalie, the main ICU leader, and had strong inclinations towards Zulu nationalism, but he too go caught up at times in the IWW vision. His 1927 pamphlet, *The Truth about the ICU*, for example, stated that the ICU was "an industrial organisation" that aimed at "industrial and political democracy by and through the emancipation … of the African worker".[140] While the ICU preamble ("which we frankly admit could be better worded") was alarming to some, it merely aimed at "true co-operation" and a "co-operative commonwealth", "nothing more and nothing less".[141] From 1928, the ICU started to fall apart, with Champion launching his own ICU *yase* Natal the following year.[142] The ICU *yase* Natal declined in the mid-1930s, closing a chapter in Durban radicalism.

[139] Notice from Randfontein Compound Clerks, dated 25 February 1920, attached as letter from H.E. Allen, manager Luipaardsvlei Estate and Gold Mining Company, 26 February 1920, to the secretary and legal adviser Transvaal Chamber of Mines, in the Native Recruiting Corporation file, "Native Strike February 1920", TEBA archives, Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit/ University of Johannesburg.

[140] Allison W.G. Champion, 1927, *The Truth About the ICU*, the Roberts Printing Works for the African Workers' Club, Durban, p. 5. A copy is held in the folder Industrial and Commercial Workers Union" in the IWW Collection, Collections of Archives of Labour and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit. I would like to thank William LeFevre for helping me locate this folder, and for sending me a copy.

[141] Champion, 1927, *op cit*., pp. 6-7

[142] For Champion's version of events, see Allison W.G. Champion, 1929, *Mehlomadala: my experiences in the ICU*, Durban, copy at University of Cape Town library; Allison W.G. Champion and Stanley Trapido, [1964] 1974, "An Interview with Mr. A.W.G. Champion", *South African Labour Bulletin*, vol.1, no. 6/7, double issue; Allison W.G. Champion, 1982, *The Views of Mahlathi: writings of A.W.G. Champion, a black South African*, introduction by R.R.R. Dhlomo, edited by M.W. Swanson, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban