
by

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Congress Alliance</td>
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<td>CNETU</td>
<td>Council of Non-European Trade Unions</td>
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<td>COP</td>
<td>Congress of the People</td>
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<td>CPSA</td>
<td>Communist Party of South Africa</td>
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<td>FCWU</td>
<td>Food and Canning Workers Union</td>
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<td>I.L.O</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>N.E.C.</td>
<td>National Executive Committee</td>
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<td>SACTU</td>
<td>South African Congress of Trade Unions</td>
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<td>SAFTU</td>
<td>South African Federation of Trade Unions</td>
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<td>SAIRR</td>
<td>South African Institute of Race Relations</td>
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<td>SAT &amp; LC</td>
<td>South African Trades &amp; Labour Council</td>
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<td>SATUC</td>
<td>South African Trade Union Council</td>
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<td>TUCSA</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The period after the Second World War was marked by a rapid growth of the manufacturing industry. The growth of the manufacturing industry was reflected in the economic growth which grew at an annual average rate of 8.3 percent.¹ Concomitant to this was the demand for cheap African labour. The direct result of this demand was increased labour supply. This increase led to a spate of laws and controls introduced to swell and redistribute labour while controlling wage rates.

In the political sphere the ANC adopted and launched the 1949 programme of action, which Tom Lodge describes as ‘the most militant statement adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) to date’.² The programme brought about increased rioting and demonstrations throughout South Africa and culminated in the 1952 Defiance campaign. The defiance campaign was preceded by the banishment of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1950 under the Suppression of Communism Act, No 44, of 1950.

The period from 1953 up to 1956 witnessed the promulgation of several repressive laws. These were the Public Safety Act, No. 3, of 1953 and the Criminal Law Amendment Act No. 8, of 1953 which gave the authorities more control over offenders.³ On the labour front the government passed the revised Industrial Conciliation Bill in 1954 which prohibited racially mixed trade unions. Thus when South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was formed the environment was highly charged and politicised and there was a clampdown of both political organisations and trade unions. Hence, organised labour had to find ways to counter this clampdown and promote their cause.

It is against this background that the aims, objectives and actions of the South African Congress of Trade Unions will be examined from 1955 to 1965.

³ J. Selby, A Short History of South Africa, p.252.
1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the actions of SACTU against the background of its aims and objectives during the period 1955 to 1965. The birth of SACTU was influenced by two factors, namely, economic and political factors. The economic factors were demands for improved wages and better conditions of employment. The political factors constituted opposition to discriminatory and repressive legislation and the advancement of democratic rights of workers. Both economic and political factors influenced the ideological disposition of SACTU as a trade union federation. However the focus of the study is not the economic or political factors, neither is it SACTU’s ideological disposition. The focus is on its actions in the light of its stated aims and objectives.

Edward Feit suggests that SACTU intended to function as a political trade union, which sought to harness worker demands for “economic amelioration to a political cause.”⁴ In other words Feit is suggesting that SACTU was a trade union federation fighting for day to day worker rights, however covertly it was a political organisation manipulating economic factors to achieve certain political gains. This study seeks to establish whether SACTU with regard to its aims, objectives and actions, indeed saw itself as a “political” trade union, which combined shop floor issues with broader issues affecting workers outside the shop floor.

SACTU itself argued through its chairman, that it would not separate politics and the way people were governed from their bread and butter issues, nor their freedom to move from places where they can find employment, shelter or the type of education they desire for their children.⁵ Thus the trade union would be neglecting the interests of their members if it failed to struggle on their behalf on all matters affecting them. He argued that trade unions must be active in the labour arena as well as in the political arena because the two were intertwined.⁶ Other trade union leaders, although not in their official capacities, investigated the possibility of forming a worker’s party to oppose the Industrial Conciliation Bill. These leaders argued that there was a distinct demand among workers for

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⁴ E. Feit, Workers Without Weapons, p.33.
⁵ SACTU Archives: AD 1197/A3, Chairman’s Opening Address, 05/03/1955, p.2.
⁶ Ibid, p.3.
“political cover” for the trade union movement. However they insisted that such a move and direction could not have any official connection with the trade union movement.\footnote{The Star, March 6, 1956, p.6.} They had discovered that workers were still inclined to their old political allegiances of Nationalists versus ‘the rest’. They had, nonetheless also discovered that a new set of circumstances was emerging in which common economic interests amongst the workers were predominant.\footnote{Ibid.} The common economic concerns included, amongst others, the high cost of living, a possible reduction in allowances, the risk of unemployment in certain industrial sections and other economic issues which offered a natural common interest for workers irrespective of the political affiliation. The government inadvertently made the workers aware of these common interests by introducing the Industrial Conciliation Bill which meant the ‘political decapitation of workers’ movement’.\footnote{Ibid.} This Bill also made workers realise that they were rendered politically voiceless. The union leaders argued that by proposing to “remove politics from trade unionism” and depriving trade unions a voice in politics, the government created a vacuum.\footnote{Ibid.}

That SACTU and other trade unions would play a role in politics is incontestable in the light of what the chairman said. He said: The slogan ‘No Politics in the Trade Union’ is a popular one in South Africa. It is extensively used by people who fear the strength of organised labour, and just as popular as it is, so fallacious is it. Politics are matters concerned with the government of the country and the laws that are passed. All laws affect the workers and, through them their trade unions. Who can say that the Industrial Conciliation Act, or the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes Act) or any other Act, does not affect the workers or their trade unions? You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter, or their freedom to move to and from places where they can find employment, or the houses they live in, or the type of education their children get. These things are of vital concern to the workers. The trade unions would, therefore, be neglecting the interests of their members on all matters that affect them. The trade unions must be as active in the
political field as in the economic sphere, because the two hang together and cannot be isolated from each other”11

The question that needs to be answered is: Did the actions of SACTU between 1955 and 1965 correlate with the stated aims and objectives of the federation?

To answer this question, there are subsidiary questions that also have to be answered, namely:

1. Why was SACTU formed?
2. In what kind of activities was it involved? What kind of general campaigns were organised?
3. Was SACTU’s involvement in politics fortuitous?
4. What was the impact on SACTU’s involvement in politics on its ability to deal with shop floor issues?
5. Were its actions, campaigns and resolutions etc, in accordance with its aims and objectives?
6. Did the federation collaborate with liberation movements and if it had, was it informed by its stated aims? How did it carry out its campaigns? Were these campaigns centralised or did SACTU support campaigns of its affiliates? What informed these campaigns? Were they political or did they primarily address shop floor issues?

11 Sactu Archives: AD 1197/A3, Chairman’s opening Address, 05/03/1995, pp 2-3.
A substantial literature has been published on the trade union activity in South Africa. De'siree' Yolanda Soudien supports the view that SACTU functioned as a ‘political’ trade union. She wrote a dissertation on the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), an affiliate of SACTU. Soudien showed how one of the SACTU affiliates, namely the FCWU was organised. She pointed out that the organisation of the FCWU was strengthened by its affiliation to SACTU and the Congress Alliance. Hence, the Union had 17 617 members by April 1961.\textsuperscript{12}

Soudien’s work showed why there was a need for a non-racial federation, by describing the birth of SACTU. Her work is valuable because it showed how an affiliate, FCWU, interacted with its mother body namely, SACTU. Whether SACTU saw itself as a political trade union is a moot point. Exploring the true nature of SACTU’s activities and investigating how it functioned as a trade union federation will reveal whether it saw itself as a ‘political trade union’ or whether in the course of its activities it found itself dealing with political matters it could not avoid.

Edward Feit wrote a critique on SACTU. In his book \textit{Workers Without Weapons} he explored how SACTU was made to fail: ‘through official (government) attack, through legislative and executive action against it, and through SACTU’s failure to raise the political consciousness of actual or potential members’.\textsuperscript{13} Whereas Feit is preoccupied with the analysis of SACTU from a political vantage point, Soudien seems to disregard the limitations that an over enthusiastic political inclination can bring to a trade union. Neither Feit nor Soudien critically investigated the activities of SACTU or its affiliates in order to determine whether they matched their stated objectives or aims.


\textsuperscript{13} E. Feit, \textit{Workers Without Weapons}, p.8.
In his book *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* Tom Lodge argued that “the repressive political climate led to realignment in the trade union movement.”

Lodge stated that legislation apart, economic conditions of the 1950’s were not favourable towards the development of African trade unions. Lodge however, did not explore SACTU’s operations to determine whether its involvement in politics was in accordance with its aims. The nature of its involvement in politics was not assessed or evaluated. There is no evaluation of how SACTU implemented its programmes. Lodge mainly gives a general history of SACTU from its inception until it became dormant in the 1960s. Lodge did however acknowledge that SACTU was first and foremost a trade union movement and he briefly outlined its more conventional activities. He pointed out that the politicisation of African trade unionism was ‘a corollary to the increasingly radical character of nationalist politics during the 1950s’. Hence he argued that an understanding of the political and economic environment within which trade unions operated was needed.

Lodge refuted some of Feit’s arguments that SACTU was covertly political. He stated for example, that SACTU’s political linkages could elevate its stature among some employers.

E.R. Braverman (a pen name for Ray Alexander – a SACTU member) wrote in ‘Fighting Talk’: “Not only will SACTU lead the struggle of workers for the day to day economic demands, but it will play its full role in the political struggle of the South African worker for a free and democratic South Africa.” However, to dismiss it simply as a conveyor belt for the liberation movement is too restricted. There is a need to assess SACTU’s actions within the context of

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
its stated goals. This is lacking in the available literature. The person who wrote most extensively on SACTU, is Edward Feit. His study focused on assessing the failure of political trade unionism. He argued that political trade unions had many pitfalls because they had divided aims. They had to fight for workers on shop floor issues and also had to engage in political activities. Feit argued that to gain its long-term political ends, a political union must secure economic gain to its members in the short term.\(^\text{19}\)

According to Feit SACTU’s aims were purely political. Thus the purpose of this study is to analyse SACTU’s actions comprehensively so as to determine whether its activities, including political actions, were accidental or deliberate and therefore in accordance with its stated objectives. Feit’s point of departure is that SACTU was an attempt by the Congress Alliance to mobilise the African workforce.\(^\text{20}\)

Feit does not show that by participating in the Congress Alliance, SACTU was contradicting its stated aims or objectives or that this participation was informed by these objectives. Feit criticised the £1-a-day campaign as disorganised and unfocussed. He criticised the leadership of being weak and ineffective. Feit maintained that the aim of organising SACTU was political.\(^\text{21}\) This view was opposed by A. Hepple who wrote Trade Union Guide for South African Workers. Hepple argued that the organisational work of SACTU was severely handicapped by a lack of funds and personnel. He also stated that this was worsened by the many discriminatory laws which hampered the movements of African workers and restricted their activities.\(^\text{22}\)

There are other sources and writers analysing SACTU or trade unionism in general. The website www.sactu.org.za yielded substantial information on

\(^{19}\) E. Feit, Workers without Weapons, p.33.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
SACTU. It outlined the birth of SACTU, its involvement in the Congress Alliance and its international connections and activities. The SACTU Archives can be found at the University of the Witwatersrand Department of Historical papers.\textsuperscript{23} The Archives contain the Chairman’s inaugural address at SACTU’s first conference on 5\textsuperscript{th} March 1955. It also contains the constitution, reports presented at conferences, memoranda and other documents. M. Horrell wrote \textit{Racialism and the Unions}\textsuperscript{24} and \textit{South African Trade Unionism: A study of Divided Working Class}\.\textsuperscript{25} In the latter she describes how divergent views on the racial issue polarised the trade union movement. She also investigated the impact of legislation, namely the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950 and the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 28 of 1956, on trade unions.

In \textit{South Africa’s Workers: Their Organisations and Patterns of Employment}\.\textsuperscript{26} Horrell describes the origins of trade unionism in South Africa. This publication represents the good overview of the trade union movement and also gives statistics of membership of the different trade unions and federations. Don Ncube wrote \textit{The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions}\.\textsuperscript{27} In this book Ncube explores the birth, demise and re-emergence of Black unions in South Africa. He points out how difficult it is to speak about trade unionism within the context of South Africa as one is compelled to speak about Black or White trade unions instead of the trade union movement in general.\textsuperscript{28} Ncube argued that the political consciousness of Black workers was a consequence of the publication of a revised Industrial Conciliation Bill in 1954. Although he does not investigate the activities of SACTU, Ncube gives a succinct historical background to the emergence of SACTU as a co-ordinating structure for a number of unions.

\textsuperscript{23} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A3 – Bb.
\textsuperscript{24} M. Horrell, \textit{Racialism and the trade Unions}, SAIRR, 1959.
\textsuperscript{26} M. Horrell, \textit{South Africa’s Workers: Their Organisations and the Patterns of Employment}, SAIRR, 1969.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid}, p.xiv.
F. de Clerq wrote a paper titled ‘The Organised Labour Movement State Registration: Unity or Fragmentation’ in the South African Labour Bulletin.\textsuperscript{29} De Clerq’s views seem to complement Ncube’s argument that the black workers political consciousness was a result of the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956. He stated that the Act became an instrument of racial dominance. He argued that it is legislation such as the Industrial Conciliation Act No.28, of 1956 which created the basis for a dual system of industrial relations. He argued furthermore that such legislation showed the state’s hand in institutionalising racism among the working class in South Africa.\textsuperscript{30}

De Clerq further argued that the new labour legislation of the mid - 1950s emphasised the differences within the registered unions and contributed to the regrouping of old unions and to the emergence of new ones.\textsuperscript{31} His work was valuable in that it offered a clear description of the milieu within which unions had to function or carry out their organisational activities.

R. Lambert wrote another entitled ‘Political Unionism in South Africa’.\textsuperscript{32} Lambert critiqued the work of Edward Feit in this paper. He argued that Feit’s goal in Workers without Weapons was to uncover the ‘facts’ of the development and failure of SACTU as an organisation.\textsuperscript{33} He pointed out that Feit’s book ‘suffers a three fold limitation’.\textsuperscript{34} Firstly, its descriptive account is confined to the level of organisation and fails to locate SACTU within the context of the working class in general.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p.98
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
It also does not locate trade union development within a changing economy sufficiently. Secondly, Lambert argues that Feit’s work is sketchy, confusing and does not give a complete history and development of individual SACTU unions. Lastly, Feit’s argument is based on ‘a false dichotomy of the economic and political’.  

Lambert’s critique provides a counter argument to Feit’s criticism of SACTU as a political trade union. It enables one to look at SACTU’s activities not only from one vantage point. It enables one to take into account certain contextual factors such as the prevailing economic and political conditions, when assessing its activities.

K. Luckhardt and B. Wall wrote the official history of SACTU, entitled Organise or Starve … The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. To a certain extent this book provides answers to the questions such as why SACTU was formed, although the history presented is incomplete as some documents were confiscated in raids carried out by the South African State. Luckhardt and Wall argued that SACTU had clearly recognised that the link between the struggle for economic gains and the general political struggle were intricately intertwined. Hence it called on its members to play a leading role in the struggle for national liberation. They also stated that a trade union movement had a specific task in the struggle. SACTU, in their view, saw its major task as that of organising the unorganised workers of South Africa. Luckhardt and Wall’s depiction of SACTU’s history enables one to position SACTU’s activities in a chronological and sequential manner.

37 Ibid, p.97
From the above exposition it is evident that quite a bit was written on SACTU even though some documents were lost during raids by the police and when the federation had to operate underground after 1960.

The methodology of this investigation will be qualitative. Internal and external criticism will be applied to the sources. Different physical locations were visited to ensure that there is an alignment of sources.

The William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, which houses the Historical Document and Manuscript Section, was consulted and yielded positive results. The SACTU Collection consisted of the constitution, reports, minutes of meetings, correspondence and pamphlets. This collection was donated by the South African Institute of Race Relations. The Library also has an extensive collection of New Age, a Congress newspaper, both on hard copy and on microfilm. It also has a sizeable collection of journals such as the South African Labour Bulletin.

Sources were also obtained from Cosatu House and the Johannesburg Public Library. The Cosatu House archives held documents that cover the period which falls beyond the scope of this mini-dissertation. These documents covered the period 1979 to the 1980s when SACTU was absorbed by COSATU. The Johannesburg Public Library has a wide range of books on the economic history of South Africa which contextualise the labour market during the period under discussion. Amongst these books were titles such as Working for Boroko: Origins of a Coercive Labour system in South Africa by M. Lacey and Capitalism and Apartheid South Africa 1910 – 1986 by M. Lipton. These books gave a clear picture of labour market environment which prevailed in South Africa during the period of the study.

An attempt to conduct an interview with John Nkadimeng, the erstwhile Secretary of SACTU did not materialise. Mr Nkadimeng was inaccessible because of his work as South African ambassador in Cuba. The aim of the interview was to establish whether members of SACTU saw the day to day activities as actions
that derived from the federation's aims and objectives. Before outlining the aims, objectives and actions of SACTU it is essential to outline the development of trade unionism in South Africa. This will take the form of an investigation into the development of the labour market in the wake of the mineral revolution. The labour market created fertile ground for the formation of a trade union movement such as SACTU.
CHAPTER TWO

2.1 A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF TRADE UNIONISM AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The genesis of trade unionism in South Africa can be traced back to the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and the discovery of gold in 1885. A few industries had been established in South Africa up to the 1850s. The discovery of both diamonds and gold led to industrialisation and diversified economic development. Both these discoveries precipitated the growth of the manufacturing sector which in turn created a demand for skilled artisans. These skilled artisans were recruited from abroad, particularly from Great Britain and Australia. In the 1880s the British Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners were established in the Cape and Natal Colonies. These were craft unions which were modelled on the British guild system. Between 1886 and 1893 branches of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers spread to cities such as Durban, Kimberley and Johannesburg. The craft unions were organised primarily in the field of mouldering, engineering, masonry, carpentry and printing. There were several other local branches of the British craft unions, amongst them were a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, which was formed in 1881. The period between 1880 and 1890 was described as the beginnings of militant trade unionism.

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40 Ibid.
The leadership of the unions were typical union officials of the British type—hard and ruthless in their approach. Du Toit argued that 23 December 1881 can be perceived as the date on which the first trade union was established in South Africa.\textsuperscript{45} The first union was formed in Cape Town which was a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Great Britain. This union together with other branches, which were established, later formed the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. By 1910 there were only 3836 registered trade unionists in South Africa. This number had shot up to 39152 by 1917 and to 135410 by 1920.\textsuperscript{46}

The growth in the mining industry on the Witwatersrand was accompanied by the growth of craft unions. These craft unions developed exclusive mechanisms and created barriers to exclude African workers from access to crafts.\textsuperscript{47} This created an elitist labour aristocracy which comprised of White workers.\textsuperscript{48} In fact, J. Lewis pointed out that in the literature the term ‘craft union’ referred to all forms of White trade unionism.\textsuperscript{49} Hutt argued that the artisan immigrants were reared in the traditions of the emergent reactionist ideologies and British trade unionism. They tried to enforce a kind of closed shop approach which denied opportunities for advancement to their non-white counterparts.\textsuperscript{50}

The discovery of diamonds and gold had another unintended effect. It gave impetus to the decline of the African peasantry. By early 1870s between 10 000 and 12 000 people were employed on the Kimberley Diamond Mines. By 1871 the Kimberley area had a population of 50 000 people.\textsuperscript{51} Within ten years since the discovery of gold on the Rand, 50 000 blacks were working on the gold mines.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{48} ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{50} W.H. Hutt, \textit{The Economics of the Colour Bar}, pp.58-59.
\end{flushright}
Van Onselen maintains that by 1913 the Witwatersrand mining industry was a huge operation with a production capacity of no less than forty percent of the world’s total gold output.\(^\text{53}\) Pampallis described the gold deposits, at that time, as the largest ever discovered in the world.\(^\text{54}\)

The development of mining was labour intensive. A large labour supply, sophisticated machinery and reduction works were acquired to recover gold from low-grade ore. By the early 1880s the demand for labour began to outnumber the supply.\(^\text{55}\) The development of mining led to industrialisation. New buildings were erected and a number of manufacturing industries, which were related to an expanding mining industry, mushroomed. The direct consequence of this industrialisation was the increasing demand for labour. Various strategies were employed to increase labour supply. A spate of laws and controls were used to swell and redistribute labour and at the same time control wages.

There was, for example, legislation which limited black access to land. The Glen Grey Act of 1894 was an example of how legal instruments were used to guarantee an ever-increasing labour force as it ensured that in each generation all but one member of the family would be landless. The intention of the Glen Grey Act was to limit the number of people on the land, justified on the carrying capacity of the land, thereby forcing the surplus labour into the capitalist sector. Beinart pointed out that the Act was not fully implemented but that its intention was clear: it promised to mobilise more labour and sharpen political segregation.\(^\text{56}\) Lacey argued that during Cecil John Rhode’s term as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony land policy was developed with features to suit the growing demand by capital for migrant labourers from Black reserves.\(^\text{57}\)

\(^\text{54}\) J. Pampallis, *Foundation of the New South Africa*, p.22.
\(^\text{56}\) W. Beinart, *Twentieth – Century South Africa*, p. 29.
She pointed out that Rhode’s aim was to restrict the growth of the African peasantry to a labouring class and at the same time prevent Africans from organising into a working class. Pampallis supported the view that Black’s limited access to land was not an accident of history but a strategy aimed at meeting the demand for labour. He pointed out that taxation was introduced as a measure to force Africans to become wage earners. He further argued out that in order to establish even tighter control over African workers and decrease labour costs a compound system was introduced. This system was to the advantage of mine owners since it restricted movement of workers and made it easy to control the labour force. Jeeves claims that already in 1895 the Chamber of Mines managed to persuade the Transvaal Volksraad to enact a special law to control the movement of African people. The Native Labour Committee of the Chamber of Mines drafted legislation which provided for a rudimentary form of influx control. It was however not easy to direct black labour into wage labour. An interesting example was presented during the South African War when White farmers joined commandos. Many Black farmers were able to meet the demand for produce created by the military. About 10 000 Black servants accompanied the Boer commandos, and the British used Africans as labourers, scouts, dispatch riders, drivers and guards. In the Transvaal there was a possibility for African peasants to retake the land (lost in conquest) during the South African war. The devastation of Boer farms by British scorched-earth tactics presented an opportunity for the tenants to reassert their claims. Military means had to be used to re-occupy the farms by White farmers. Africans had realised the short term advantages of farming, of owning stock and agricultural equipment. They had become self-sufficient once more.

59 Ibid, p.28.
61 W. Beinart, *The Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.50
The state intervened on behalf of White commercial farmers, and soon African tenants were under pressure. A £2 levy was imposed on rent-paying tenants through the 1908 Natives Tax Act.\textsuperscript{62} The chief consideration for the White authorities was to ensure a stable supply of labour and curtailing competition for the land. Pastoral Africans were reduced to economic dependence through Wars of Dispossession which resulted in the appropriation of most of the land by White Settlers\textsuperscript{63}.

In an effort to restrict the growth of an African peasantry, the government enacted the Natives Land Act No. 27 of 1913 and later the Native Trust and Land Act, No. 18 of 1936. These Acts defined residual ancestral lands as reserves for African occupation and declared illegal all land purchases or rent tenancy outside reserves. The reserves constituted 13% of South Africa’s land surface. Beinart challenged the view that the remaining 87% of the land was reserved for Whites. He argued that those figures were not accurate for the first few decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He pointed out that Whites never owned that much land and that Africans owned less than what was initially reserved for them. In his view three – quarters of the land was demarcated for private rural ownership by White individuals or by companies. Eight per cent was reserved exclusively for Africans, a small portion was privately owned by Africans or on their behalf by institutions such as missions. The rest of the land was urban land and land owned by the Empire or state land. Land owned exclusively by Africans increased to 13% after the enactment of the Native Trust and Land Act, No. 18 of 1936.\textsuperscript{64} Tim Keegan pointed out that one of the major stumbling blocks that prevented black peasants from rendering labour service was their capacity to uproot themselves and move to a piece of land that offered them independence from levies.\textsuperscript{65} He described the Land Act as the ‘greatest assault yet on independent black peasants.’\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{64} W. Beinart, \textit{Twentieth – Century South Africa}, p10
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
The government also regulated the classification of employment opportunities, whereby skilled work was reserved for Whites and African workers were denied the right to organise. Hutt argued that the job colour bar was instituted to appease White miners. It was felt that unless Africans were excluded from opportunities by legislation violence would be used to enforce exclusion, hence the promulgation of the Wines and Works Act No. 12 of 1911 (also the called 'colour Bar Act').

Segregation was further entrenched through legislation such as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act No. 21 of 1923 which was passed during General J. Smuts’s first premiership. This legislation gave municipalities more powers to segregate housing, to police African communities and control movement by imposing passes. Section 6(1) of the Act stated:

Except with written approval of the Ministers no owner, lessee, or occupier of the land situated outside an urban area within three miles of the boundary thereof shall allow natives to congregate upon or any native to reside upon or to occupy any dwelling on such land other than a native who is in his bona fide employment, nor shall natives congregate upon nor any native who is not in the bona fide employment of the owner, lessee or occupier thereof reside upon or occupy any dwelling on such land.

What is important here is that according to Wilson and Thompson, the enactment of legislation such as the Representation of Natives Act No 11 of 1936 and the Native Trust and Land Act No 18 of 1936 revived and encouraged African nationalism and a movement for political unity between Africans, Indians and Coloureds. The Coloured people who had been subjected to informal discrimination were brought within the ambit of discriminatory laws in the mid-1950s. Lodge observed that between 1948 and 1951 prohibitions on sexual relationships and marriage between Whites and Coloured, a humiliating system of racial classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, apartheid on trains in the Cape Peninsula, stricter residential segregation, and separate Voters Bill were eroding the relatively privileged position of Coloureds in relation to Africans. These measures were also eroding the security and status of the Coloured community.

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68 W. Beinart, Twentieth – Century South African, p.126.
71 T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 p.39
These discriminatory practices, the forced labour system and the migrant labour system gave impetus to a political consciousness that would inevitably lead to the emergence of political organisations and trade unions which would challenge them. Already in 1919 the Industrial Commercial Union was formed. The people behind the union were Clements Kadalie, a Malawian who came to Cape Town in 1918 and Selby Msimang, a leader of the working class organisation in the ANC.72

Meanwhile the government was promoting a ‘civilised’ labour policy which provided for employment of whites by the public sector and by industries, a policy directed at the absorption of poor White labour.73 Government was also keen to wean White labour away from industrial action by promoting a policy of job reservation in skilled trades. Consequently the Mines and Works Act 1911, Amendment No. 25 (Colour Bar Act), was passed in 1926 to ensure that there was no labour opposition to skilled White workers.74

A large number of poor Whites were brought to the factory floor. It was argued that they could perform as well as black migrants who had been employed in preference to these poor Whites because they could be paid lower wages. The working class was thus marked by racial stratification. Whereas African workers were subject to what Jon Lewis calls ‘extra-economic controls’–which included taxation, pass laws, Masters and Servants Laws and the compound system–the White workers on the other hand had trade union and political rights.75

White workers demonstrated their power and militancy as far back as the 1890s76. In 1907 and in 1913 they went on strike in the gold mines over the question of their status.

74 Ibid, p.635.
76 Ibid.
There was another strike the following year, which emanated from the coal mines and spread to the railways, gold mines and developed into a general strike. The strike could only be terminated through the declaration of martial law.\textsuperscript{77}

The period between 1920 and 1922 was marked by strikes of both Africans and White mineworkers respectively in 1920 and 1922\textsuperscript{78}. In 1920 7100 black mineworkers protested against the cost of living. The strike was quickly quelled by isolating compounds where the migrant workers lived.\textsuperscript{78} White workers went on another strike in 1922 and the government suppressed it with military force. The preference of cheap African labour came to haunt the employers and the government. The strike, according to Lipton, was precipitated by a falling gold price. As a result of this falling gold price mine owners were forced to relax the colour bar. This in Lipton’s view increased the ratio of cheap African labour to expensive White labour.\textsuperscript{79} The Chamber of Mines announced that it would withdraw the Status Quo Agreement and increase the ratio of Africans to Whites. Prior to this withdrawal from the Agreement the ratio of white to black workers stood at 7.4: 1.\textsuperscript{80} The withdrawal led to White unions calling a strike. The strike had political repercussions. Many embittered White workers started to look to the National Party (N.P.) for support. They formed a Pact with the Labour Party to contest a general election in 1924.\textsuperscript{81} According to Giliomee the SAP government’s brutal suppression of the 1922 strike cost it much of its labour support and even some black and coloured votes.\textsuperscript{82} The Pact government trounced the South African Party in the 1924 elections.

Jon Lewis reckons that there was a strong rejection of trade unionism by the government in the wake of the 1922 Rand strike. This rejection was, in his view, institutional in that the Industrial Conciliation Act (passed in 1924) brought trade unionism within the system of conciliation, which in turn bureaucratised trade union leadership.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{77} M. Horell, \textit{Racialism and the Trade Unions}, p.2.
\textsuperscript{78} D.C. Hindson, \textit{Pass Control and the Urban African Proletariat in South Africa}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{80} H. Giliomee, \textit{The Afrikaner: A Biography of a people}, p.332.
\textsuperscript{81} M. Horrell, \textit{South Africa’s Workers: Their Organizations and Patterns of Employment}, pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{82} H. Giliomee, \textit{The Afrikaner: A Biography of a people}, p.337.
The Pact government established the Department of Labour after it came into power. The Labour Party leader F.H.P Cresswell oversaw the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Act No. of 1924 which was believed to be 'congenial to the new industrial unions, since it encouraged industry by industry bargaining.'84 The act made provision for the registration and regulation of trade unions and employer organisations and for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes.85 The act’s provisions did not however extend to agriculture and it excluded pass-bearing or recruited Africans from its definition of an “employee”.

In 1925 the South African Association of Employee’s Organisations was formed. It changed its name to the South African Trade Union Congress (SATUC). In 1927 Kadalle the leader of the ICU applied for direct affiliation to SATUC. The application was turned down and this implied SATUC to be a ‘narrow racialist body, devoid of any true working class spirit.’86 The ICU disintegrated rapidly and this created the opportunity for the re-evaluation of the strategy and tactics in building a trade union movement for Africans. Meanwhile the South African Trades & Labour Council (SAT & LC) replaced SATUC in 1930.

In 1945 the National Executive of the SAT & LC recommended that African trade unions with non-party political bases be permitted to register. It also recommended that African workers should have the right to send their own representatives to present their case at meetings of industrial councils where matters affecting them directly were discussed. There was strong opposition to this policy from leaders of the mining, iron, steel, certain transport, railway, provincial council and other unions who demanded the exclusion of Africans from the Trades and Labour Council (T & LC). The council declined gradually and by 1950 its 80 affiliates, declined from 111 in 1947. Its membership dropped from 184 041 unionists in 1947 to 126 018 in 1950.87

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84 J. Lewis, Industrialisation and Trade Unions in South Afria, 1924-1955, p.58.
85 M. Horrell, South Africa’s Workers: Their Organisations and Patterns of Employment, p.3.
86 K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organise … or Starve: The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.3.
87 M. Horrell, South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class, p. 16.
In 1951 a group of White mine workers, boilermakers, furniture workers, typographical workers unions and printers split from SAT & LC. This was a result of the council’s policy of promoting the organisation of African workers in parallel unions. These workers formed the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) which did not allow African workers membership.\textsuperscript{88} In 1954 the SAT & LC and SAFTU met in an effort to synchronise their opposition to the amended Industrial Conciliation Act. They formed a new federation called the South African Trade Union Council which was later called Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) which excluded Africans from affiliating whilst maintaining ‘a close working relationship with them …’\textsuperscript{89}.

TUCSA’s attitude towards African unions was however parochial and paternalistic. In 1955 its president argued that:

> Trade unionism should be willing to guide natives along a path of responsible trade unionism without endangering their own standards of leadership. Suppression will instil in workers the desire to political power to alleviate this lot. That is the possibility which we cannot contemplate without great misgivings if the Europeans wish to remain in Africa. If we continue to withhold trade union organisation to improve themselves, they will have to turn to political action to overcome their frustrations.\textsuperscript{90}

This narrow and paternalistic approach together with TUCSA’s collaborationist tendencies with the state resulted in a number of registered unions, including the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) establishing the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) on 05 March 1955. SACTU was a non-racial federation which was keen to deracialise trade unionism and ‘to organise all workers on an equal basis irrespective of their race and eligibility under the Industrial Act’.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} F de Clerq, ‘The Organised Labour Movement and State Registration: Unity or Fragmentation’ in \textit{SALB}, Vol. 5 No. 6&7, March 1980, p.28.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. p.30.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. p.31.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
Don Ncube argued that SACTU was ‘created as a means of fighting the policy and practice of racial discrimination as well as building a strong umbrella organisation for all sections of the working class’\(^\text{92}\). De Clerq pointed out that SACTU unions argued that ‘racial inequality at work was inextricably bound up with the political system of White supremacy and that the struggle for a non-racial labour movement had to deal with both the economic and political forms of apartheid’\(^\text{93}\). Whereas Feit saw SACTU as nothing more than a political trade union, Soudien saw it (and FCWU) as a federation which largely sought to link the trade union movement to the broader struggles affecting the most unorganised and oppressed section of the nation.

### 2.2 FORMATION OF SACTU: ITS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The passing of the revised Industrial Conciliation Bill in 1954 brought some challenges to the trade union movement. In terms of this revised law mixed unions were prohibited. The mixed unions that had existed before the bill was promulgated, were allowed to continue with their operations provided these members maintained separate branches and held separate meetings for White, Coloured and Asian members.\(^\text{94}\) In a resolution presented at the inaugural conference, the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill was seen as a measure designed to weaken the trade union movement and deprive it of freedom of independence; to divide the workers on racial basis contrary to the principles of trade union solidarity of all workers and thus to make them easy prey to the exploitation by employers; to impose state control on trade unions and to turn them into adjuncts of a fascist state; to deprive the workers of the right to strike and generally to weaken the workers position in collective bargaining. The bill was expected, far from serving in settling disputes, to seriously endanger industrial relations.\(^\text{95}\)

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\(^\text{93}\) F de Clerq, ‘The Organised Labour Movement and State Registration: Unity or Fragmentation’ in *SALB*, vol. 5, No. 6&7, March 1980, p.31.


\(^\text{95}\) Archives of SA CTU, AD 1197/A1, Resolution proposed by the Trade Union Coordinating Committee, p.1.
The Bill created an onerous situation for the trade unions. The executive committee members of many trade union branches consisted of whites only and only office bearers could take part in union meetings of a separated racial group.\textsuperscript{96} Deviation from the precepts of the Industrial Conciliation Act would lead to the deregistration of unions. According to Lodge this law deeply divided the SAT & LC.\textsuperscript{97}

In its report on the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill at the self to the industriFourth Annual Conference in 1959, SACTU described the Industrial Conciliation Act as a six pronged attack on the working class and trade union movement of South Africa. The Act resulted in the disruption and interference in trade union activity.\textsuperscript{98}

TUCSA aligned itself to the industrial conciliation Act. It excluded African unions from directly affiliating to it in an effort to appease White unionists. A coordinating liaison committee was created for Africans through which they could consult and seek advice from TUCSA on matters pertaining to African workers. Tom Lodge aptly refers to this as a ‘parallelism’.\textsuperscript{99} De Clerq described the Industrial Conciliation Act as an instrument of racial domination since it reintroduced the racial hierarchy in the wage and in job allocation.\textsuperscript{100} SACTU saw the Act as an attempt to extend apartheid in the trade unions.\textsuperscript{101} Most African unionists could not countenance working under conditions as set out in the Act. They saw it as an affront.

\textsuperscript{97} T. Lodge, \textit{Black Politics in South Africa since 1945}, p.190.
\textsuperscript{99} T. Lodge, \textit{Black Politics in South Africa since 1945}, p.190.
\textsuperscript{101} SACTU Archives, AD 1197/A4, Reports on the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill, 1959, to the Fourth Annual Conference of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.4.
Hence in his inaugural address at the First Annual Conference, the Chairman urged delegates to lay the foundations for a non-racial Trade Union Centre which will lead to the workers realisation of their own potential. He called for the establishment of a body that would firmly establish the principle of unity, not on a racial basis, but on the basis of common interest, on the basis that all workers have a right to share in wealth of the country.\textsuperscript{102}

The inaugural conference was attended by 19 affiliates of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) in March 1955 to establish the South African Congress of Trade Unions.\textsuperscript{103} CNETU affiliates were joined by members of unions which had affiliated to the Trades and Labour Council. These were Coloured and African members who were against the formation of a new coordinating body which would represent registered unions only. SACTU afforded equal rights to registered and African unions.\textsuperscript{104} Some of the SACTU leaders were: Pieter Byleveld – President, Cleopas Sibande and Lucy Mvubelo – Vice Presidents, Leon Levy – Treasurer and Leslie Massina – General Secretary. Additional leaders were amongst others J. Nkadimeng, M. Shope, J. Fillies and P.M. Mei.\textsuperscript{105} The formation was in general precipitated by the prevailing political climate, what Ncube refers to as ‘the policy and practice of racial discrimination.’\textsuperscript{106} In particular it was precipitated by the enactment of repressive and discriminatory legislation specifically the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} SACTU Archives, AD 1197/A3: Chairman’s Opening Address, p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{103} D. Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in SA, p.30.
\item \textsuperscript{104} M. Horell, South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class, pp. 22-23.
\item \textsuperscript{105} K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organise or Starve… The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.96.
\item \textsuperscript{106} D. Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in SA, p.30.
\end{itemize}
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The willingness of SATUC to maintain parallel liaison with coordinating African Trade Unions was the final straw. The chairman of the inaugural conference did not equivocate in his rejection of this parallel approach. He insisted that a body, no matter how sincere it might be, could never succeed nor could it constitute serious opposition to the government, while it accepted the principle of racial division and excluded from its ranks seventy percent of the workers in South African industry, that is, African workers.107

The enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill led to a realignment of trade union federations. By the end of 1955 the following union federations operated in South Africa.

1. SACTU – with 30 000 members who were mainly African, Coloured, Indian and some Whites, SACTU was considered a far left body of the political spectrum.
2. The SATUC was a centre body with 150 000 members and accepted registered unions only.
3. SAFTU, which was to the right of the political spectrum with 50 000 members. SAFTU accepted mixed unions but Africans were not allowed to affiliate.
4. The Coordinating Council of South African Trade Unions which represented about 13 000 workers. It was further to the right. It disallowed affiliation from any union in which non-whites had voting powers.
5. There was an independent body in the form of The Federal Consultative Council of South African Railways and Harbour Staff Associations.
6. There were also a number of unions which did not affiliate to any coordinating structure.108

107 SACTU Archives, AD1197/A3: Chairman’s Opening Address, pp. 9-10.
According to Hepple the birth of SACTU was brought about by the isolation of trade unions.\(^{109}\) This isolation could be traced to the exclusion of African unions from TUCSA. CNETU was deliberately not invited to TUCSA’s inaugural conference. The British Trades Union Congress reported in its official publication that it was distressed by the unhappy situation in the trade union movement in South Africa. It reported that the South African Trade Union movement was divided by personalities, policies and the racial question.

It commented also on the exclusion of Africans from TUCSA: “It is true that the rules of this council confined membership to registered unions which means in practice that Africans were excluded. Provision is made, however, for liaison with African Unions should that be advisable or desirable.”\(^{110}\)

The 19 CNETU affiliates that established SACTU had a total membership of 20 000 people. Outside these affiliates there were about 1 to 2 million ununionised workers.\(^{111}\) SACTU did not equivocate on the kind of role it would play. It did not confine itself to the economic struggle, that is, fighting for better conditions of employment and for higher wages. It intended to take part in the struggle for political freedom. Hence in its Declaration of Principles (later adopted as the preamble to its Constitution) it declared:

> The future of the people of South Africa is in the hands of the workers. Only the working class, in alliance with other progressive minded sections of the community, can build a happy life for all South Africans, a life free of unemployment, insecurity and poverty, free from racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all people.\(^{112}\)

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\(^{110}\) *The Star*, Tuesday, June 28, 1955, p.9.


\(^{112}\) Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A3, Constitution of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.1.
SACTU's involvement in the political struggle was therefore not fortuitous, it was a conscious decision motivated by its immediate political environment. This political environment was the creation of the prevailing political establishment. From the outset SACTU made clear its political stance in the words of its chairman at its founding conference. It stated clearly that it would be shirking its responsibilities if it did not engage in both the political and economic struggles.

Trade union leaders considered forming a worker’s party to counter a call of “no politics in trade unions” and to counter the effects of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. These trade union leaders investigated the possibility of establishing a worker’s party in their strictly unofficial capacities. In their investigation they established two things, namely, that workers increasingly displayed a distinct demand for “political cover” for the trade union movement and that a move in that direction could not have any connection with the existing trade union movement. A leading trade union leader stated:

We have found that workers are still inclined to their old political allegiances of Nationalists versus ‘the rest’, a new set of circumstances is coming to the fore in which common economic interests of the working community are predominant.

There are matters like high cost of living, a possible reduction in allowances, the risk of unemployment in certain industrial sectors and other matters of purely economic content which form a natural community of interest for workers regardless of their political views.

We have found evidence that the action of the government in introducing the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill, which virtually means political decapitation of workers movement has made workers aware of these common interests, in addition to making them realise that they are being rendered politically voiceless.¹¹³

¹¹³ The Star, March 6, 1955, p.6.
The proposal to “remove politics from trade unionism” and depriving trade unions of a voice in politics would lead to the creation of a vacuum, a trade union leader argued.114

According to R. Alexander and H.J. Simons, the Minister of Labour, Mr Schoeman, told a National Party Congress in Pretoria in 1953 that he would introduce apartheid in the unions.115 This intention manifested itself in the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956, which prohibited the Registration of African Unions and stipulated ‘that no further mixed unions will be registered.’116 Clearly it is the National Party which brought politics into trade unionism by enacting discriminatory and repressive legislation. The milieu within which SACTU found itself was thus not of its own creation. This milieu however determined the thrust of its actions. The aims it formulated were informed by what it had to deal with on the ground. Its objectives were as follows:

(a) “To coordinate the activities and interests of workers in the union of South Africa”. One of the SACTU leaders, Dan Tloome, expatiated on this objective by describing two types of African trade unionists. Those who confined themselves to obtaining economic demands of their members and those who saw in the worker a person who is both exploited and oppressed.117 The latter group of unionists were concerned about the activities and interests of workers ‘in the Union of South Africa’ not only within the confines of trade unionism. SACTU identified strongly with this latter group.

(b) “To assist trade unions morally, financially or otherwise, as circumstance may dictate”. SACTU survived on a shoestring budget. It did not want to overburden its affiliates financially by charging exorbitant affiliation fees. It adopted a resolution in its 1959 conference that arrear affiliation fees were

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114 The Star, March 6, 1956, p.6.
117 K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organise or Starve... The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.99.
treated as loans made by SACTU to affiliates which would have to be paid off within a period of six months with effect as from the date of the adoption of the proposed resolution.\textsuperscript{118} It was proposed that unions should charge members 10d per month and that unions should pay a basic fee of 10s per month.\textsuperscript{119}

To be able to carry the objective of supporting unions morally and financially SACTU opened a trust account into which all monies collected from “Workers Unity” (SACTU’s publication) and sale of all other union paraphernalia were deposited. The system worked very well because monies in the trust account was kept separate from the general funds of the organisation.\textsuperscript{120} Clearly even though SACTU functioned in an environment characterised by financial constraints it tried its best to ensure that it had funds for its daily operations and funds to support ‘appeals for workers’ thereby giving both the moral and financial support it intended to give. SACTU also assisted unions to get started. A member of the management committee made this statement in a discussion on the report of the secretary general:

You have a Trade Union now but no organiser, no secretary, no office. Call the workers together. Tell them “we have a wage complaint and to handle this properly we must have an organiser and establish our Trade Union on a proper basis’. Ask the workers to contribute every month or every week. Go to your nearest SACTU office. When your Trade Union is still weak, SACTU will help you by banking your money for you and keeping it in trust. Then when you come to a conference like this your factory and trade union can be represented.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4, Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference, Durban, 28\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th} March, 1959, pp.14-15.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid, p.15.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid, p.10.
\textsuperscript{121} ibid, p.10.
(c) “To organise the unorganised workers into trade unions”. This objective was clearly spelled out by Piet Byleveld, the Chairman in his address to the inaugural conference. He stated:

It will further be the task of this new body to organise the vast masses of exploited and unorganised African workers, and to educate the workers who misguidedly believe that they can safeguard their own rights while they exclude their fellow African workers from the struggle.122

In fact, in his report to the Fourth Annual Conference, the general secretary stated that the conference was intended to concentrate on organising workers who were not yet organised.123

(d) “To oppose any discrimination in employment and to fight for the right of all workers to do any job, provided the prevailing minimum wage rates are applied.” SACTU strongly rejected discrimination in the working environment. It unanimously adopted a resolution opposing Clause 77(Job Reservation) at its Fourth Annual Conference in 1959.124 This clause would result in mass unemployment and a reduction in wages for all workers, White and Non-white.

It also rejected the proposal which would make it illegal for employers to deduct trade union subscriptions on behalf of African workers. The federation particularly rejected the proposed amendment which would separate the races in mixed trade unions and make multi-racial activity illegal.125

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123 Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A3: Chairman’s opening address, p.11.
125 Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference, Durban, 28th and 29th March, 1959, p.17.
SACTU felt so strongly about a minimum wage that it submitted a memorandum to the Association of Chambers of Commerce, amongst others, in which it called for ‘the immediate payment of a minimum wage of not less that £1 for so-called “unskilled workers.””126

(e) “To promote, oppose or support any legislation as might be in the interest of the workers and the trade union movement” The chairman at the inaugural conference pronounced on this objective. He succinctly stated that SACTU would have “to promote, oppose or support any legislation as might be in the interest of the workers and the trade union movement.”127 In this regard legislation which promoted or supported workers and their interests would be supported. However, legislation which denied workers their rights would be opposed.

(f) “To advance the democratic rights of all workers” – SACTU intended to represent the interests of working people in a holistic manner. Hence its insistence that it would engage in both the economic and political struggles on behalf of the working class. The intention to advance the democratic rights of ALL (own emphasis) was spelled out in its declaration of principles. It stated:

“We firmly declare that the interests of ALL workers are alike, whether they be European or non-European, African, Coloured, Indian, English, Afrikaans or Jewish.”128

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126 Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference, Durban, 28th and 29th March, 1959, p.17.
127 Archives of SACTU AD1197/A3: Chairman’s Opening Address, p.11.
“To do all other things, not inconsistent with this Constitution, to promote the interests and welfare of trade unionism” SACTU intended to carry out its mandate as encapsulated in its Constitution. Whether or not its activities were consistent with the Constitution will be borne out in the discussion of its activities in relation to its stated aims.

SACTU’s aims and objectives were informed by its paradigm. It believed that the future of workers was in the hands of the workers. Hence, in its view, only the working class in collaboration with other ‘progressive forces’ could build a happy South Africa for all. It believed that it could create a South Africa free from unemployment, insecurity, poverty, free from racial hatred and oppression and which could provide a life of vast opportunities for all people. This is clearly reflected in its aims. It confined itself to the economic interests of all workers whether they be African, Coloured, Indian or White.

2.3 ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

SACTU’s founding affiliates in 1955 were: Domestic Workers Union (Transvaal); Transvaal Furniture, Mattress and Bedding Workers Union; National Union of African Laundering, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers; Metal Workers Union (Transvaal); SA Railways and Harbours Workers Union (Transvaal); African Textile Workers Industrial Union of SA; Toy Workers Union (Transvaal) and the Garment Workers Union of African Women. There were four other so-called mixed unions, namely the Textile Workers Industrial Union; the National Union of Laundering, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers, the Food and Canning Workers Union and the SA Canvas and Rope Workers Union.129

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129 M.Horrell, South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class, pp.78-79.
The federation elected a National Executive Committee (NEC) which conducted its affairs between conferences. The NEC consisted of a President, Treasurer, two Vice-Presidents, General Secretary and one member for each three thousand affiliated members.\(^{130}\) Whereas the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and NEC members were elected annually at the Annual Conference, the General Secretary was elected bi-annually. The NEC elected eight members who, together with the President, General Secretary and Treasurer, constituted the Management Committee.

The management committee managed the affairs of SACTU between NEC meetings. The NEC also formed local committees in various areas throughout South Africa. These local committees were under the direct control of the NEC. The committees were financed by the NEC and all affiliated unions or their branches were automatically members of the local committee in that area in which a particular union or branch operated. Local committees did not have the power to decide on policy matters.

They could only discuss and make recommendations to the NEC. Besides the local committee the NEC formed industrial groups which were constituted by affiliated unions of which the members were engaged in the same industry. The industrial groups were responsible for their own income and expenditure and their powers were restricted to questions affecting their own industry. The industrial groups could not proceed with any action before obtaining the consent of the NEC.\(^{131}\)

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\(^{130}\) Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A3: Constitution of South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.3.

\(^{131}\) Ibid, p.7.
SACTU had a clear and comprehensive organisational structure which also enabled it to deal not only with national issues but local and industry-specific issues. By 1961 its membership had grown to 53 323. The membership was constituted as follows:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of union</th>
<th>No of unions</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White union</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured and/or Asian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African unions</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of members</td>
<td></td>
<td>53 323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 LABOUR, POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The environment within which SACTU operated was characterised by a labour market which was racialised and politicised through legislation. Because of this the solidarity of workers across the racial spectrum was compromised.

The main legislation configuring this environment was the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956. Consequently the focus will be on this piece of legislation. According to the report, which was presented by the General Secretary, the Act sought amongst other things, to outlaw workers’ solidarity and weaken their collective bargaining power by denying registration to new mixed unions. The Act, the General Secretary further argued, interfered in the domestic affairs of unions, firstly by compelling them to have all-white executives. Secondly, it denied registered unions political involvement of any kind and thirdly it imposed unfair restrictions on the union’s office-bearers. The Act also limited the right to strike and the opportunities open to workers.  

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Horrell argued that the law which included new racially discriminatory provisions, had the indirect effect of consolidating trade unionists.134

The Act stated that no further mixed trade unions providing membership to both Whites and Coloureds (including Africans) would be registered. Over half of the White and Coloured groups could apply for registration in the area for which their union was already registered if they wished to break from a separate union on racial lines. The Act also determined that only one White union and one new Coloured union may share the assets of the original mixed union. Subsequent break-aways were not provided for. It also provided that assets could be shared by members of mixed union during the closed shop agreement.

The Industrial Registrar could divide assets if the unions could not successfully divide the assets. Mixed unions, which continued to exist, had to have separated branches and hold separate meetings for the White and Coloured members. The executive committees had to consist of White members only. Only White office-bearers could attend a meeting of a branch other than their own. The Act also introduced ‘job reservation’, that is, specified jobs were reserved for persons of a specific racial group.135

The Act was amended in 1959 to make it more stringent in its application and to ensure that ‘job apartheid is made easier and will be wider’.136 The amendment also made provision for an industrial tribunal, of which the tasks would include making recommendations with regard to job reservation. The tribunal was permitted to use any ‘method of differentiation it may deem expedient in recommending the industry undertaking or class of work to be reserved’.137

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134 M. Horrell, South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class, p.20.
135 Ibid.
Another piece of legislation which affected or determined the nature of the labour, political and social environment, and which created fertile ground for the formation of a trade union such as SACTU, was the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950. The act was amended in 1951 and 1954. In terms of the Act the words “communism” and “communist” were defined widely to include a doctrine or scheme which aimed at bringing about political, industrial, social or economic change within the Union by promoting disorder or disturbance. The definition included any doctrine or scheme which aimed at encouraging feelings of hostility between the European and the Non-European races of the Union.\(^{138}\)

The Act declared the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) unlawful. Members of SAT & LC who were communists were banned. The Act thus curtailed SACTU’s endeavours to implement its stated aims. Already in 1956 23 of SACTU’s leaders were charged with high treason in terms of this act. In the aftermath of the 1958 stay-away demonstrations several SACTU members were convicted and sentenced. They were imprisoned for inciting others to strike and for protesting against the laws of the country. The Act was amended in 1962, making it more stringent by introducing house arrest and making it possible for further restrictions to be added to banning orders. Severe restriction orders were served on all the leading SACTU officials making it difficult for them to continue with their activities. In 1963 35 of SACTU officials were detained in terms of the 90 day detention clause. Some of the senior leaders were already banned by the time the Act was amended. Amongst these were president Leon Levy, the General Secretary Leslie Massina and one of the Vice Presidents Moses Mabhida.\(^{139}\) Hepple aptly summed up the effect which the labour, political, social and economic environment had on SACTU on the one hand and the legislative context had on the other hand. He argued:

\(^{138}\) M. Horrell, South Africa’s Workers: Their Organisation and the Patterns of Employment, p.13.
\(^{139}\) Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Minutes, Fourth Annual Conference, “Chairman’s opening remarks”, Durban, 28th and 29th March 1959, p.2.
The organisational work of SACTU is severely handicapped by lack of funds and personnel, aggravated by the many discriminatory laws which hampers movements of African workers and restricts their activities. The banning, this year of the leaders of SACTU under the Riotous Assemblies Act and the Suppression of Communism Act (even though they cannot be listed as communists) has been a further hardship imposed on this organisation. Several of SACTU’s leaders are also among those who are now being tried on charges of treason.140

South Africa’s labour and political landscape was marked by a great deal of repression and racial stratification. Clearly in the light of this SACTU could not but deal with the political questions of the day as it dealt with trade union matters. There were other laws that dealt with other labour matters, such as payment of wages and conditions of service. These included the Mines and Works Act, No. 27 of 1956, which was used to prohibit Africans from doing skilled work on the mines. There was also the Wage Act No. 5 of 1957 that was used as an instrument to fix wages and conditions of service of unorganised workers and those not covered by the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956. The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, No. 48 of 1953 was intended as a mechanism to settle disputes between Africans and their employers.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 SACTU’S ACTIVITIES
3.1.1 SACTU’S campaign against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill

In 1948 the Government appointed the Botha Commission to investigate and report on the existing industrial legislation, namely:

1. The Industrial Conciliation Act No. 36 of 1937 as amended;
2. The Factories, Machinery and Building Work Act (No. 22 of 1941);
3. The Wage Act (No. 44 of 1937) as amended;
4. The Shops and Offices Act No. 41 of 1939.\(^{141}\)

The aim of the review of the industrial legislation was to consolidate existing legislation. One of the most controversial amendments was that mixed unions and existing mixed unions were forbidden and were required to establish separate branches for different racial groups.\(^{142}\) This recommendation challenged the very existence of SACTU as it was formed as a non-racial trade union centre that intended to unite workers on the basis of common interest. SACTU argued that the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill set out to:

1. Assist disrupters and wreckers to divide and weaken old established trade unions by forcing the racial separation of their members.
2. Ensure financial aid for the wreckers and disrupters by guaranteeing them a share of the assets of the original unions.
3. Outlaw worker’s solidarity and weaken their collective bargaining power by denying registration to new mixed unions.
4. To interfere in the domestic affairs of unions by:
   a. Compelling them to have separate branches for the different races, and to have all – white executives.
   b. Denying registered unions political action of any kind.
   c. Imposing unfair restrictions on their officials.

\(^{142}\) M. Horrell, *South African Trade Unionism: A study of a Divided Working Class*, p.33
5. To limit the right to strike which would render workers defenceless against gross exploitation and injustice.
6. Limit the opportunities open to workers, and to impose grave hardships on them by establishing machinery for racial quotas in employment.\(^{143}\)

SACTU found itself having to launch a campaign against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill before it could consolidate its organisational machinery. It hit the ground running. It held an emergency management committee meeting to discuss and adopt a detailed plan of action against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill which would be re-introduced in the 1956 session of Parliament in January 13, 1956.\(^{144}\)

SACTU decided to rally every worker and democrat to take immediate steps to campaign against the Bill which included the following actions:

1. Each local committee of SACTU would immediately convene a conference of local trade unions to discuss the Bill, and to discuss ways and means of getting hundreds of thousands of workers of all races to sign the petition against it.
2. Numerous mass meetings of workers had to be held on this issue and petition forms had to be signed.
3. Local committees had to issue their own leaflets as regularly as possible condemning the Bill and explaining its dangers to the workers.
4. SACTU recommended to its affiliated unions that its annual conference be held in Cape Town during the parliamentary session. The conference was planned for February 1956.\(^{145}\)

\(^{143}\) Archives of SACTU, AD1197 / A4: Report on the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill presented to the Fourth Annual Conference of SACTU, p.2.
\(^{144}\) New Age, January 6, 1956, p.1
\(^{145}\) Ibid.
Local Committees were urged to campaign vigorously against the Bill and at the same time prepare for the “greatest trade union conference that South Africa has ever known in February 1956”.\textsuperscript{146} SACTU sought to use the campaign against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill as a great mass campaign to galvanize the working class. It staged a protest demonstration outside the House of Parliament against the Bill with placards exclaiming “Down with the Industrial Conciliation Bill.”\textsuperscript{147} SACTU had also given evidence to the Select Committee on the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. It presented a memorandum in which it argued that the proposed industrial legislation could only be of benefit to the workers if it enabled them to organize freely in trade unions under its control. It argued that workers had to be free at all times to withdraw their labour as the sale of their labour was their strongest bargaining point in the struggle for improved wages and conditions of employment. SACTU found that the Bill did not meet the needs of the workers, instead it intended to:

- Divide the workers and prevent any social contact between various races.
- Weaken the trade unions and smash their bargaining powers against employers.
- Subject the trade unions to ministerial control and to dictation by government officials.
- Intensify competition and animosities among workers.
- Deprive workers of their right to withdraw labour.
- Deprive the workers of the right to take independent political action in their own interest.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{New Age}, January 6, 1956, p.1.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{New Age}, February 9, 1956, p.1.
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{New Age}, March 31, 1955, p.4.
In its evidence to the select committee SACTU made a detailed reference to clause 77 of the Bill which the Government had claimed was designed to “safeguard against Inter – Racial competition”. SACTU argued that the only possible way of safeguarding against such competition was to observe the principle of equal pay for equal work alligned with a policy of equal opportunity for all workers. It argued that reservation of trades or occupations for workers of any particular race would have exactly the opposite result as there would be greater competition between races and increased ill feeling and friction.

According to Luckhardt and Wall the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill significantly changed the machinery of industrial relations to conform with the general policies of Apartheid which were implemented in the country. The Bill attacked the African workforce which was not affected by the Native Labour (Settlement of disputes) Act No. 48 of 1953. This workforce was attacked on two fronts: the internal structure and scope of registered trade unions and the racial composition of the workforce by job category. SACTU disputed the racialisation of the workforce by job category by arguing that a manufacturer employing White workers would not necessarily find them to be more productive than workers of other races. It further argued that that kind of conclusion would be in contrast to every finding in industry in the country and throughout the world. It went on to quote a statement by UNESCO on 18 July 1950 which pointed out the fallacy of racial superiority.

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149 New Age, March 31, 1955, p.4.
150 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
The Statement declared:

All human beings are capable of learning to share in a common life. . . such biological differences as exist between members of different ethnic groups have no relevance to problems of social and political organisation, moral life and communications between human beings\textsuperscript{153}.

SACTU rejected the Bill completely and requested the Select Committee to embrace principles of the Worker's Charter drawn up in 1944 by the trade union movement. The Charter espoused the rights of all to employment, to housing, adequate food, to leisure, to free education, freedom of association and speech, and to security in old age or from unemployment\textsuperscript{154}.

SACTU organised workers throughout the country to challenge the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. A signature campaign to petition law–makers was launched and signatures came in from factories. A number of regional trade union conferences were planned in preparation for SACTU's first national conference in March 1956. In Johannesburg SACTU's local committee and affiliated unions met at the Trades Hall on Saturday, 5 February. Another local committee meeting was scheduled for 12 February in Durban. The Western Cape local committee wrote to six members of Parliament pledging its support to them for opposing the Bill. The M.Ps were Messrs L. Lee Warden, A. Hepple, L. Lovell, H. Davidoff, W. Stanford and Mrs M. Ballinger\textsuperscript{155}. In its letter to the MPs SACTU stated that it opposed the Bill because:

1. It prohibited the forming of new unions of Coloured, Indian, and White workers and permits the division of existing unions along racial lines, thus infringing the basic principle of unity of workers.

2. The Minister was to have the power of prohibiting African, Coloureds and Indians from doing any class of work, which he may specify.

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{New Age}, March 31, 1955, pp. 4 – 5.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Ibid}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{New Age}, January 26, 1956, p. 5.
3. The Minister might declare any industry or occupation an essential service and prohibit the workers concerned from striking.

4. No union would be allowed to affiliate to a political party or take part in elections. In his report to the fourth annual conference of SACTU the Secretary General summed up the effect of the amendments on the trade union movement as follows:

   i. To carry the enforcement of trade union apartheid one stage further.

   ii. To attempt to restrict even more than before the development of African trade unions, and to try and hold back those workers who are organised and have shown militancy.

   iii. To give the Government almost unfettered powers to carry out the policy of job apartheid.

MPs such as Lee Warden, the African representative for the Western Cape, argued that “outside the ranks of the Nationalist Party, neither the worker nor the employers supported the Bill, of all the witnesses who appeared before the Select Committee only one showed any favour towards the Government measure, and it is crystal clear that the Government hopes to smash the power of the trade union movement in South Africa by introducing the Bill”. Mr Lee Warden criticized the harsh penalties for illegal strikes stipulated in the Bill. He asked what the position would be where there were non – European employers in industry. These employers, he pointed out, prefer to employ non – European labour, however under the Bill this labour might be taken away from them and only Europeans could be employed.

156 New Age, January 26, 1956, p. 5.
159 Ibid.
The commission which was appointed to review Industrial legislation had recommended that African unions be recognized. It proposed that recognition should be in two stages, that is, the “certification” stage and the full recognition stage which would take place if the union was considered suitable for recognition.\textsuperscript{160} The Government rejected this recommendation and instead introduced the Labour (settlement of disputes) Act No. 48 of 1953 in which the term “employee” was re–defined to exclude all Africans.\textsuperscript{161} The outcome of this was that the term “employee” as used in the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill excluded all Africans. Thus African unions were illegal. They could not be registered, neither could Africans be members of registered unions. The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, No. 48 of 1953 set up a special machinery for settling disputes between African workers and their employers as they were denied the right to negotiate through their trade unions. The Minister of Labour had stated that this legislation ‘was meant to bleed African trade unions to death’.\textsuperscript{162} Hence in his report on the Industrial Conciliation Amendments Bills, the General Secretary argued that the amendments had as their aim: -

1. The extension of apartheid in trade unions.
2. Further steps to continue the Government’s policy of “bleeding African trade Union to death”.
3. The tightening and extension of job apartheid.\textsuperscript{163}

SACTU’s first conference at the Salt River Institute from 1 – 4 March 1956 had as its main item on the agenda, a discussion of ways and means of fighting the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. Hence leaflets were used to mobilise the people in the struggle against the Bill. One of the pamphlets issued by the Cape Town Local Committee was titled “Has your union pulled its weight?”

\textsuperscript{160} M. Horrell, \textit{South Africa’s Workers: Their Organizations and the patterns of Employment}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} SACTU Archives: AD1197/A3, Chairman’s Opening Address, 05 / 03 / 1955, p.9.
\textsuperscript{163} SACTU Archives: AD1197/A4, Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.3.
The leaflet dealt specifically with clause 77 of the Bill which enabled Government to demarcate jobs for the different race groups. The leaflet called on all workers to help build up a strong, independent, progressive, anti-racial union organisation which would fight against oppressive and discriminatory laws. It read:

The coloured and Indian workers are facing the most serious crisis in the history of their people. Never before has there been such a deliberate and cold-blooded attempt to oust the non-European artisans and force them into unskilled labour. Every worker must ask these questions: Which course has my union followed? Have my secretary, chairman and executive committee thrown their full weight in the struggle against this Bill which is intended to split the workers on racial lines and throw the non-European workers into the ditch?164

The leaflet was not only used to campaign against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill, but also to criticise leaders of other union federations and to recruit members. In this regard the leaflet read:

The workers have to decide whether they are going to tail on to people like Rutherford who accepts the principle of white domination in the trade union movement as elsewhere or whether they will do the honest and straightforward thing for themselves and their people, by getting their unions to disaffiliate from the Trade Union Council, throw out the leaders who accepted supremacy and make a stand for trade union independence and dignity. Workers of all races need unity and working class solidarity. Join the South African Congress of Trade Unions – the only organisation which fights against racial discrimination and for equality of workers! 165

Workers from Natal’s industrial centres attended the conference of the local committee of SACTU. The conference was attended by seventy eight delegates representing 22 000 workers. The conference was in preparation for the first National Conference of SACTU on 1 March 1956.

164 New Age, February 16, 1956, p.4.
165 Ibid, p.4-5.
The General Secretary of SACTU – Mr Leslie Massina – delivered the first speech. He dealt with the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill in his address. He stated that it was aimed at dividing workers on racial lines so that they could be more easily and more severely exploited and free trade unionism in South Africa destroyed. He argued that working class unity and action was the most effective weapon against the Government’s efforts to crush the trade union movement. A resolution unanimously passed, called upon all workers, Black and White to oppose the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill until it was withdrawn and the Trade Union Council not to betray the working class of South Africa by its isolationist policy, but instead to serve it by organising its members to fight the undemocratic anti – trade union legislation.166

SACTU invited the TUC to join in sponsoring the Grand Parade mass rally in Cape Town, and co-sponsor other protest activities against the Bill. It proposed that it be allowed to send representatives to the next Management Committee meeting of the TUC to discuss steps for united action. SACTU reported that this was the second time within six months that it had approached the TUC in order to foster maximum unity in opposing the anti trade union Bill. It argued that opposition to the Bill ‘should be linked with the sharpest possible attack on the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act No. 48 of 1953 which was the forerunner of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill’.167 SACTU proposed to the T.U.C that there should be a national petition against the Bill, mass lobbying of members of Parliament, mass deputations to the Minister as well as special union meetings and factory meetings and mass workers rallies. The T.U.C replied by pointing out that while it appreciated the necessity for co-operation amongst all trade unions to oppose the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill, its Management Committee had decided that it would determine its own policy and prepare its campaign against the Bill in line with the decisions of the annual conference and any special conference that they might convene.168

SACTU realised that it would have to shoulder the responsibility of fighting the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. Hence its Management Committee adopted a plan to mobilise the workers in the fight against the Bill. The mobilisation included the afore-mentioned mass petition, locally convened conferences to popularise the national conference and obtaining signature to the petition. Thus when the first National Conference was held from 1 – 4 March, the spirit was militant. The Conference delegates passed resolutions condemning the Industrial Amendment Bill and the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act No. 48, of 1953. The discussion on the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill was led by Mr B. January. The need to rally all workers against the Bill was emphasised and the conference declared in its resolution that it:

1. Confirms its previously affirmed position that the Bill is a fascist-like measure dictated by anti-working class, undemocratic and capitalist interests and aimed at the destruction of free trade unionism.

2. Calls upon the workers of all races to uphold the historic and fundamental principles of the trade union movement which are to establish collective action on the part of wage earners irrespective of race, sex, religion and politics to advance their collective interests and strive for the achievements of a living wage and adequate social security.

3. Urges all trade unionists and workers to struggle for the defeat of this pernicious fascist-like measure and in the event of it being adopted by the fake Nationalist majority in the present government to work unceasingly for its repeal and for the enactment of industrial laws that would guarantee workers the right to organise freely.

4. Expresses its strong disapproval of the leaders of the SATU Council who adopted a colour bar constitution in 1954, accepted in principle the segregation provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Bill, compromised with the Nationalist apartheid government, identified themselves with “Baasskap” and consequently undermined the resistance of the working class.

5. Therefore urges all unions affiliated to SATUC to move immediately for disaffiliation from this colour bar organisation which has now dismally failed the workers of South Africa and which can only do them untold harm by its continued existence.
6. Appeals to Coloured, Indian, African and European workers both men and women to realise their common interests as workers, reject the false and treacherous conceptions of white ‘Baasskap’ and segregation, organise free and independent unions of their own choosing and combine under the banner of SACTU to build a single trade union centre embracing all sections of the working class for the achievement of complete equality and a workers’ charter.\textsuperscript{169}

SACTU did not, however, succeed in its attempts to mobilise a united trade union movement against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. TUCSA and other federations chose to oppose SACTU instead of the Government.\textsuperscript{170} When the Bill was passed by Parliament SACTU adopted its strategy of opposing the legislation. It issued a policy statement through its NEC which read:

The duty of all workers, in particular the white workers, in the face of the race – splitting of the Act is clear. They must stand by the principle of working class unity, denounce the Act and its hated colour bar clauses, refuse to operate them and stand firm by the coloured and Indian and African workers. Class and not race interest must prevail! \textsuperscript{171}

The clause that SACTU could not countenance was, clause 77 (6) (a) of the Act which stated:

The reservation . . . of work . . . in the undertaking, industry, area and any portion thereof or any specified area for persons of a specified race or for persons belonging to a specified class and the prohibition of the performance of such work by any other persons\textsuperscript{172}.

\textsuperscript{169} New Age, March 8, 1956, p.4.
\textsuperscript{170} K, Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organize or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, p.119.
\textsuperscript{171} New Age, June 21, 1956, p.3.
\textsuperscript{172} Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956, Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1956, p.743.
This meant that the Minister of Labour could exclude racial groups of workers from certain occupation.

Section 8 (3) (a) of the Act proscribed racially mixed unions, as follows:

If membership of a registered union is open to both white and coloured persons its constitution must after not more than 12 months from the date of the Act enforce separate branches, the holding of separate meetings by these branches for white and coloured persons respectively and an all-white executive committee. No coloured person shall after the expiring of a period of 12 months from the commencement of this Act attend or take part in any meeting of the executive committee of such union.173

In rejecting the Act SACTU called for:

1. The right to workers irrespective of race to combine in to free trade unions.
2. Free democratic election of officials and leaders without state interference.
3. Freedom of occupation without restriction on grounds of race and sex.
4. The right to withhold labour in support of demands, for improved wages and protection against exploitation.
5. Freedom of organised trade unions to achieve their aims through political action.174

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173 Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956, Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1956, p.559
174 New Age, June 21, 1956, p.3.
3.1.2 SACTU and the Congress Alliance

In his opening address at SACTU’s inaugural conference the chairman Piet Beylerveld declared that SACTU would play a role in politics\textsuperscript{175}. This view was also supported by Chief Albert Lutuli the President of the African National Congress. In his address at SACTU’s fourth Annual National Conference in 1959, Lutuli stated that workers constitute the front line of the freedom struggle. He also pointed out that historically workers were the spearhead of the freedom fighters. In his view the workers have two roles, namely:

- Improvement of wages and general conditions of service
- Prosecution of the national liberatory struggle\textsuperscript{176}

The General Secretary of SACTU, Leslie Massina spelled out what he considered to be SACTU’s top priority in his report at its 4\textsuperscript{th} Annual National Conference. He stated that the Conference needed to recognise “the aspect of strengthening the movement and forming worker’s committees, as a first priority in the trade union movement and take practical steps to bring workers effectively together so that they can struggle in the most organised way to emancipate themselves”\textsuperscript{177}.

\textsuperscript{175} Archives of SACTU AD 1197/A3: Chairman’s Opening Address, pp.2-3.
\textsuperscript{176} Archives of SACTU AD 1197/A4: Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference 28\textsuperscript{th} - 29\textsuperscript{th} March 1959, p.4.
\textsuperscript{177} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4, Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.1.
The General Secretary, Leslie Massina further submitted plans to the conference to recruit large numbers of workers into the movement. He indicated that it was a vast programme of action for the trade union movements and extended to SACTU’s allies in the Congress Alliance particularly the African National Congress (ANC). Hence, Ncube observed:

To achieve its objectives SACTU joined the Congress Alliance which consisted of the ANC, South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Coloured People’s Organisation (SACPO), and the Congress of Democrats (COD). SACTU was first and foremost a trade union, that is why uppermost in its programme of action was to ‘determinedly seek to further and protect the interests of all workers…’ The first task that it had to perform was to organise membership so as to make it easier for unions to affiliate. It opened affiliation to all types of unions and stated categorically that no union shall be refused membership of the Congress on the grounds of race, colour, nationality or gender of its members. The affiliation fee was 10 shillings per month irrespective of the size of the union. In order to fulfil one of its objectives, namely to organise unorganised workers throughout the country, it built an organisational structure to enable operation in every part of the country. It had a National Executive Committee with the authority ‘to establish local committees of the Congress in various areas throughout South Africa’.

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180 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A3: Constitution of SACTU, P.1.
181 Ibid.
These Committees would be able to deal with issues at a regional level through regional committees or the local factory level through local committees. This organisational structure showed that SACTU wanted to ensure workers access to their organisation and that the shop floor was well organised.

When the General Secretary addressed SACTU’s 1959 Conference he called on ANC members to become organisers in the factories, on the farms, in the mines, vineyards and sugar plantations. SACTU joined the Congress Alliance to enhance its visibility in order to achieve mass appeal. The President of SACTU had, at its First Annual National Conference in March 1956, argued that even though SACTU would pursue an independent policy in the interest of the workers, it must participate in the struggle to mobilise the people behind their demands as contained in the Freedom Charter and therefore must cooperate with all other organisations engaged in this struggle.

The move to join the Congress Alliance was a result of a deliberate decision. SACTU was formed a month prior to the Congress of the People meeting to adopt the Freedom Charter which would be used to rally the people of South Africa to fight oppression. As a strategic move, SACTU sent many of its working class leaders to participate actively in the organising committee of the Congress of the People. They went around collecting demands from workers in the factories and townships. These organisers were particularly active in Natal and the Eastern Cape. The submission of the workers’ demands for inclusion in the Freedom Charter was approved at SACTU’s Inaugural Conference. Participation in this campaign enhanced SACTU’s public profile.


\[183\] Ibid.
Alven Bennie, a SACTU activist from Port Elizabeth thought that the Port Elizabeth Local Committee benefited from participating in this campaign: The workers responded with enthusiasm, worked day and night to prepare for the Congress of the People. The workers brought their demands to the offices after work and the local committee worked till late processing these demands. The workers came from different industries. Small committees were set up not only in preparation for the Congress of the People but to organise trade unions in the dairies, laundries, road construction industry, building and railway industries. This campaign (to prepare for the Congress of People) strengthened the drive towards organising the workers.184

However SACTU’s involvement in this campaign also had a negative impact. SACTU took part in all passive resistance activities which were organised by the Congress Alliance such as demonstrations, boycotts, strikes and other forms of civil disobedience. Its involvement compromised its ability to service its affiliations. As a result, union membership fluctuated at that time. There was poor shop floor organisation which was occasioned by a lack of follow-up. There was also an inability to take up issues with employers which led to disillusionment and lack of interest in the union.

SACTU responded to these problems by formulating a multi-pronged organisational strategy. The strategy aimed at attending to unorganised workers, giving assistance to striking workers with a view to build unions out of the strike, encouraging workers to challenge corrupt union officials and advising workers about their statutory rights.185 Workers’ Committees were established to implement this strategy. In a discussion on the report of the General Secretary pertaining to the organisational strategy a member of SACTU’s Management Committee outlined in simple terms how the committees should be established. He stated:

It is necessary that people should organise themselves. This is simple. The first step is to get together with other workers about small complaints such as cloak room facilities. Afterwards one can come to the bigger complaint of wages. One must start by taking up minor complaints; something small which does not need a professor. It is simple as reading your ABC. You must be determined to organise your fellow workers in a factory and it is this committee which should attend to complaints.  

3.1.3 Boycotts, “stay-at-homes”, strikes and other campaigns

SACTU, together with its allies took part in bus boycotts and stay-at-homes. These included the 1957 Alexandra bus boycott against PUTCO when fares were increased, the potato boycott – a protest against the inhuman work and living conditions of agricultural workers on the farms; and the boycott of all cigarettes produced by the Rembrant Group whose branches included Rothmans and Peter Stuyvesant. Labour leaders and workers also opposed Bantu Education and assisted in the setting up of ‘cultural clubs’ which were forced to close due to police repression. These boycotts and protests were carried out by the Congress Alliance. SACTU as an affiliate of this Alliance had hoped that by joining in these activities it would have access to machinery for mass mobilisation. It understood that what was happening on the factory floor was inextricably interwoven with what was happening politically in the country.

SACTU supported the use of the strike weapon by its workers. There were four major strikes during 1958. The General Secretary of SACTU, Leslie Massina led a discussion on these in his report at the Fourth Annual National Conference. In March 1958 the National Workers’ Conference called a “stay-at-home” for 14 April.

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The stay-at-home was intended to last for a week and coincide with the 1958 general elections in the country. The purpose of the protest was to call for:

- Full, universal suffrage.
- Higher wages for lower paid workers, and a national minimum wage of £1-a-day.
- The abolition of pass laws, both for men and for women, and an end to the “ceaseless raids and arrests”
- The repeal of discriminatory legislation like the Group Areas Act, job reservation, etc.\(^\text{190}\)

The protest was to be conducted in a peaceful manner and in accordance with the policy of non-violence. Chief Albert Lutuli addressed a press conference and appealed to participants to adhere to this policy. He also expressed hope that the authorities would assist the ANC to uphold this policy. He said that there would be no intimidation of Non-white workers and that every Non-white would decide whether or not to participate. He further stated:

> We are attacking the entire edifice of state policy as it concerns us, we want to enter this election to make ourselves heard. The election is of great concern to non-whites, and we feel it is important that there should be a £1-a-day law, for repeal of pass laws, for an end to apartheid legislation.\(^\text{191}\)

The strike lead to arrests of workers’ leaders in all centres of the country and mass trials were held.\(^\text{192}\) There were reports that top officials in the police and National Party meant to “deal with” the peaceful demonstrators. These reports included:

- A new wave of raids and searches.
- Massive police reprisals against African, Coloured and Indian demonstrators.

\(^{190}\) *New Age*, April 10, 1958, p. 1.

\(^{191}\) Ibid, pp. 1 & 3.

\(^{192}\) Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.9.
• Wide scale arrests of trade union and Congress leaders.
• Drastic measures to further restrict and even outlaw the African National Congress and its allied organisations, and the people’s fighting newspaper, *New Age*.
• An all-out propaganda effort was launched at home and abroad, to smear the Congress movement as “Red” and to paint peaceful demonstrations of protest week as “a revolution”.193

National Party officials made a number of threats against the organisers of the stay-at-home campaign. Prime Minister J.G. Strijdom said:

I can say we are going to take hold on the African National Congress.194

The Minister of Labour, De klerk, also said: I can give you the assurance that the Government will tackle them without gloves. There will be a counter-demonstration in which the white man will not only talk white supremacy but will prove white supremacy."195 A National Party senator J.S. de Wet said: “To grant full rights to the coloured races in South Africa would lead to rebellion and leave the white bones of the Blacks strewn over South Africa.196

These utterances should perhaps be understood in the context of an election campaign as election campaigns are almost always characterised by emotionally charged statements.

The stay-at-home did not however yield positive results. It met with different responses in various areas. It was generally considered unsuccessful as most workers did not heed the call to stay at home. The highest proportion of workers who heeded the call were from Natal, about 31 000 of them stayed at home.197

In the aftermath of the stay-at-home the government arrested workers' leaders in all centres of the country and mass trials were held. Many of these leaders lost their jobs and suffered financially.198

194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
198 Ibid, pp. 9-10.
SACTU offered moral and financial support to those who stood trial. It contributed £300 towards the trial. Workers were victimised for participating in the stay-at-home protest. The Regional Employment Commissioner of the Witwatersrand instructed various Departments of non-European Affairs and private employers to observe Government Notice No. 2175, dated 1952 which stated:

Any Native employee who is discharged as a result of taking part in strikes; demonstrations, absenteeism from work, etc, must not under any circumstances be placed again in employment, without specific approval of the Regional Employment Commissioner.¹⁹⁹

SACTU immediately notified the Director-General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) when the notice to debar participants who observed the stay-at-home came to its attention.²⁰⁰

About 3800 African textile workers at Amato Textile Mills in Benoni (Transvaal) took part in a strike during February 1958. SACTU assisted the Textile Workers’ Industrial Union by writing to the employer requesting him to re-instate the workers. SACTU also gave the strike wide publicity in the press and interested organisations on the progress of the strike. SACTU protested strongly to the police for the way in which they responded to the Amato workers.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Ibid.
²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 7
Another strike took place at the H. Jones & Company on 21 January 1959 when two hundred and eighty-nine male and female workers were charged with striking illegally and arrested for refusing to work new shifts. The arrested strikers could only be bailed out at £10 per person. SACTU appealed to all trade unions to assist the families of the workers who were starving. The ANC also assisted them by giving them access to their hall. The strikers were released after three weeks in prison and after being found innocent. The firm however refused to reinstate or pay them. The ANC also considered launching a boycott of all products of H. Jones and Co.

Another major strike was the Durban strike of stevedores on 14 April 1958. SACTU solicited support for this strike by appealing to International Trade Union bodies such as Docker’s Union and British Trades Union Congress for assistance. They requested support from those unions to protest the use of scab labour brought from the reserves or from neighbouring ports. The dockworkers demanded the removal of “Tocht,” the labour system whereby workers were paid on a daily basis for their labour and wanted a monthly income to ensure a regular income. The “Tocht” had been a source of friction between the workers and employers. The strike came to a head in February 1959 when the police crushed it. A detachment of police broke up a gathering of over 1500 strikers at the docks. Four dock workers sustained serious injuries and 87 were arrested. SACTU briefed lawyers to defend the arrested strikers. Of the 87 charged with trespassing, 11 pleaded not guilty. The remainder pleaded guilty and were fined £5 with the alternative of 25 days compulsory labour. The strike yielded positive results for the strikers. Daily-paid labour was abolished and workers’ were taken back on a permanent weekly-paid basis.

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203 New Age, February 3, 1959, p.3.
204 Ibid.
205 New Age, March 5, 1959, p.3.
206 Ibid.
There were also two other strikes in Durban, that is, the nurses’ strike at King George V Hospital and the strike at the Lion Match Company. Both took place in March 1961.\footnote{D. Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions, p. 93.} Prior to 1961, SACTU was hampered in its endeavour to engage in strikes as the Government had banned meetings of more than 10 Africans in most industrial areas of South Africa. This ban was only lifted in September 1958.\footnote{Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.10.}

SACTU was also involved in other campaigns. During August 1958 it protested against the Transvaal Provincial Council which had threatened to extend working hours and introduce shift work for distributive workers. SACTU issued a press statement in \textit{The Star} in August, 1958 in which it pointed out that the proposed extension would not only affect distributive workers. It would also affect transport workers who would be required to transport workers working night shifts to and from work. It would also affect regular transport and delivery. Eventually every industry would be involved. They further pointed out that in cases where both parents worked night shift children would be left to fend for themselves. SACTU argued that night shifts should be restricted except in essential services.\footnote{Ibid, p.7.} SACTU supported the National Union of Distributive Workers and Shop and Office Workers in opposing the proposal. Consequently, the Transvaal Provincial Council temporarily suspended its intention to extend shop hours.\footnote{Ibid.}

SACTU also opposed the withdrawal of free hospitalisation for certain patients in the Transvaal. In terms of a new ordinance patients were classified according to their incomes into four categories, that is, full-paying, private, part-paying and free. Only workers who earned less than £12.10.0 per month, if Non-white, and £25 per month, if White, were granted access to free hospitalisation.\footnote{Ibid.}
SACTU’s actions did not end there. It opposed the increase in taxes for men by seventy five per cent from 1959 and the introduction of taxation for African women as from 1960. It engaged in a nationwide campaign on this matter with its partners in the Congress Alliance and published an article covering the subject in a publication called “Worker’s Unity”. It sent fifty petition forms to each of its affiliated unions. The aim was to send these petitions to Parliament but this did not materialise. However, SACTU had managed to organise a public protest on this matter earlier on 26 October 1958.212

Furthermore SACTU campaigned against the issuing of reference books to African women. They issued press statements and their affiliate, the S.A. Clothing Workers’ Union issued a memorandum to the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development in an effort to secure a meeting with him. SACTU also contacted the Chambers of Industry and Commerce asking them to intervene on behalf of African women opposed to the pass system. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce refused to meet a deputation from SACTU or to intervene in the matter. SACTU wired the Associated Chambers of Commerce Meeting in Margate asking them to oppose this intended measure. It also wrote a circular to employers of African women on 26 October 1958 raising their concern about the matter213. On the 26 October 1958 the local Witwatersrand Committee of SACTU protested against introduction of passes for African women. The Congress also sent messages of support and solidarity to African women at the meeting convened by the Federation of South African Women.214

213 Ibid.
SACTU had campaigned against Government’s intention to use money in the Unemployment Fund to subsidise factory owners during the recess. It proposed instead that wages especially of lowly-paid workers should be increased. It also proposed that there should be national legislation for a minimum wage of £1-a-day. It suggested pass laws should be scrapped as they were a ‘cruel and brutal’ method intended to drive the African workers to the farms and mines. SACTU further proposed that Government apartheid policies should be reversed.215

SACTU suggested an eight–point plan to curb unemployment to be implemented with immediate effect. The plan entailed the following:

1. New government and municipal projects should be started to create jobs.
2. Unemployment insurance benefits should be increased.
3. Unemployment benefits should include all African workers.
4. The cost of living allowance which has been pegged since 1953 should be increased.
5. The pass laws should be suspended.
6. The period of unemployment insurance benefits should be extended to at least 12 months.
7. The decision to increase African taxes should be reversed.
8. Rent payments in municipal townships should be waived for the unemployed.216

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215 New Age, May 28, 1959, p.3.
216 Ibid.
3.1.4. The £1-a-day campaign

At its third Annual National Conference in March 1958 SACTU examined the progress on higher wages and planned an intensive mass campaign on wages. The campaign was conducted from 1957 to 1963. The Management Committee spent some time on planning the intensification of the campaign which was premised on three aspects, namely 1) powerful unions 2) workers’ committees and 3) a minimum wage of £1- a-day.

The campaign was aimed at ensuring higher wages for workers and the recruitment of twenty thousand new members into the trade union movement.217 In its campaign message SACTU urged members to ‘get busy’:

People must wake up. This is not a campaign to take a year. It must be a quick, hard campaign. Start today. Wear the ‘Asinamali’* badge. Get your forms and leaflets. Start talking on the bus tomorrow morning. Canvas this very Saturday and Sunday. Have that meeting this very weekend. Talk to fellow workers at lunch time as soon as you can get them together. This campaign must be a snowball. Every new member must get five new members. Each one of those must get five more. In a few weeks we can have the whole country behind us. So please don’t waste time.218

In terms of the first aspect of the campaign the aim was to build powerful unions of workers employed in the transport and metal industries which were referred to as ‘basic industries’. Hence a total of 100 000 copies of a leaflet containing an application form for union membership were printed. Workers were asked to fill in the form and send it to SACTU. Where there was no union in existence in an industry from which applications were received SACTU organisers would take the initiative to form a union.219

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218 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: ‘How to Organise for the £1 a Day Campaign, p.2.
219 New Age, March 21, 1957, p.3.
* ‘Asinamali’ = Zulu word meaning ‘we have no money’
The first positive result of SACTU’s campaign was the formation of the African Building Workers’ Industrial Union which was launched at the Mavis Isaacs Hall in Jabavu, Soweto\textsuperscript{220}.

The second aspect of the campaign dealt with the need to form factory or workers’ committees wherever possible. The third aspect aimed at popularising the wage demand among the workers and pressurising the employers and the Government to meet the demand for £1 a day. This would be done by releasing press statements, memoranda, meeting the Wage Boards, and sending deputations to employers.\textsuperscript{221}

In June 1957 the Management Committee of SACTU approved a memorandum calling for a general increase in the wages of low-paid workers and a national minimum wage of £1-a-day. The memorandum was presented to the affiliated unions, which approved it. The memorandum was presented to the employers much as the S.A Chamber of Industries, the Chamber of Commerce and the Transvaal and Orange Free State Chamber of Mines. The memorandum proposed the following:

1. “Immediate and substantial increases” in wages.
2. A £1-a-day minimum wage for “so-called unskilled workers”.
3. Recognition of and direct negotiation with trade unions of African workers, without State interference.\textsuperscript{222}

SACTU offered to meet the employers’ organisations to discuss these proposals, but to no avail.

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{New Age}, March 28, 1957, p.3.
\textsuperscript{221} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.2.
\textsuperscript{222} \textit{New Age}, April 3, 1958, p.4.
The £1-a-day campaign was planned at national level but its implementation was at local level. Each local committee would meet to decide how they would embark on the campaign on the basis of nationally provided guidelines. The Eastern Cape Local Committee for example organised a conference to elect an “Eastern Cape £1-a-day Committee”. One of the objectives of the Committee was ‘to make a study of living below the poverty datum line…’\(^{223}\). The way the campaign was implemented was determined by the prevailing conditions on the shop floor. The Management Committee of SACTU wrote a letter to all local committees and all affiliated unions requesting them to organise rallies to initiate the £1-a-day minimum wage demand and all-round increase in wages campaign. SACTU was using this specific issue to rally and organise members.

The first local committee to be formed was the Port Elizabeth Committee which was established a few months after SACTU had been formed. The aim of this particular local committee was to organise all unorganised workers to fight against the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, No. 48 of 1953 and the Industrial Conciliation Bill. In a letter to the Secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union the Secretary of the Local Committee indicated that the formation of the committee had led to the re-organisation of the Tin Workers Union and the African Commercial Distributive Workers Union. He also indicated that new unions were formed known as the Iron, Steel and Metal Workers and the African Workers Battery Unions. \(^{224}\) The re-organisation of the Tin Workers Union and African Commercial Distributive Workers Union, as well as the formation of the Iron, Steel and Metal Workers and the African Battery Unions indicated definite successes for SACTU.

\(^{223}\) Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Circular letter No. 85/1/7, p.1.

\(^{224}\) Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Letter from the Port Elizabeth Local Committee, p.1.
In a memorandum that SACTU had written on the £1-a-day campaign it outlined the cost of living, showing what families were spending on food. The memorandum outlined wages of “unskilled” labour and argued that there needed to be an ‘upward revision of wages... for all categories of workers’. 225 This question was dealt with in a non-political manner and purely as a labour matter. The memorandum quoted a study that showed a price increase of essential commodities which was not accompanied by wage increase, particularly for the low income groups. Although the £1-a-day campaign had its shortcomings, it served as rallying point to galvanise African workers into joining the trade union movement. A resolution was adopted at the Fourth Annual National Conference (28 to 29 March 1959) explaining what SACTU intended to achieve through this campaign. It read:

As part of the campaign to obtain a Minimum Wage of £1-a-day, this conference of the South African Congress of Trade Unions resolves to undertake the widespread organisation of unorganised workers into Factory Committees as the nucleus of Trade Unions. There is a foundation of 20 000 new members in the Trade Union to carry the movement forward226.

SACTU also published a document titled ‘How to organise for the £1-a-day Campaign’. According to this document the campaign combined two types of activities, that is, getting people to support the demand for £1-a-day and lobby for higher wages and organising the workers. 227 The document also called for the establishment of Workers’ Committees at every factory, workshop, compound and office. The role of these committees was to ensure to it that workers were organised for the campaign. 228

225 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A5: The Urgent need for general increase in wages particularly for the lower paid categories of workers and 1 national minimum wage of £1 ad day – A Memorandum from SACTU, pp.1-2.
227 Ibid, p.15.
228 Ibid.
The thrust of the campaign was mass mobilisation. A careful look at the campaign will also reveal that SACTU had decided to adopt a strategy of embracing existing unions or starting new ones. This is clearly depicted in the "How to organise for the £1-a-day campaign" flyer. The Workers’ Committees were urged, “stand together with all other trade unions” and to “find out whether there is a trade union or Workers’ Committees in other factories”.229

In the editorial of South African Congress of Trade Unions Bulletin, SACTU pointed out that every day more workers were organised, cases were taken up on behalf of workers, and that memoranda were issued by different unions affiliated to SACTU. It showed further that unjust dismissals were as regularly fought just as they were common. It argued that the key focus of SACTU activities was higher wages, improved factory conditions and the mobilisation of workers into trade unions.230 The editorial explained that SACTU was particular about the type of union they assisted and that they insisted on building up a high standard of efficiency. It also showed that SACTU trained its affiliated unions on the principles of its Constitution and this was regarded as sacred. Consequently Executive Committee meetings were held regularly and general meetings were called to elect officials in a democratic manner.231 The editorial illustrated how an organiser after reading the first issue of the Bulletin, went into a mineral water factory and told workers about the forthcoming campaign for higher wages and thereafter organised those workers.232

Besides a large-scale campaign such as the £1-a-day campaign SACTU also engaged in what could be described as mundane organisational activities. It issued a simple practical guide on how a worker could lodge a complaint.

230 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/Ba-Bb: SACTU Bulletin (Editorial).
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
Firstly, the worker was advised to see a shop steward to give him/her a full complaint. The shop steward would then take the matter up on behalf of the workers. If the worker was not satisfied, the matter could then be taken to any member of the Workers’ Committee. If the member did not resolve the matter the worker would then see the Chairman of the Committee. This shows that SACTU was serious about recruiting new members and ensuring that workers’ interests were served.

A fairly sizable number of workers participated in the £1-a-day campaign. A rally to mark the beginning of the campaign in the Eastern Province was attended by close on 1000 Africans, a few Coloureds and Europeans. At the end of the rally a resolution was passed which read:

We, trade unionists, congressites and democrats, resolve to return to our homes and places of employment, and to organise our fellow-workers into trade unions, and to fight for a minimum wage of £1-a-day, a general all-round increase in wages and trade union recognition.

By 1960 the campaign was producing significant results. More workers were joining trade unions and attending workers’ meetings. In Natal, for example, over 50 000 workers were organised by SACTU and more were enrolling. In the Transvaal there was a steady influx of workers and officials were struggling to cope. Four hundred workers in two factories were organised by SACTU in Springs.

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233 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: “Join the Union, How to Settle your Complaints” (not numbered).
234 New Age, January 2, 1958, p.6.
235 New Age, January 7, 1960, p.3.
3.1.5 International connections

From as early as 1958 SACTU maintained a steady correspondence with the ILO and informed the organisation about all the problems they encountered. They forwarded to them press statements, memoranda, newspaper cuttings and articles.\(^\text{236}\)

The Management Committee had taken steps to establish friendly relations with Union Co-ordinating bodies in Africa by writing letters to over forty trade union organisations on the African continent.\(^\text{237}\) SACTU also submitted a detailed memorandum which dealt with disabilities of African workers to the Accra Conference which was held in Ghana in December 1958. It invited Tom Mboya of the Kenya Federation of Labour to open its Fourth Annual National Conference. However the government disallowed his visit.\(^\text{238}\)

In the wake of the Coalbrook mining disaster of 21 January 1960 in the Clydesdale coal mine, SACTU urged trade unionists in South Africa and throughout the world to support the following demands:

1. Adequate compensation for the dependants of African mineworkers, and an equitable distribution of all gifts received.
2. An immediate substantial increase and compensation rate for African mineworkers.
3. An improvement in safety standards and the keeping of records.
4. Genuine TRADE UNION RIGHTS for all African workers.\(^\text{239}\)

The Miners Trade Union International representing 5 million miners, wrote to the ILO and Prime Minister Dr H.F. Verwoerd about the disaster, highlighting a recommendation of an international conference that miners' safety and health must be put before profits, lower production costs and productivity.\(^\text{240}\)

\(^{236}\) Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.13.

\(^{237}\) Ibid, p.12.


\(^{239}\) New Age, February 4, 1960, p.2.

\(^{240}\) Ibid, p.3.
SACTU’s goal up to 1963 had been to fight the exclusion of African unions and federations from representation on the South African delegations to the ILO. It protested its exclusion from its ILO’s 42nd Conference, but the objections were overruled. However, SACTU intended to make strong representations for their inclusion at their next conference.\textsuperscript{241} In keeping with the policy of maintaining close contact with international and national trade union bodies SACTU was afforded the opportunity to work for World Peace by seeking the co-operation of a widely differing number of bodies on the basis of common problems.\textsuperscript{242}

It adopted several resolutions pledging solidarity with trade unions in other countries and called for World Peace. One of the resolutions pledged solidarity with trade unionists in Sudan who were arrested and sentenced for up to five years for holding a meeting on the premises of the \textit{Sudan Trade Union Journal} and for maintaining contact with the World Federation of Trade Unions. Another resolution expressed horror at the death of about 1000 political detainees at Phu Loi in Vietnam. These political prisoners were killed by food poisoning, shooting and burning. Yet another resolution called for an end to nuclear armament and an end to the Cold War.\textsuperscript{243}

SACTU had sent a memorandum in 1959 to the ILO in which it claimed to be the only representative body of workers in the country. This memorandum was updated in 1961. SACTU wrote a 13 page memorandum in which it pointed out that SATUC excluded African Unions from membership.\textsuperscript{244} In 1963 it added information on the repression of its leaders. Consequently in 1964 the African states took a stand and they walked out when H. Liebenburg, a South African delegate, rose to address the ILO Conference. The remaining delegates voted unanimously to expel South Africa. Consequently in 1964 South Africa withdrew from the ILO.\textsuperscript{245}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{241} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, pp. 12-13.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/AR: Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference, Durban, 28th – 29th March, 1959, p.22.
\item \textsuperscript{244} New Age, June 8, 1961, p.8.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Luckhardt and B. Wall, ‘Organise or Starve’…The History of S.A. Congress of Trade Unions, p.393.
\end{itemize}
According to Lodge between 1960 and 1966 160 SACTU officials were arrested and several were convicted for sabotage.\textsuperscript{246} In 1961 the government imposed a three month ban on SACTU which came into force on March 31. SACTU managed to hold its sixth conference a day before the ban became effective and passed a composite resolution which stated that despite the bannings, arrests and deportations, and heavy fines and sentences on workers who participated in strikes, SACTU had grown from a small body with only 12 affiliates into a major federation representing 53 000 workers in 51 affiliated trade unions.\textsuperscript{247} The conference also resolved to:

1. Call upon all trade unionists and all democrats in South Africa to protest against its ban to the Minister of Justice.
2. Send details of the ban to the United Nations and the ILO.
3. Call upon fellow workers throughout the world to demonstrate their solidarity with SACTU by taking action they deemed fit.
4. To call upon members of its affiliates to participate in mass action planned for May 1961.

Since 1961 SACTU was, to all intents and purposes, completely immobilised.

\textsuperscript{246} T. Lodge, \textit{Black Politics in South Africa since 1945}, p.197.
\textsuperscript{247} \textit{New Age}, April 6 1961, p.3.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 ANALYSIS OF SACTU'S ACTIONS IN RELATION TO ITS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter is not primarily aimed at assessing whether or not SACTU achieved its aims and objectives. The aim here is to assess whether SACTU's aims were related to its actions, or whether its actions implemented its aims. SACTU had clearly outlined its broad aims in its Declaration of Principles and Objectives. Firstly its main objective was to co-ordinate the activities and the interests of workers in the Union of South Africa. This objective was spelled out by various SACTU leaders. In his opening address the chairman called for the establishing of a body that would firmly entrench the principle of unity, not on racial basis, but on the basis of common interest, or the basis that all workers have a right to share in the wealth of the country, the General Secretary of SACTU Leslie Massina also emphasised this when he stated that as a first priority the trade union movement needed to take practical steps to bring workers together so that they can operate in the most organised way to free themselves. To coordinate the activities of workers SACTU established local committees in all major centres, which were under the control and authority of the NEC. They were established to implement SACTU's strategy of organising unorganised workers, that is, make contact with workers at a factory level, recruit through the distribution of SACTU newspaper, Workers Unity, and through leafleting.

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248 Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A3: Chairman's Opening Address, p.10.
These committees were intended to function in accordance with the objectives of SACTU within their local area of jurisdiction and under bye-laws framed by the NEC.\textsuperscript{251} Clearly SACTU wanted to be as near as possible to its constituency. The primary function was to co-ordinate the activities of the workers at the shop floor level and to a certain extent it succeeded to organise workers through local committees and later through worker committees. These committees were set up in the Western Cape, Natal, Port Elizabeth and on the Witwatersrand. The committees were an important mechanism in recruiting members and in forming new unions. The committees also played an important role in SACTU’s campaigns which were used to organize unorganised workers. When a mass signature petition was launched against the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill, local committees convened local conferences to obtain signatures to the petition.\textsuperscript{252} In Port Elizabeth where the local committee was very active new trade unions were formed in the milling, chemical, hotel and restaurant, sweet, biscuit, engineering, food and canning and toy industries.\textsuperscript{253} SACTU’s major focus was on organising unorganised workers. In 1956 its affiliated membership was about 20,000 in 19 unions. In 1959 it stood at 46,000 in 35 unions. By 1961 it had 53,000 members with 51 affiliates.\textsuperscript{254}

Secondly, SACTU aimed to assist unions morally, financially or otherwise as circumstances dictated. This was borne out by the limited amount the Federation charged as subscription fee to its affiliates and individual members. It charged unions a basic affiliation fee of 10s per month and charged members 10d per month.\textsuperscript{255} SACTU supported its affiliates by training them on the Constitution which would obviously include training with respect to duties and responsibilities of the various structures and training on record keeping, that is, minutes and financial records as per its Constitution.

\textsuperscript{251} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A3: Constitution of SACTU, p.7.
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{New Age}, March 1, 1956, p.7.
\textsuperscript{253} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{254} J. Pampallis, \textit{Foundation of the New South Africa}, p.204.
\textsuperscript{255} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Minutes, Fourth Annual Conference, Durban, 28\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th} March, 1959, pp. 14-15.
SACTU also gave direct guidance to its members on how to lodge a complaint against an employer.\textsuperscript{256} SACTU had a trust fund to assist in appeals for workers. These funds were kept separate from the general funds of the organisation. When striking workers were arrested and charged for taking part in stay-at-home campaigns, SACTU morally and financially supported those who stood trial morally and financially. It provided £300 towards the trial of workers who were arrested after the 14 and 15 April 1958 stay-at-home.\textsuperscript{257} Although the response to the stay-at-home was on the whole a failure, in some centres the response was enthusiastic. In Port Elizabeth 50 per cent of workers stayed at home. In Sophiatown and Newclare in Johannesburg several thousands of workers participated in work stoppages, whereas in Pietersburg demonstrations were crushed by the police. There were small-scale strikes in areas such as Balfour where workers in a tiny polony factory downed tools. Farm workers in two Ermelo farms stayed away. An Indian shopping centre completely shut its doors.\textsuperscript{258} SACTU also solicited support for its affiliates who were involved in strikes by appealing to international bodies for assistance.\textsuperscript{259}

Thirdly SACTU aimed to oppose any discrimination in employment and to fight for the right of all workers to perform all types of employment provided the prevailing minimum wage rates were applied. SACTU vehemently opposed the Industrial Conciliation Act and the subsequent amendments. It staged protest demonstrations outside Parliament and gave evidence in front of the Select Committee. It completely rejected clause 77 of the Act which enabled Government to demarcate jobs for different race groups. It organised the stay-at-home campaign and launched the £1-a-day campaign to ensure that workers had higher wages and that 20 thousand new members were recruited into the trade union movement.\textsuperscript{260}

\textsuperscript{256} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: “Join the Union, How to settle your complaints” (not numbered).
\textsuperscript{257} Archives of SACTU, AD 1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.9.
\textsuperscript{258} New Age, April 17, 1958, p.7.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid, p.10.
\textsuperscript{260} Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, pp.2-4.
By 1961 SACTU had 46 unions affiliated to it, of these one was a white union, nine were Coloured and/or Asian and 36 were African. Clearly it did not entirely succeed in eliminating discrimination in the labour movement but its composition was representative of the country’s demography.

SACTU also aimed at promoting or supporting any legislation which was in the interest of the workers and the trade union movement and opposing legislation which was not in the interest of workers and the trade union movement. The stay-at-home campaign was aimed at opposing repressive laws. It opposed the Regional Commissioner of the Witwatersrand in his attempt to implement a clause in Government Notice 2715 which stipulated that workers who participate in activities such as strikes and stay-at-homes would not be reinstated should they be dismissed.\(^{261}\) SACTU opposed the Industrial Conciliation Act as it had resulted in the disruption and interference by Government in trade union activity. Statistics reflected that this interference had a negative impact on the trade unions, the number of strikes by workers, other than Africans steadily declined between 1954 and 1958. In 1954 there were 39 strikes, in 1955 there were 34, in 1957 there 18 and by 1958 they had dropped to 10.\(^{262}\) It must be pointed out as Lodge noted that ‘despite the new legal weapons at its disposal, the state was to experience great difficulty in enforcing industrial discipline on black workers’.\(^{263}\) As far as the African workforce was concerned strikes actually increased reaching 569 between 1955 and 1961.\(^{264}\)

It advanced the democratic right of all workers by sending out workers to collect demands from factories and townships for inclusion in the Freedom Charter. It established international links and highlighted that the South African delegation to the ILO was not representative in its composition at the ILO Conference.

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\(^{261}\) Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Report of the General Secretary to the Fourth Annual National Conference of SACTU, p.9.


\(^{263}\) T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, p.193.

\(^{264}\) Ibid.
This was done in an effort to ensure that structures that professed to represent workers were themselves democratic. It joined the Congress Alliance precisely because it wanted to promote democracy both in the political sphere and the labour sphere. A reader of The Star newspaper expressed a view on the struggle for democracy by African people and trade unions. He wrote:

The present struggle of the indigenous peoples of Africa for political freedom is to my mind the symptom not so much of the desire for political freedom. This viewpoint can be substantiated, I think by taking a closer look at history than we have possibly been doing.

Political unrest is more often than not the outcome of economic insecurity. In the Middle Ages the agricultural worker in England finally over threw the feudal system when he was looking for improved economic rights. The struggle for economic freedom runs like a thread through history up to modern times when we find THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT (own emphasis) fighting through many years and stages in Europe, Britain and the world: all for better economic rights to share in the fruits of your own hard work. Though this right is often OBSCURED AND SUPRESSED BY LEGISLATION the struggle for it eventually becomes too strong to be controlled by law 265.

This reader’s view is supported by Styles who argued that SACTU organisers consciously propagated the concept of “political unionism” which entailed an integrated trade union approach which made a clear link between specific economic and political issues with broader goals of the society.\textsuperscript{266} Lambert characterised Feit’s rejection of this integrated approach as “a false dichotomy of the economic and the political”.\textsuperscript{267} Lodge also noted that SACTU’s original purpose was to link economic struggles with political imperatives of the working class consciousness.\textsuperscript{268}

Despite its approach to link the economic struggle to the political struggle its core and primary focus was on trade union activity. It serviced its affiliates, it had about 65 full-time organizers and officials, the majority of whom were in Johannesburg and Durban. A smaller number was in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, along the Reef and Pretoria. SACTU provided practical assistance to these affiliates, it provided lectures and organised new schools for new officials, and employed organisers to visit the unions to train members of staff in booking and other related areas. It circulated specimens of constitutions and memoranda to employers, the working of the Workmen’s Compensation Act and information about wages and conditions of employment.\textsuperscript{269} Furthermore its publication “Workers’ Unity” provided much needed information to workers.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[D. Styles, Understanding the Freedom Charter: The Political Orientation of the African National Congress, p.91.]
\item[T. Lodge, \textit{Black Politics in South Africa since 1945}, p.193.]
\item[M. Horrell, \textit{South African Trade Unionism: A study of Divided Working Class}, p.82.]
\end{footnotes}
It is the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, No. 28 of 1956 which inadvertently led to the formation of SACTU. In 1954 the SAT and LC, the SA Federation of Trade Unions and the Western Province Federation of Labour Unions called a Unity Committee Conference to co-ordinate and consolidate opposition to the Industrial Conciliation Act. A new co-ordinating body was formed, namely TUCSA which would exclude African unions. TUCSA’s paternalistic tendencies and collaborationist tendencies with the state resulted in a number of registered unions and CNETU’s African unions forming SACTU, a non-racial federation. Many unions woke up to the danger facing trade unions when the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended to include employment reservation. The exclusion of Africans from the ambit of trade unionism as envisaged by the Industrial Conciliation Act led to the formation of this non-racial federation which sought to fight against the racial differentiation created in the new industrial legislation. SACTU argued that:

rational inequality at work was inextricably bound up with the political system of white supremacy and the struggle for a non-racial labour movement had to deal with both the economic and political forms of apartheid\textsuperscript{270}.

SACTU’s aims and objectives were informed by labour legislation. It responded to racial differentiation as reflected in this legislation. The legislation politicised the labour market. Hence in one of the leaflets chief Lutuli warned against “the fallacious belief in some circles that the workers’ struggle was purely an economic and not a political one”. He further stated that such belief ignored the facts of the situation which were:

1. Workers were employees but also part of the oppressed Non-white public.

The implication of this is that a worker should be a trade unionist and a congressite.

2. The employer was part of the ruling class, so that in his exploitation of the worker, the employer was encouraged and protected by the state through legislation such as the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act which according to the Minister of Labour, Mr Ben Schoeman, was aimed ‘at bleeding African Trade Unions to death’, the Industrial Conciliation Act with its undemocratic job reservation provision, and laws enforcing the industrial colour bar which debar non-European workers from skilled jobs.\(^{271}\)

\(^{271}\) Archives of SACTU, AD1197/A4: Chief Albert Lutuli’s Address to the Fourth Annual National Conference, Durban, 28\(^{th}\) and 29\(^{th}\) March, 1959, p.4.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

As with any other organisation and/or institution SACTU had its weaknesses and failings. It had constraints and impediments. It changed and adapted to new circumstances. In its initial organisational structure there were only local committees which operated in a particular locality, however with time factory committees or so-called workers’ committees were introduced.

It worked in a highly politicised labour market which was characterised by racial stratification. It was steadfast in its belief in non-racialism. In fact, the composition of its office-bearers was ahead of its time. Its first President Piet Byleveld, was a White man. It recruited the most destitute and least sophisticated workers who could neither afford to pay union dues nor easily comprehend the concept of unionism, let alone politically oriented unions, yet it soldiered on. An assessment of its actions reveals that these actions were informed by its aims and objectives. Whether or not it achieved these aims and objectives is another debate.

To dismiss SACTU therefore as a conveyer belt of the liberation movement as alleged by Feit, is misplaced. SACTU clearly stated that it would embark on a massive programme which would include its allies. Hence its involvement in the Congress Alliance cannot be attributed to a willingness to be used by the ANC to achieve its own goals. To argue that the £1-a-day campaign was not based on a specific action programme as Ncube did, is also misplaced. SACTU had clearly spelt out three aspects in relation to the campaign, namely:

1. establishing powerful unions in the transport and metal sectors
2. forming factory/workers’ committees
3. popularising the wage demand for £1-a-day.
SACTU had also put its organisational machinery in the form of local committees to drive this campaign. It provided guidelines, for example on how to start a factory committee which would have to be implemented taking cognisance of peculiarities prevalent in the various localities.

SACTU faced many challenges; it was at the receiving end of legislative restrictions. It lacked financial resources, therefore collaboration with other progressive forces was a means for survival and a strategic decision aimed at gaining access to mass mobilisation. It understood its milieu hence its strategies were flexible. It had witnessed how the ANC had implemented the Defiance Campaign in 1952 which was geared towards the abolition of unjust laws. It also opposed these laws; therefore working with the ANC was the most logical strategy to pursue.

To argue therefore, as Feit did, that SACTU sought to harness worker demands for “economic amelioration to a political cause” \(^{272}\) is grossly exaggerated. The prevailing environment shaped SACTU. SACTU must be assessed in the context of that environment. Feit’s contention that SACTU was an attempt by the Congress Alliance to mobilise the African workforce is contestable. Rather the Congress Alliance provided SACTU with an opportunity to implement some of its objectives namely, to organise workers into the trade union movement. It never shirked its primary responsibility. It understood its task clearly. In his speech at the inaugural conference, the Chairman asserted:

> It will be the task of this federation to mobilise the workers in the struggle against any discrimination in employment, and to fight for the right of all workers to do any job, provide the prevailing minimum rates applied. To promote, oppose or support any legislation as might be in the interest of the workers and the Trade Union Movement. It must also fight to advance

\(^{272}\) E. Feit, *Workers Without Weapons*, p.33
the democratic rights of all workers, and itself with other forces engaged (own emphasis) in the struggle. All of SACTU’s actions were informed by these goals. It mobilised workers, it gave the practical assistance, it opposed discriminatory legislation and promoted democracy. It also formed an alliance as explicitly intended. SACTU collaborated with the ANC and other organisations in the Congress Alliance. Its involvement in politics was deliberate and although it created a situation where its membership was not stable, it did not distract SACTU from engaging in shop floor issues. Its £1-a-day campaign was purely a labour matter which was planned nationally but implemented locally taking into account the prevailing conditions in the various localities. The resolutions passed at conferences were intended to advance the interests of workers. The resolution it took at its Fourth Annual Conference (28 –29 March 1959) regarding the £1-a-day campaign was aimed at improving the wages of workers and organising unorganised workers.

SACTU co-ordinated the activities and the interests of workers by its affiliates morally and financially, particularly employment by organising stay-at-home campaigns. It fought for all workers to receive a minimum wage by engaging in the £1-a-day campaign. SACTU opposed a clause in Government Notice 2715 and clause 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill. It advanced the democratic rights of its workers by seeking assistance from the ILO and by highlighting that the South African delegation to the ILO Conference was not representative. SACTU’s actions, therefore matched its aims and objectives.

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