

“EXPORTING TRADE UNIONISM AND LABOUR POLITICS: THE BRITISH INFLUENCE ON THE EARLY SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MOVEMENT”*

Wessel Visser

(Department of History, University of Stellenbosch)

wpv@sun.ac.za

Opsomming

Werkers van Britse herkoms, wat die oheersende element van die geskoolde werksmag van die vroeë Witwatersrandse mynindustrie gevorm het, het 'n belangrike rol in die ontstaan en uitbouing van die ontluikende arbeiderbeweging in Suid-Afrika gespeel. Hulle het verskeie vakbonde en politieke arbeiderliggame in Suid-Afrika geïnisieer, wat op die lees van soortgelyke organisasies in Brittanje geskool was. Daarby het hulle ook prominent as vakbond- en politieke arbeiderleiers in die plaaslike arbeiderbeweging gefigureer. Tot 1924 het die “Britse gesindheid” van hierdie werkers tot 'n mindere of meerdere mate die aard van hulle verhouding met swart en Afrikaner-werkers bepaal. Die debat oor vakbond- en politieke arbeidkwessies in arbeiderkringe is verder gestimuleer deur die gereelde plaaslike verspreiding van Britse arbeider- en sosialistiese lektuur en deur geleentheidsbesoeke van Britse arbeider- en sosialistiese leiers.

The Origins of the British Influence on the South African Labour Movement

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 resulted in the economic balance in South Africa tilting towards the interior. South Africa was transformed from an agricultural into a mining country and the mining industry was destined to provide the impetus that would lead to gradual industrialisation and the creation and growth of cities in the interior, such as Johannesburg and Kimberley.³

The exploitation of minerals such as gold and diamonds required a highly mechanised and industrialised technology, especially for gold mining due to the low average mineral content of the ore. Thus engineers, technicians and scientists were crucial to the South African mining industry. As South Africa initially lacked skills and technical expertise in hard-rock mining, thousands of skilled experts were recruited. Therefore it was immigrants who started South African industries.⁴

The first generation of gold-miners mainly came from Cornwall and the north of England, such as Northumberland, while smaller numbers came from South Wales, Western Australia, California, the Klondyke, Italy and Greece. There were also Portuguese, Germans, Russians, Jews, Poles, French and Dutchmen. Thus the Witwatersrand became a cosmopolitan mining community in which British workers were the majority.⁵ In 1896 in Johannesburg alone there were about 16 265 Britons, against 3 335 Russian Jews, 2 262 Germans, 992 Australians, 819 Dutchmen, 754 Americans, 402 French and

² Paper presented at the British World Conference, UCT, Cape Town, 9-11 January 2002. This paper was also published in *New Contree*, No.49, April 2005, pp.145-162.

³ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652 – 1974* (Johannesburg, 1975), p.159.

⁴ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social & Economic* (London, 1957), pp.117,211; E.A. Walker, *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, Vol. VIII (London, 1936), p.778; G.V. Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1961), pp.41-42.

⁵ D. Tickin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888-1910* (PhD, UCT, 1973), pp.2-3,5; R.K.Cope, *Comrade Bill. The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader* (Cape Town, 1943), p.43; De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa*, pp.119,268; Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar*, p.116.

others.⁶ By March 1905, for instance, 85,4% of the white workers on the Witwatersrand goldmines were of British descent.⁷ Also on the Kimberley diamond-fields mineworkers of British descent comprised 68,6% of the white employees of the De Beers Company by 1892.⁸

Katz declares that a British ethos and perspective had filtered in so strongly since the beginning of the new mining community on the Witwatersrand that visitors could scarcely believe that the Transvaal had regained her independence from Britain in 1881. For instance, an article that appeared in the *London Mining Journal* in 1893 nostalgically referred to the Witwatersrand as the "Gold Fields of the British Empire".⁹

Various reasons can be construed for the majority of the immigrant workers being of British, and especially of Cornish descent. For many centuries minerals such as tin, iron, copper, lead, silver and zinc were mined in Cornwall and elsewhere in Britain. Thus through experience especially Cornish miners became world leaders in implementing hard-rock mine technology and deep-level mine exploitation techniques. Therefore the training, experience and skills of the Cornish miners in excavating these minerals, as well as gold and diamonds, were in high demand also elsewhere in the world. Apart from mining the above-mentioned minerals in various countries, Cornish miners particularly followed the gold trail to the El Dorados of the USA, Australia and eventually to South Africa. Exploitation of the goldfields of the Witwatersrand and the diamondfields of Kimberley also required high levels of expertise and hard-rock mining technology.¹⁰

There were also contributory factors to these reasons. By the 1880s the tin, copper, lead and iron deposits of Cornwall and elsewhere in Britain were to a large extent depleted. Mining activity declined sharply and mines were closed down. As a result of competition by other overseas mineral-producing areas, the price of these minerals also dropped in Britain. Therefore large-scale unemployment arose in the British mining areas and many mineworkers were compelled to look for work elsewhere to make a living.¹¹ In addition, high salaries were paid during the Transvaal republican period - according to Katz, they were on average higher than in any other mining centre in the world. This, together with the availability of black manual labour that put white immigrant mineworkers mainly in the position of supervisors, made the Witwatersrand a highly sought after centre of attraction.¹²

⁶ Van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster*, p.185.

⁷ A.A. Mawby, *The Political Behaviour of the British Population of the Transvaal, 1902-1907* (MA, UWits, 1969), p.289.

⁸ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.3.

⁹ E.N. Katz, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines 1886-1910* (Johannesburg, 1994), p.63.

¹⁰ Katz, *The White Death*, pp.2,49-50,63,65-66,68,211; G.B. Dickason, *Cornish Immigrants to South Africa: The Cousin Jacks' contribution to the development on mining and commerce 1820-1920*, pp. X,2-7,60-61,76; D.B.Barton, *A History of Tin Mining and Smelting in Cornwall*, pp. 17,175,192,223,231; J. Rowe, *The Hard-Rock Men: Cornish Immigrants and the North American Frontier* (Liverpool, 1974), pp. 3,43,114,119-120,206.

¹¹ Dickason, *Cornish Immigrants*, p.11; Barton, *A History of Tin Mining*, pp. 130,133-134,147,165,178; Rowe, *The Hard-Rock Men*, pp.17,114,115,157-158,161,171; Katz, *The White Death*, pp.63,66.

¹² Katz, *The White Death*, pp.49-53,62,64,66-69,75.

According to W.H. Andrews, the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold in the Transvaal made trade unionism possible and even inevitable.¹³ The predominantly British character of the miners, the habits of the British workshop and the tradition of the British trade unions established themselves on the Witwatersrand.¹⁴ The South African Labour Party (SALP) was also mainly supported by workers of British origin; the party was found in the British tradition of labour politics and most of its leaders were British born.¹⁵ Indeed, political labour activities in South Africa were preceded by the rise of labour parties in European countries such as Britain during the last decades of the 19th century. Consequently this would also impact upon the South African labour movement with its British character.¹⁶

After the Anglo-Boer War the pre-war white, predominantly English-speaking labour force was augmented by demobilised British, Australian, New Zealand and Canadian soldiers from the British armies. The infusion of the demobilised soldiers into the labour movement introduced new ideas on labour and socialist organisation. In Australia, for instance, trade unionism and labour politics were more advanced at that stage than in Britain. Some of the workers, particularly miners, also came from America and introduced the American variety of industrial unionism and syndicalism. Although the bulk of the immigration to South Africa therefore did come from the English-speaking world, the Italian, German and Jewish immigrants who came from the continent of Europe included socialists who brought their own particular organisational models to South Africa, but these ideas were absorbed by the predominantly English-speaking labour force.¹⁷

The wide circulation of British labour and socialist literature and visits by prominent British, Australian and New Zealand labour sympathisers to South Africa hastened the growth of the local labour movement. British socialist weeklies, such as Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* and *Merrie England*, as well as copies of *Labour Leader*, *Herald* and *Forward*, were circulated by local socialists.¹⁸ According to Ticktin, British influence on socialism in South Africa was preceded by a socialist revival in Great Britain in the 1880s inspired by H.M. Hyndman, William Morris and others.¹⁹

However, considering the fact that the British character dominated the labour dispensation particularly on the Witwatersrand, it must also be mentioned that after the Anglo-Boer War Australians and, to a lesser extent, New Zealanders became actively involved in the South African labour movement.²⁰ Indeed, almost all the early trade union leaders in South

¹³ W.H. Andrews, *Class Struggles in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1941), p.12.

¹⁴ De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa*, pp.211-212; A Hepple, *South Africa. A Political and Economic History* (London, 1966), p.223; M. Horrell, *South African Trade Unionism. A Study of a Divided Working Class* (Johannesburg, 1961), p.1; E.S. Sachs, *The Choice before South Africa* (London, 1952), p.139.

¹⁵ Sachs, *The Choice before South Africa*, p.47.

¹⁶ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.6-7.

¹⁷ S. Johns, *Raising the Red Flag. The International Socialist League & the Communist Party of South Africa 1914-1932* (Bellville, 1995), p.25; Mawby, *The Political Behaviour*, p.231.

¹⁸ See Ticktin, *The Origins of the south African Labour Party*, chs I,V-VIII and Appendix E; E.N. Katz: *A Trade Union Aristocracy. A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913* (African Studies Institute, UWits, 1976), pp.4,254; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.98,170.

¹⁹ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.6.

²⁰ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.5,9.

Africa were either British or Australian born. Therefore the initial organisation and growth of South African trade unions and labour organisations, particularly in the Transvaal, can be attributed to the efforts of immigrants, largely from Britain and Australia, who prior to their arrival in South Africa had belonged to or had been influenced by trade unions abroad.²¹

Trade Unions and Political Labour Organisation

Soon after their arrival in the country many British-born trade unionists and labour personalities, who were to become leaders in the South African labour movement, became actively involved with local labour activities.

The first hints of labour and socialist organisations in South Africa became visible in the Transvaal in the last decade of the 19th century before the Anglo-Boer War.²² The first trade unions and political wings of the labour movement in South Africa were established on the basis of similar movements in Britain by immigrant workers who entered the country since the 1880s. Some of these first trade unions were branches of overseas mother organisations.²³

One of the oldest trade unions in South Africa was a printers' union that already existed by 1881-82 in Cape Town. On 5 January 1898 the South African Typographical Union (SATU) was established with H.W. Sampson as one of its leading personalities.²⁴

Henry William Sampson was born from the working class on 12 May 1872 in Islington, London. After qualifying as an artisan in the printing trade in 1892 he emigrated to South Africa. He was prominent in organising various trade unions in South Africa, the Cape Trades and Labour Council, the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council, the Transvaal Independent Labour Party in 1906 and the Transvaal Federation of Trade Unions in 1911. Sampson was also president of the SATU since 1903 and was elected life president in October 1929. From 1909 to 1910 Sampson was chairman of the SALP and in the first general election for the Union Parliament in 1910 he became the Labour MP for Commissioner Street. From 1928 to 1933 he was appointed Minister of Posts and Telegraphs and Public Works in Hertzog's Pact Cabinet.²⁵

Another prominent British-born trade unionist was James Thompson Bain, a remarkable and colourful figure in the history of the South African labour movement – according to

²¹ Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, p.13. See also biographical details of British and Australian born labour personalities in South Africa in E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation in South Africa* (Durban, 1926), pp.159-179.

²² Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, p.24.

²³ E.R. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope. A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison, 1964), p.130.

²⁴ A.J. Downes, *Printers' Saga: Being a History of the South African Typographical Union* (Johannesburg, 1952), pp.2,19a,21,43.

²⁵ W.J. de Kock (red.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek, Deel I* (Cape Town, 1976), p.715; I.L. Walker & B. Weinbren, *2000 Casualties. A History of the Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1961), p.294; L.E. Neame: *Some South African Politicians* (Cape Town, 1929?), pp.73-75.

Walker and Weinbren, he was South Africa's most famous trade union leader²⁶, and for Ticktin he was the father of labour and socialist movements in the Transvaal.²⁷ Bain was born in 1859 or 1860 in Dundee, Scotland. He was well-versed in the writings of William Morris and other British socialist thinkers and also a great admirer of Thomas Carlyle, the champion of the poor and the oppressed. At the beginning of the 1880s he was employed at the government printers in Edinburgh, where he came into contact with various leading socialists, such as Prince Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist leader.

Bain apparently emigrated to Cape Town in 1887 and played a leading role in the formation of the Cape Trades and Labour Council. In 1890 he moved to Johannesburg. As a disciple of the British socialist Robert Blatchford he promoted the sales of Blatchford's popular socialist weekly, the *Clarion*, and also wrote articles for the paper. In addition, Bain distributed other British labour publications such as *Merrie England* on the Rand. By the middle of 1898 he started a labour weekly, the *Johannesburg Witness*. He exercised great influence on behalf of the workers with the Transvaal government and became a naturalised citizen of Kruger's republic. During the Anglo-Boer War he was an agent of the Republic's secret service under Gen. Smuts – the only post-war British-born labour leader to have fought on the side of the Boers.

Bain constantly strove towards fomenting revolution and was a leading figure in the strike committees of the 1913 and 1914 strikes. In 1919, under the leadership of Bain, a so-called Provisional Joint Board of Control, dubbed the "Johannesburg Soviet", usurped the powers of the city's municipal council for a few days.²⁸

Branches of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), a British craft union, were organised between 1866 and 1893 in Cape Town, Durban, Kimberley and Johannesburg.²⁹ According to Cope, the Johannesburg branch of the ASE was the pioneer trade union in the engineering industry on the Witwatersrand. Although initially the ASE's membership along the whole of the Reef was only a few hundred, the branch could draw on the large membership and funds of the mother organisation in Britain.³⁰ Significantly, according to Ticktin, the ASE was to provide most of the trade union parliamentary candidates for the general election of 1910.³¹

In 1905 Bill Andrews was appointed as the official South African organiser of the ASE. William Henry Andrews was born on 20 April 1870 in Suffolk. There he joined the ASE in 1890 and came to Johannesburg in 1893. Until 1899 he held various jobs on goldmines on the West Rand. Andrews was intimately involved in all the labour organisations in the Transvaal and prominently engaged in every political movement within the ranks of labour. Through organisational work in the trade union movement he became actively involved in many labour disputes throughout South Africa, including the major strikes of 1907, 1913, 1914 and 1922. Andrews became president of the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour

²⁶ Walker & Weinbren, *2000 Casualties*, p.286.

²⁷ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.83.

²⁸ De Kock, *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel I, pp.40-41; Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 10,83,90-91; Walker & Weinbren, *2000 Casualties*, pp.286-287.

²⁹ Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, pp. 20-21.

³⁰ Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.28,47.

³¹ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.23.

Council and the Political Labour League in 1905, the Labour Representation Committee in 1906 and the SALP in 1909.

Andrews was elected as a Labour MP in the 1912 Georgetown by-election. Influenced by the British shop stewards' movement during a visit to Britain in 1918, he was instrumental in the formation of similar shaft and mine committees of shop stewards on the Witwatersrand representing a variety of trades. Andrews was also an outspoken advocate of socialism. In 1915 he was elected the first president of the International Socialist League (ISL). On 30 July 1921 he became the general secretary of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and in 1922 the editor of *The International*, the party's mouthpiece. In 1925 he was elected as the first secretary of the South African Trade Union Congress.³²

On 30 August 1902 the Transvaal Miners' Association (TMA) was officially launched in Johannesburg, with William Mather as general secretary.³³ Mather was a miner from Cumberland.³⁴ Most members of the TMA, which aimed at protecting the interests of white miners, were of British descent, especially from Cornwall, Durham and Northumberland.³⁵

Another prominent British-born trade unionist, Tom Matthews, was secretary of the TMA from 1908 to 1915. He was born in 1866 in Newlyn, Cornwall and emigrated to the USA in 1882. There he worked in gold, silver, copper and lead mines and soon took a prominent part in the trade union movement of Montana. In 1897 Matthews emigrated to the Transvaal goldfields where he worked for ten years. He also became involved at the forefront of the local labour movement and took an active part in propagating socialism to the mineworkers of the Rand. Matthews distinguished himself in the 1907 miners' strike and took a leading role in the strikes of 1913 and 1914. He also served on the WT&LC, the Johannesburg branch of the socialist Transvaal Independent Labour Party, the Transvaal Labour Representation Committee and the SALP.³⁶

British-born workers were also prominent in forming pioneer political labour organisations in South Africa. For instance, Bill Andrews and others played leading roles in forming the Johannesburg Trades and Labour Council in 1902 that soon became known as the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council (WT&LC).³⁷ The Trades and Labour Councils were the primary institutions used for linking up the various craft unions and these were also formed in Cape Town, Pretoria, Kimberley and other important centres. Their activities were not strictly confined to trade union issues for they also took an active interest in industrial legislation and in all matters affecting the interests of the workers, either in the colonial legislatures or in town councils. They took on the lion's share in the formation of the SALP.³⁸

³² De Kock, *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel I, pp.17-18; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.191-192,200.

³³ Mawby, *The Political Behaviour*, p.238.

³⁴ Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, pp.54,113-115.

³⁵ Gitsham and Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation*, p.67; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, p.89.

³⁶ D.W. Kruger (red.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel II, (Pretoria, 1972), p.464; Gitsham and Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation*, pp.66,160.

³⁷ Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.65-66.

³⁸ Andrews, *Class Struggles in South Africa*, p.16.

The WT&LC became South Africa's foremost political and industrial labour organisation since the Anglo-Boer War. It was the driving force behind labour politics in the Transvaal until the formation of the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1906 and until its political functions were taken over by the SALP in 1910.³⁹ Hepple asserts that the SALP was actually born from the WT&LC. Already in November 1903 it described itself as the "Labour Party" and was also commonly referred to as such.⁴⁰

British-born Labourites and the South African Labour Party

Workers of British origin also took the initiative in the formation of the South African Labour Party, which took place at an inter-colonial labour conference from 9 to 11 October 1909 in Johannesburg.⁴¹ Already prior to the conference ex-Britons such as C.H. Haggart, J.F. Trembath, W.H. Andrews and J.T. Bain had promoted the formation of a united labour party, organised at national level, on several occasions.⁴² In the run-up to the formation of the party a committee, all British-born, consisting of H.W. Sampson, C.H. Haggart, Nelson Palmer, A. L. Clark and A. Crawford, was appointed to draft a provisional constitution. In addition, Sampson was elected as the first president and Haggart as the first secretary of the SALP.⁴³

As a result of bitter dissension among leaders within the ranks of organised labour and ideological disputes between socialists and right-wing trade union leaders in the Party, another ex-Britisher, F.H.P. Creswell, was elected as the parliamentary leader of the SALP in June 1910. Although born in the English middle-class, Creswell espoused strong pro-labour political sentiments.⁴⁴ Frederick Hugh Page Creswell was born on 13 November 1866 in Gibraltar. In 1888 he qualified as a mining engineer at the Royal School of Mines in London and came to the Witwatersrand in 1894. He was appointed general manager at the Durban Deep goldmine in Roodepoort in 1895.

As mine manager he experimented with unskilled white labour in tasks traditionally reserved for unskilled blacks. He came to believe that South Africa's labour problems could only be solved by employing and protecting unskilled white labour and by restricting the employment of non-white labour. He was therefore forced to resign his job and in 1903 went into politics. During the strikes of 1913 and 1914 Creswell, as the parliamentary leader of the SALP, voiced the strikers' cause in Parliament. His growing friendship with General Hertzog of the Nationalist Party (NP) in the period after the First World War was to have a profound impact on the political development of South Africa. Discussions between Creswell and Hertzog in 1922, partly as a result of the negative

³⁹ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.25,117.

⁴⁰ See Hepple, *South Africa. A Political and Economic History*, p.224.

⁴¹ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.434-435.

⁴² See W.P. Visser, *Suid-Afrikaanse Koerantberiggewing en –kommentaar t.o.v. Arbeiderspartye, Sosialistiese Partye en ander Radikale Groepe en Bewegings, 1908-1915* (MA, US, 1987), pp.147-148.

⁴³ For a comprehensive discussion of the run-up, founding conference and policy issues of the SALP, see Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, ch.9, pp.397-424 and M.E. Wentzel, *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Arbeiderspartye: Agtergrond, Stigting en Algemene Ontplooiing tot 1915* (MA, US, 1984), ch.3, pp.76-102.

⁴⁴ Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, p.201.

outcome for labour of the Rand Revolt of that year, resulted in an electoral pact in 1923 between the SALP and the NP. This led to a victory at the polls for the NP-SALP Pact in the general election of 1924. Creswell was appointed Minister of Defence in Hertzog's cabinet.⁴⁵

From 1909 to 1911 C.H. Haggart served as the editor of *The Worker*, a labour weekly that would become the official mouthpiece of the SALP the following year. Charles Henry Haggart was born in East Anglia in 1854. Before ill-health made him settle in Durban in 1898, he had spent at least ten years in northern Queensland, Australia. In 1906 Haggart was elected as a Labour member to the Natal Legislative Assembly and from 1908 to 1909 he was the organising secretary of the Natal Labour Party. He was an ardent supporter of the White Australia attitude, for he asserted that "the only sound policy was to aim at South Africa as a white man's country". He was in the forefront of the anti-Asian movement in Natal before Union. Not only was he one of the pioneers of labour representation in Natal, but also one of the architects of the SALP. After Haggart's appointment in October 1909 as the first secretary of the SALP and editor and manager of *The Worker*, he moved to Johannesburg. From 1910 to 1915 Haggart served as Labour MP for Roodepoort.⁴⁶

British-born Immigrants and Socialism in South Africa

Unlike several European countries, South Africa lacked an indigenous socialist tradition. Its first socialists were foreign-born and its socialism, as a movement to transcend capitalism, was an imported doctrine. Apart from an Eastern European socialist tradition that came along with Yiddish-speaking exiles, and a weaker tradition from the United States in which syndicalism played an important role, the influence of British socialist traditions was predominant. Most of the first socialist groups saw themselves as local branches of existing British organisations.⁴⁷

The post-war socialist movement in the Transvaal resurfaced with the formation of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in Johannesburg on 19 December 1903 at a meeting attended by 300 persons.⁴⁸ Jock Campbell, a socialist who hailed from the west of Scotland, was the party's leader.⁴⁹ Campbell's SLP agitated for responsible government – the SLP was allegedly the first political organisation in South Africa to insist upon it. Its activities included the distribution of various revolutionary literature and of Marxist books and pamphlets by the German socialist Karl Kautsky, Friedrich Engels, Eugene V. Debs and Daniel de Leon – the latter a leader of the American SLP.⁵⁰

Reflecting the pull of British experience, in 1903 Durban socialists formed a local branch of the Clarion Fellowship, an organisation that provided recreational and cultural outlets

⁴⁵ M. Creswell, *An Epoch of the Political History of South Africa in the Life of Frederick Hugh Page Creswell* (Cape Town, n.d.), chs. 1-20; De Kock, *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordboek*, Deel I, pp.194-196; Neame, *Some South African Politicians*, pp.29-30.

⁴⁶ C.J. Beyers (red.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordboek*, Deel III, (Pretoria, 1977), pp.374-375; Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.16,74-75 and Appendix E, p.555.

⁴⁷ A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades. Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*, (Aldershot, 2000), pp.6-7,22.

⁴⁸ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.182.

⁴⁹ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p.29.

⁵⁰ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.182-183; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.82,98.

within the tradition of ethical socialism. The Fellowship was modelled on the English society of the same name and distributed its publications. The founders of the movement in Durban were two Scotsmen, A.L. Clark and Harry Norrie. It contributed to the election expenses of H.M. Hyndman, the leader of the British Social Democratic Federation (SDF). The Clarion Fellowship also launched an anti-Chinese movement in Durban. In 1905 the Durban Workers' Political Union was started under the auspices of the Clarion Fellowship with the purpose of securing labour representation in the Natal parliament.⁵¹

By late 1907 local socialists had established a Durban branch of the British SDF, of which Norrie was secretary. The British SDF, founded in 1883, presented itself as a mainstream Marxist Second International party. Broadly, it advocated a co-operative commonwealth and was committed to reform through parliamentary and municipal politics as a stepping stone to revolution.⁵² The Durban SDF advocated the unification of South Africa as it believed that such a step would also unite the South African labour movement.⁵³

In May 1904 a SDF branch was founded in Cape Town through the efforts of a certain Blagburn (formerly a member of the West Ham branch of the British SDF), W.H. Harrison and Jack Erasmus, a New Zealander. The Cape Town SDF attracted a cosmopolitan membership, of which British trade unionists were the predominant element. Other prominent members included A. Needham, an Australian, and Percy McKillop, who was of Irish descent. The SDF advocated the socialist objective, claimed to follow Hyndman in England, and to be true Marxists and the representatives of international revolutionary socialism. It also advocated the franchise, regardless of race or gender.⁵⁴

The Cape Town SDF regarded itself as a branch of the London SDF and sold its paper, the **Clarion**. The local SDF regularly conducted propaganda and organisational work among the Cape Coloured community. The SDF also applauded the Russian revolution of 1905 against czarism and was supported in its action by the Cape socialist, Olive Schreiner. The organisation was host in Cape Town to the British labour and socialist leader, Keir Hardie, when he visited South Africa in 1908. The SDF also participated in the most important of the founding conferences of the SALP.⁵⁵

In 1906 a South African section of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP) was established on the Witwatersrand with J.T. Bain as chairman. Archie Crawford was the general secretary and other Britons, such as J. Reid and W. H. Harrison, were also prominent party members. All its office-bearers were devoted socialists.⁵⁶ According to Drew and Pike, the British ILP, which was founded by Keir Hardie in 1893, espoused an

⁵¹ H.J. and R.E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (IDAAF, 1983), pp.102-103.

⁵² Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, pp.8,25.

⁵³ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.396.

⁵⁴ W.H. Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947* (Cape Town, 1947), pp.4-6,14; Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.327-328; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, p.96.

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa*, pp.6,9-10,19-23; Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.328,330 and Appendix E, p.556. Regarding Hardie's visit to South Africa see also pp.12-13 below.

⁵⁶ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.219-224.

ethical socialism.⁵⁷ During Hardie's South African visit the local ILP arranged a meeting for him.⁵⁸

The official mouthpiece of the Socialist Society (an off-shoot of the Johannesburg branch of the ILP) and the Rand militant socialists was the ***Voice of Labour***, established in September 1908 by Archie Crawford and his partner, Mary Fitzgerald.⁵⁹ Archibald Crawford, also known as the "stormy petrel" of the early labour movement in South Africa, was born in Glasgow in 1883, where he qualified as a fitter. He came to South Africa with British troops in 1902 and in 1903 became a member of the ASE. He became a prominent agitator in the labour movement and was involved in the miners' strike of 1907. Apart from his involvement with the ILP, he was also a member of the Transvaal LRC. Crawford was elected a Labour Councillor for the Johannesburg City Council and served one term.

Crawford took a prominent part in the strikes of 1913 and 1914. In the general strike of 1914 he was the secretary of the Transvaal Federation of Trade's strike committee. During the strike he was arrested and was one of nine strike leaders abducted from jail by the government and deported to Britain. After being repatriated later that year, Crawford subsequently built up the South African Industrial Federation (SAIF), which maintained a white labour policy. In 1922 he became the secretary of the SAIF.⁶⁰

Mary Fitzgerald, nicknamed "Pickhandle Mary" for leading crowds who brandished pickhandles at protest meetings during strike actions in 1911, was born in Wexford, Ireland in 1885. Her family emigrated to South Africa in 1902 and the following year she was appointed as a typist in the office of the TMA in Johannesburg. A born orator, she soon became a powerful influence in the labour movement. Fitzgerald was the only woman to attend the founding conference of the SALP in 1910 and was a pioneer in organising female trade unions. As a skilled agitator she was a powerful influence among the strikers during the 1913 miners' strike. In 1915 Fitzgerald was elected to the Johannesburg City Council, where she became the first woman deputy mayor in South Africa.⁶¹

Socialist organisations in South Africa would also attract a number of middle-class white men, some "with a sprinkling of the bohemian type from the university".⁶² The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 would cause a political and ideological rift within the ranks of the South African labour movement, especially in the SALP. The split took place between pro-British workers, who in a spirit of patriotism and out of a sense of duty joined the British war effort, and those who adhered to the international socialist call for worker solidarity and who were anti-war and pacifist. For instance, ***The Worker***, the SALP's

⁵⁷ See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, pp.8,25 and H.R. Pike, *A History of Communism in South Africa* (Germiston, 1985), p.69.

⁵⁸ Cope, *Comrade Bill*, p.98.

⁵⁹ (TAB) CS Vol. 877, file no. 15580, Correspondence Voice of Labour: A. Crawford-Colonial Secretary, 24.9.1908 (no.1/15580), Register of Newspapers and Certificate of Registration of Newspaper.

⁶⁰ Beyers, *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel III, pp.184-185; Gitsham and Trembath, *A First Account of Labour Organisation*, p.159; Walker & Weinbren, *2000 Casualties*, p.290.

⁶¹ C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. V, (Pretoria, 1987), pp.265-266; F. Hunter, "Who Was Pickhandle Mary?", (Unpublished Typescript, JPL, Johannesburg, n.d), chs 1-13; A. Crawford, "The Class War in South Africa", *International Socialist Review* (August 1911), pp.76-77.

⁶² Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa*, p.xix.

official mouthpiece which at the time was edited by the British-born Wilfred Wybergh and his wife, Katherine, was obviously swayed by Britain's entry into the war and expressed an unequivocal pro-war attitude.⁶³ Within a month after the outbreak of the war, the pacifist section in the SALP founded the War on War League at the beginning of September, with Colin Wade as chairman and S.P. Bunting as treasurer.⁶⁴

The biographical information on the League's leadership confirms Cope's views that the bulk of the War on Warites were middle-class professional men who were recent adherents to the labour movement – clerks, clergymen and others whose “humanitarianism had brought them over to the side of the workers”.⁶⁵ Most of these persons were of British origin.

Sidney Percival Bunting, for instance, came from middle-class stock. He was born in London on 29 June 1873. Both Bunting's parents were devoted champions of unpopular social issues and the Bunting home was a rendezvous for political refugees from various nationalities. A graduate from Oxford, he won the chancellor's prize for classics from Magdalen College in 1897. In 1900, during the Anglo-Boer War, Bunting came to South Africa. After the war he took up a law degree at the South African College in Cape Town and in 1902 established a law practice in Johannesburg. By 1910 Bunting had become sympathetic to the views of the SALP and was Creswell's election agent in the general election. After joining the party he became the secretary of the Witwatersrand district committee and was elected to the national executive in 1912. In the same year he managed *The Worker* and sat on its editorial board. In March 1914 he was elected to the Transvaal Provincial Council on the Labour ticket. Apart from the War on War League, he also became a member of the International Socialist League in 1915 and of the CPSA in 1921. In 1923 he became the CPSA's secretary and was elected party chairman in 1924 and again in 1929.⁶⁶

The formal and final split between the pro-war and anti-war factions within labour ranks took place in August 1915 at a special conference of the SALP in Johannesburg to consider the party platform for the impending general election. After lengthy discussion and vigorous debate a pro-war motion endorsing Creswell's “See the War Through” policy was carried by 82 votes to 26. As a result the dissident anti-warites formed a new body in September 1915, the International Socialist League (ISL), and decided to sever all connection with the SALP. Once again persons of British origin played a major role in the formation of the League. Bill Andrews became president, A. Crisp a vice-president, D.I. Jones secretary, and former War on Warite Sidney Bunting an additional member of the ISL's management committee.⁶⁷

⁶³ D. Ticktin, “The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15”, *South African Historical Journal*, No.1, (November 1969), pp.62-63. For biographical sketches on the Wyberghs, see Visser, *Suid-Afrikaanse Koerantberiggewing*, pp.58-62.

⁶⁴ See Wentzel, *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Arbeidersparty*, pp.236-237; Ticktin, *The War Issue*, pp.61-65.

⁶⁵ Cope, *Comrade Bill*, p.63.

⁶⁶ D.W. Krüger (red.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel II, (Pretoria, 1972), pp.105-106; E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting. A Political Biography*, (Bellville, 1993); G.M. Gerhart and T. Karis, *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964, Vol. 4, Political Profiles, 1882-1964*, (Stanford, 1977), pp.13-14.

⁶⁷ Ticktin, *The War Issue*, pp.65-71.

D.I. Jones also became the first editor of the ISL's own weekly, *The International*. Jones and Bunting were the League's leading theorists⁶⁸ and headed its so-called "negrophile" group.⁶⁹ David Ivon Jones was a remarkable personality in labour and socialist circles. His biographer describes him as the "apostle of socialism". Born in 1883 in Aberystwyth, Wales, he contracted tuberculosis and much of his life was spent in search of better health. He came to South Africa in 1910. In only a few years he developed from a liberal to an international socialist. In 1911 he joined the SALP and was elected as its secretary in 1914 before joining the war-on-warites in 1915 that broke with the party to form the ISL. He became convinced that the black people of South Africa were the true proletariat of the working class. In 1920 Jones left South Africa for good and travelled to Russia to attend the second congress of the Comintern. There he sat on Comintern committees and prepared documents as a specialist on colonial rule and nationalism. He pioneered the translation of several of Lenin's works into English.⁷⁰

British-born immigrants were also actively involved in the formation of the CPSA. The rules of the Comintern in Russia precluded the affiliation of more than one communist party from any country. Accordingly, the ISL took the initiative of bringing together all socialist parties, groups and individuals with the object of establishing a single Communist Party. On 30 July 1921 fourteen delegates, all English-speaking whites, assembled in Cape Town where the Communist Party of South Africa was officially launched. Bill Andrews was elected secretary and Sidney Bunting as treasurer of the new party.⁷¹

British Socialists and the South African Labour Movement

Trips to and from Britain strengthened the ties with the South African labour movement. For British socialists on the move, South Africa became a stopping off point en route from Australia.⁷² Socialists, both South African and British-born, attempted to come to terms with the problems raised by racial and national divisions within the working class.⁷³

In 1908 James Keir Hardie, the Scottish socialist patriarch of the British ILP, visited South Africa. He sailed from Australia at the end of an overseas tour and landed at Durban on 11 February 1908.⁷⁴ In interviews with the Natal press he favoured the restrictions but not the prohibition of Indian immigration to the colony and stated that black and white labour should receive equal compensation. With regard to the "Bambatha rebellion" that had

⁶⁸ D.I.-Archive, file no. 3/13, *The International*: Extract from Newspaper Register, 9.9.1915 and Certificate of Registration of Newspaper No.226; Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, p.101; *The International*, 10 September 1915.

⁶⁹ D.J. Kotze, *Communism and South Africa* (Cape Town, 1979), p.169.

⁷⁰ See B. Hirson, Notes towards an Intellectual History of the Early Communist Party. The Influence of David Ivon Jones (UWits, 2.9.1991), p.2; B. Hirson and G.A. Williams, *The Delegate for Africa. David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924* (London, 1995), chs 2-4; Gerhart and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, p.43.

⁷¹ S. Johns, "The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (1976), pp.380-397; *The International*, 12 August 1921.

⁷² Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p.27.

⁷³ A. Drew (ed), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Vol. 1: 1907-1950* (Rondebosch, 1996), p.42.

⁷⁴ F. Hale, "Socialist Agitator, Traitor to the British Empire, or Angel of Peace? James Keir Hardie's Visit to Natal in 1908", *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, XIV, (1992), pp.1-3; Drew, in *Discordant Comrades*, pp.20,27 and in *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, pp.42,71 erroneously asserts that Hardie visited South Africa in 1907.

erupted in Natal in 1906, he professed that the Zulus had legitimate grievances that should have been investigated and redressed. Hardie's constant advocacy of social and political equality and his suggestions that the trade unions be thrown open to coloured men inescapably put him at odds with much white opinion, especially white labour opinion. In Pietermaritzburg he encountered public hostility and at the Town Hall jeers and heckling by hooligans were so vociferous that he was unable to deliver his speech. In Ladysmith he also faced an angry crowd. At the Railway Institute he took the platform amid hisses, jeers and much heckling.

After Natal Hardie proceeded to the Witwatersrand where his presence proved even more tumultuous, because the publicity he had gained in the Natal press had preceded him to the north. With unemployment at a high level in the mines and other industries in and around Johannesburg, Hardie's suggestions that equal conditions of employment be offered to non-whites plunged many working-class whites into paroxysms of anger. In Johannesburg enraged white workers attempted without success to inflict bodily harm on him.⁷⁵ He did, however, receive a cordial reception at a closed meeting in the Johannesburg Trades Hall.⁷⁶

In Cape Town Hardie received a mixed reception. The Cape T&LC would have nothing to do with him, in spite of having sent him an invitation in June 1907 to stop over during his world tour. It had become alarmed at his hostile reception in Natal and in the Transvaal and probably feared a loss of support by being associated with evidently a champion of non-white workers. This gave the local SDF the opportunity to entertain Hardie. Ironically enough, Hardie's public meeting in Cape Town, which was then organised by the SDF, was his most enthusiastic public reception during his South African tour.⁷⁷

The visit to South Africa of Tom Mann, the British communist and former revolutionary syndicalist, from February to May 1910 en route from Australia to Britain would also evoke a mixed reaction in the ranks of the labour movement.⁷⁸ He was the first secretary of the British ILP and a member of the SDF. He was renowned as one of the pioneers of the new union movement in Britain.⁷⁹

Mann visited Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. According to Katz and Cope, he probably had more influence on trade union leaders in South Africa than any other overseas trade unionist or labour leader. As a result of Mann's presence the Labour Day demonstration in the Transvaal in 1910 "was the most successful ever" as thousands turned out and a high degree of enthusiasm was displayed. Workmen enthusiastically endorsed a resolution that May Day be recognised as an official holiday. Mann advocated that trade unionists should participate in politics for the attainment of immediate and limited

⁷⁵ Hale, *Socialist Agitator*, pp.1,5,6,8,10-15; Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp.295,303,382,383; Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, pp.16,42-43.

⁷⁶ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.296.

⁷⁷ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.337; Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa*, p.20.

⁷⁸ T. Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs* (London, 1967), pp.192,197,199; C. Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856-1941. The Challenges of Labour* (Oxford, 1991), p.140.

⁷⁹ L. van der Walt, "A Class-conscious Revolutionary Organisation embracing all Workers regardless of Craft, Race or Colour": The IWW and the Origins of Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa, 1908-1912. Paper presented at the SA Sociological Association Congress, Saldanha Bay (6-9 July 1999), p.16; Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, p.219.

gains. His endorsement of political action gave many trade unionists the necessary encouragement to pursue their plans of supporting the SALP and of making it a strong and financially viable organisation.⁸⁰

But Tom Mann's public utterances were controversial. Although favouring industrial unionism, regardless of creed or colour, at first he carefully avoided dealing with the non-whites in his propaganda, in deference to his tour organisers. However, much to the embarrassment of his hosts, he eventually called for the organisation of non-white workers.⁸¹ The theme of Mann's talks in South Africa was the necessity to unite all workers into industrial unions able to challenge the power of capital and the state. This outlook provided an immediate challenge to the sensibilities of mainstream organised white labour. On the one hand, his attacks on the craft outlook in the unions were vigorously endorsed by white trade unionists. On the other hand, the notion of inclusive industrial unionism implied non-racial labour unionism, as opposed to the colour bar practices of the white labour movement. Most unions simply refused to accept blacks as members. Even the few which did accept Coloured members drew the colour line at African membership. In his speeches Mann declared that industrial unionism was impossible if 80 per cent of the workers (as was the case) were excluded from the trade unions. Instead, the South African unions must be restructured on non-racial, industrial lines.⁸²

Tom Mann would still visit South Africa twice in the future. In the absence of the nine strike leaders who were deported to England by the government on account of their involvement in the 1914 general strike, Mann came again to South Africa from March to July that year to assist the workers. Travelling through the whole country, he concentrated on industrial organisation and preached industrial unity. In Johannesburg, where he was welcomed by 10 000 people, he called on the workers to take action against war and condemned the government's martial law regulations.⁸³

Mann's last visit to South Africa was a four-month speaking tour in 1922-23 in the wake of the Rand Revolt of 1922. His aims were two-fold: to rebuild the demolished trade union movement, to revive the morale and promote working class unity under the rubric of the Red International of Labour Unions, and to fight for amnesty for the Rand strikers who had been sentenced to death. Mann was also impressed by the level of organisation which he observed at the third annual conference of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, as he saw the industrial organisation of Africans as fundamental to building working class solidarity across the colour line.⁸⁴

The Effects of the British Influence on the Early South African Labour Movement

The solidarity of English-speaking white workers in South Africa with those in Britain lay in the fact that most of the former had been born in Britain and still saw themselves as British

⁸⁰ Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, pp.220-222; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.110-111.

⁸¹ Ticktin, *The Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p.297.

⁸² Van der Walt, *A Class-conscious Revolutionary Organisation*, pp.16-17; Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, p.199; Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, pp.230,256,271.

⁸³ Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, pp.268-269; Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann*, pp.169-170; Cope, *Comrade Bill*, pp.159-160.

⁸⁴ Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann*, pp.209-212.

workers and supported British labour struggles.⁸⁵ For instance, apart from occasionally publishing articles and excerpts from the writings of international socialists and communists such as Tolstoy, Marx, Engels and De Leon, the socialist weekly **Voice of Labour** also gave much prominence to the works of British socialist authors like Hyndman, Hardie, Blatchford, R.B. Suthers, H. Quelch, Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and Jack London.⁸⁶ **The Worker**, mouthpiece of the SALP, in its regular column, "London and Thereabouts", commented on labour conditions and events in England and compared them to the South African labour scene.⁸⁷

Even English-speaking socialists in South Africa still largely identified themselves as British. During the general strike of 1914 socialists and labourites of the likes of Andrews, Sampson, Bunting and others send cables *home* about the position of affairs from the strikers' standpoint.⁸⁸ This British outlook was also influenced by the fact that since the 19th century Southern Africa fell within the global British political sphere of influence and, since 1902, South Africa in particular became an integral part of the British Empire.

The "Britishness" of the English-speaking workers inhibited closer co-operation with the growing Afrikaner working class on the Witwatersrand on labour issues of mutual concern for a long time, especially in establishing worker solidarity and a substantive consolidation of the ranks of labour in the struggle against mining capitalism. According to the Simonses, the "sheer Britishness" and "cultural insularity" of the SALP, its focus on British patriotism, anti-republicanism and the imperial connection during the war and at election times repelled Afrikaner workers and snuffed out any chance of winning their allegiance. Most of the Labour Party's leaders and MPs were British born and unilingual. They welcomed Afrikaners into their ranks, but expected them to communicate in English, the language of the "master race". Preference were given to English-speaking and British-born trade union officials.

And according to **The Labour World**, a labour weekly that supported the SALP unofficially, the British working man (in South Africa) voted for a Unionist or SAP candidate in elections in preference to a Labour candidate who was not British-born. Therefore no Afrikaners sat on the Labour benches in parliament prior to 1924. The SALP alienated Afrikaners by upholding British supremacy, and Africans by upholding white supremacy.⁸⁹

In its turn, the Afrikaans press which championed the cause of the Afrikaner working class, accused the SALP of being imperialist in fighting to uphold the British connection in South Africa and claimed that its policies espoused British racism and jingoism.⁹⁰ It was only

⁸⁵ Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, p.16.

⁸⁶ See Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa*, p.141; *Voice of Labour*, 7 August 1909 and 15 July 1910.

⁸⁷ See *The Worker*, 25 September 1913.

⁸⁸ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p.35.

⁸⁹ Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa*, pp.246-247. See also N.G. Garson, "The Political Role of the White Working Class in South Africa 1902-1924", Conference on Southern African Labour History, African Studies Institute (8-10 April 1976), pp.14,16-18; *The Labour World*, 7 June 1918, 19 June 1920, 26 June 1920 and 7 August 1920, respectively.

⁹⁰ W.P. Visser, *Die Geskiedenis en Rol van Persorgane in die Politieke en Ekonomiese Mobilisasie van die Georganiseerde Arbeiderbeweging in Suid-Afrika, 1908-1924* (PhD, US, 2001), pp.341,344,354,365,370,372.

after labour's devastating defeat by mining capital in the 1922 Rand Revolt that the English- and Afrikaans-speaking sections of the labour movement, represented by the SALP and the Nationalist Party (NP), respectively, reconciled their political differences on issues surrounding the British connection and republicanism. As result an electoral pact between the SALP and the NP was formed in 1923 that led to victory at the polls in the 1924 general elections and an NP-SALP government alliance.⁹¹

Coming from a background where the industrial revolution in Britain, which was also characterised by a long drawn-out struggle between labour and capital for the rights of the working class, had only just run its course, the British-born workers to a great extent introduced an activist and militant element into organised labour in South Africa. Skilled in the traditions and experience of British working-class democracy, which could be only achieved by struggle, agitation and the strike⁹², British-born workers were in the forefront of the political organisation and mobilisation in the local working class in its struggle for better working conditions and wages, especially against big mining capital. For that very reason labour leaders of British origin were in the vanguard of worker agitation during incidents of industrial unrest – the strikes of 1907, 1913, 1914 and 1922 serve as examples.

But British-born workers would, in many ways, also add a dualistic element to the South African labour configuration. The British immigrants came as highly skilled workers to a country where initially only pools of unskilled black and white labour were available. As a consequence British miners in particular immediately found themselves in elevated positions of supervisors on the mines. But instead of augmenting the South African working class in the true sense of the word, British-born labourers were rather inclined towards an exclusive "aristocracy of labour" on the basis of their skills. This inclination would manifest itself particularly in the trade unions and the SALP and would constitute the right-wing and majority of the white labour movement in South Africa.⁹³ Despite the common interests of white workers *vis-a-vis* blacks, English-speaking whites saw themselves as British.⁹⁴

On the other hand, a smaller group of British origin, who espoused a more radical perspective and had a more radical experience of labour's struggle against capitalism, established themselves in the left-wing of the labour movement and contributed to its elaboration. They were informed about similar ideological tendencies abroad and would also assist in establishing a British version of socialism in South Africa. British-born labour leaders who found themselves in either sections of the labour movement would play a major role in the rift that took place in labour ranks on the ideological differences pertaining South Africa's participation in World War One.

In addition, persons of British origin established and built up an inherently South African labour and socialist press. Among British-born intellectuals certain individuals emerged, themselves strongly influenced by British social traditions, who would spread the gospel of socialism in South Africa on the grounds of religious and ethical convictions. British-born

⁹¹ See J.P. Brits, *Die Totstandkoming van die Pakt-regering van 1924* (MA, PU for CHE, 1971).

⁹² See for instance H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (Oxford, 1965) and H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Macmillan, London), 1966.

⁹³ Cf. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar* and De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa*, pp.208-245.

⁹⁴ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p.32.

socialists would be among the first to organise the black working class and were also prominent in establishing communism in South Africa.

As far as the origins and the establishment of trade unionism and labour politics in South Africa are concerned, the British influence therefore left an indelible imprint on the local labour movement.

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