STRIKES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND SOUTH AFRICA, 1900-1998: A COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary international labour history requires comparisons between countries or regions, instead of purely descriptive or qualitative studies about one single locality. In order to understand why certain labour developments took place it should be asked whether they are the result of local or global developments. In this article we compare the histories of strikes in South Africa and the Netherlands for the period 1900-1998. First, the comparison is made in a qualitative way by giving written histories. Secondly, we compare both countries by calculating a composite index on the basis of official data for South Africa and newly collected data for the Netherlands. The somewhat striking conclusion from both ways of making a comparison is that the histories of strike movements in both countries are more similar than one might expect.

1. Introduction

International labour history nowadays requires comparisons between countries or regions instead of purely descriptive or quantitative studies about a single locality (Van der Linden, 1999). Only broadly based studies make it possible to understand why certain developments have taken place and to determine whether they are the result of local or global developments. The Netherlands and South Africa were chosen for a case study to ascertain the similarities and anomalies in strike tendencies between an industrially developed and a developing country.

When researchers want to compare the propensity to strike in several countries, they tend to use the data collected by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). However, in spite of the recommendations of the ILO, the method of gathering data on strikes is different in almost all countries. Most statistical bureaus confuse strikes and lockouts, others neglect political strikes and, in general, there are no overall standards on the minimum number of strikers that would be taken to constitute a strike.

In order to make valid comparisons between countries one requires access to a database on strikes. The only database on strikes currently available is the one in the Netherlands. This collection of data on almost 15 000 strikes and lockouts can be consulted at http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html. This database is compiled on the basis of official statistics and research in archives, newspapers, union magazines, etc. The most striking difference between the numbers on this website and those in official statistics is that official publications seem to underestimate the incidence of strikes. Official statistics on the history of strikes in South Africa are even more incomplete and inaccurate than those in the Netherlands. The incompleteness of South African national strike statistics collected by the former Department of Manpower, for instance, was revealed by research into strikes in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area, where only 25% of the 142 strikes that were researched in 1990 had been reported to the Department (Finnemore & Van Rensburg 2002:374).

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In order to calculate the influence of strikes on society, it is customary to calculate the number of working days lost due to strikes and relate the outcome to the number of wage-dependent workers. This seems fair enough, but it means that the actual number of strikes and the number of strikers are not taken into account.

What we need in order to make international comparisons is a standard that can be used by anyone. In the year 2000 an index was constructed that can be used for this purpose (Van der Velden 2000; Van der Velden & Doorn 2001). This article compares the histories of labour strikes in the Netherlands and South Africa. The aim is to analyse the similarities and the differences between the two countries.

A brief overview of the history of strikes in both countries is given first, followed by a calculation of the South African and Dutch indices for the period 1900-1998. Apart from the similarity between the language spoken in the Netherlands and that spoken by a part of the South African population, the countries differ in all other respects. However, an analysis of the available data revealed interesting similarities and anomalies regarding strike tendencies in the two countries.

2. Histories of strikes in South Africa and the Netherlands

2.1 South Africa before the First World War

At the time of the industrialisation that accompanied the opening up of the diamond fields in 1867 and the gold fields in 1886, there was no ready source of skilled or unskilled labour to draw on. In order to recruit skilled labour, many employers turned to Europe and Australia to attract employees and paid high wages for skills which were in short supply in South Africa. The white skilled worker thus began his career in a position of elitism and dominance (Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:18; Grossett &Venter 1998:32). However, because of the nature of the deep-level mining necessary and the low average mineral content of the ore, South African minerals could be produced profitably only if production costs could be kept low by creating and containing a vast supply of cheap available labour. Thus the proletarianisation of South Africa's black labour force was initiated (Webster 1978:8-9).

Because the white workers feared the black workers' numerical superiority and saw them as competition in the labour market, the former effectively excluded the latter from opportunities to acquire competitive skills, knowledge and expertise (Wiehahn 1983:168) by introducing labour legislation and other discriminatory practices on the basis of a colour bar in the work place (Doxey 1961). Growing structural insecurity among the white workers and the tendency of trade unions to militantly resist deskilling efforts by the mining industry would in time lead to direct conflict between the unions and capital. Therefore, the first two decades of 20th century South African labour history were characterised by endemic labour unrest and industrial strike action, particularly on the Witwatersrand (Walker & Weinbren 1961), with race forming the underlying base of this militant strike period.

1907

From 1907 onwards the strike weapon was increasingly used in an attempt to prevent the reduction of the white supervisor/black worker ratio and the deskilling of jobs (Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992). This coincided with the realisation by mine capital that unskilled labour and

semi-skilled labour could replace many of the functions performed by skilled white labour. This was largely due to improvements in technology that facilitated the replacement of such labour (Grossett & Venter 1998).

In 1907 a strike broke out on the Witwatersrand goldmines as a result of the productive functions of white miners increasingly being superseded by their supervisory roles. Where skilled white miners had formerly operated a mechanical drill with the help of two black (unskilled) assistants, the employers tried to reduce their task to the supervision of more than two drills operated by black workers. The increased supervisory content of the skilled white miners' functions actually meant that many of their skills and positions were becoming redundant, as they were increasingly being replaced by cheaper, more cost-effective unskilled or semi-skilled black labour. Ironically the strike was eventually broken when many of the striking overseas skilled miners were replaced by strike-breaking unemployed and unskilled white Afrikaner scab labour (Walker & Weinbren 1961:22-24; Lewis 1984:15-16; Davies 1979:67-68, 71).

1913

The high level of militancy attained by white trade unionism was soon demonstrated by the next major strike in 1913, once again on the Witwatersrand goldmines. This strike, the crux of which was management's refusal to hold consultations with the workers or their representatives, began at the Kleinfontein Mine in Benoni on 26 May 1913, subsequently spreading to other mines, and affecting 20 000 strikers. Job fragmentation (deskilling) undoubtedly added to the insecurity of the white workers. The white miners also resented the fact that their grievances of 1907 had not been significantly addressed by 1913. The strike began on a technical question affecting working hours and conditions of employment and wages. The issue quickly escalated into one of recognition of trade unions for the purpose of collective bargaining, which the mining companies refused to do.

After a bloody clash between troops and miners on 5 July resulted in the loss of 21 lives, an agreement was reached which provided for the cessation of strike action, protection of blacklegs (scabs), reinstatement of strikers without their being victimised and the liberty to place grievances before the government, with the assurance that they would be addressed.

1914

The agreements reached in the 1913 strike merely reinstated the *status quo*, paving the way for the 1914 general strike. This strike was touched off by the government's announced intention to lay off railway personnel. It commenced in Pretoria on 12 January 1914 and soon spread to other railway and industrial centres and mines. Martial law was applied, a number of people were arrested and 9 trade unionists even deported. This was regarded as an attempt by the government to break unionism, its success in this subsequently being enhanced by the dismissal of a number of workers and the drawing up of blacklists, which ensured that certain strikers did not obtain employment. Some of these were forced to leave the country (Du Toit 1976:11-12; Yudelman 1983:93-112; Davies 1979:80-81,120-121,123; Walker & Weinbren 1961:32-44,47-58).

The government, which had until this time adopted a completely *laissez-faire* approach to labour relations and had intervened in industrial unrest through the use of martial law and other measures only when security was threatened, realised that certain controls had to be introduced. According

to Bendix, it appears that the government was particularly afraid that the heightened militancy of black African employees would also lead to their increased politicisation. Thus, in essence, it approved of the separatism of white trade unions (Bendix 2001:58).

2.2 The Netherlands before the First World War

Because the Netherlands had no minerals apart from peat and some coal, post-1870 industry consisted mainly of the production of consumer goods (food, textiles, shoes) and luxury goods (diamonds). As an off-shoot of these industries, the metal industry saw its opportunity to develop as well. The Dutch economy as a whole, however, had for centuries depended on agriculture, trade and commerce, and this state of affairs lasted until after the Second World War.

In the nineteenth century the first workers who went on strike consisted of scattered groups of navvies and peat-cutters. These strikes broke out spontaneously and often ended when the police or army took violent action. It was not before the 1870s that craftsmen entered the class struggle and these workers (mainly typographers) were the group that established the first unions. The Amsterdam diamond industry flourished around 1870 after the opening up of the South African diamond fields. Wages rose rapidly and some of the workers were even able to take a taxi-cab to go to the factory. Of course, this situation did not last and the diamond workers went back to being an ordinary group within the working class.

However, some of the characteristics of this group made it highly prone to strike action and to unionisation. This group of workers was concentrated in one city, producing a non-elastic good and requiring training in the main. In 1894 a massive strike broke out and during this strike the workers formed a union. The strike was successful and the union lasted for a long time as an organisation of many thousands of workers under the strict leadership of a handful of directors.

Five years earlier there was a massive strike in the port of Rotterdam. Ten thousand dockworkers fought a ferocious battle with the bosses and the police, which they won. This group was not inclined to form a tight union, however, because the work did not need any training whatsoever. Therefore each worker was easily replaceable and during strikes scabs were even recruited in Germany.

These are the two lines along which the history of the Dutch labour movement developed. On the one hand, there was a group of skilled and semi-skilled, unionised workers in some industries and, on the other hand, a vast group of unskilled proletarians (Heygele 1981). The last group was strike-prone but hard to organise, although the revolutionary Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat (NAS, founded in 1894) organised quite a few of them. The union movement was, moreover, divided along political and religious lines. As a reaction to the growth of the union movement, Protestant ministers and Roman Catholic priests founded their own unions in order to keep their respective flocks free from socialist fallacies.

1903

These two groups clashed in 1903 (Rüter 1935). In January of that year Amsterdam dockers went on strike spontaneously, with the object of achieving a closed shop. In other words, they were striking for a stronger union without the permission of their union. After a few days several railwaymen refused to do scab labour and when the railway board punished them, their colleagues

went on strike too. Although the union leaders tried to stop them, almost all the railwaymen in the Netherlands joined the strike, not only because they wanted to support their comrades, but also because their demands had long been neglected. Within 48 hours they had won a complete victory. Scab labour was no longer obligatory.

The nation was in turmoil. Dozens of strikes broke out, the unions grew in membership and many workers glimpsed a better world in the future. Right-wing politicians, clergymen and the press, on the other hand, feared the strength of the working class. They asked the government to prohibit striking, at least by railwaymen and public servants.

The government acted on their suggestion. First, 25 000 soldiers were enlisted and, secondly, a bill was issued to forbid such strikes. As a result the entire left-wing united and organised a second railway strike. This strike broke out in April, but was a complete failure. In reaction the unions and socialist parties declared a general strike, but this failed as well.

The bill became law, thousands of workers were sacked and the labour movement fell on hard times. Nevertheless 1903 turned out to be a watershed in the development of the unions. Many workers realised that it was necessary to build strong unions and that a spontaneous struggle could not in itself ensure them a better life. Three years after the defeat of the second railway strike a nation-wide union was established, the Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (NVV) (Jong Edz 1956). This organisation followed the principles of the Amsterdam diamond workers and the British union movement. This entailed a strictly hierarchical method of decision-making, paid officials and a strike fund. After all, strikes might be won, but in the long run good negotiators would achieve better results.

On the other hand, many employers also realised that they had much to gain by negotiating with the representatives of their employees. As a result of these two intermingled developments, the number of collective agreements grew rapidly and only the highly conservative employers still refused to recognise the unions. This development did not prevent the unions from taking action and during the economic boom of 1909-1913 the number of strikes grew rapidly. There was much to gain for the workers and they put pressure on the union leaders to negotiate a better future for them. However, when the First World War broke out and the social democrats supported the respective governments in their war efforts, the unions stopped the strikes. The workers were sent back to the workplace.

2.3 South Africa after the First World War

1922

The white labour movement emerged from the 1913-14 strikes still militant and relatively strong. By 1915 the power of the white unions had become so great that the Chamber of Mines decided to give official recognition to the miners' trade union. The war years 1914-18 saw a truce on the labour front. A period of relative stability followed and various agreements were reached between the white unions and the Chamber of Mines, the most significant being the 1918 *Status Quo Agreement,* whereby employers agreed that the ratio of whites to blacks employed would never be less than two whites for every 17 blacks in employment.

However, tensions resurfaced when the gold price began to drop in 1922. Mining capital realised the need to reduce costs and it did so by targeting what it deemed unduly highly paid white labour. It maintained that the cost of white labour had risen by a disproportionate 92%. The total wage bill for the white labourers who held principally supervisory positions was almost double that of their black counterparts, who carried out the work and who constituted some 90% of the workforce. It was therefore proposed that any regulations unfairly restricting the performance and advancement of black labourers be amended so as to incorporate this underutilised resource. This was the background to the scrapping of the 1918 *Status Quo Agreement*. White employees were also informed that wages might have to be cut and that certain marginal mines might close, the result of which would be the retrenchment of about 10% of the white workforce. Old insecurities re-emerged as white mineworkers viewed the announcement as yet another attempt to replace them with cheaper black labour.

In January 1922 some 22 000 white miners went on strike in what became known as the Rand Rebellion. Eventually martial law was proclaimed and the Smuts government sent in the Defence Force, which effectively crushed the general strike. By the end of the strike 153 miners had been killed and 500 wounded; 5 000 strikers had been arrested, of whom 4 were later hanged for treason. The breaking of the strike also resulted in the virtual destruction of the white trade unions' bargaining power. Hundreds of white miners were subsequently laid off. Those who did return had to be satisfied with lower wages and the deskilling of certain jobs (Bendix 2001:59; Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:20; Grossett & Venter 1998:34).

For two reasons the Rand Rebellion was probably the most critical turning point in industrial relations in South Africa. It marked the final parting of the ways for black and white workers, and it produced a "conciliation system" introduced by the Smuts government in the aftermath of the strike through the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act (Nel 1997:48-49). The Act gave the unionised white workers security against undercutting from any quarter, but also helped management because of the obstacles it placed in the way of precipitate strike action. It constrained the right to strike by imposing serious procedural limitations in the form of mandatory conciliation and mediation preceding the strike. The new Pact government of the Nationalist and Labour Parties was able to wean white labour away from industrial action by promoting a policy of job reservation in skilled trades. The introduction of the Mines and Works Amendment Act of 1926 effectively neutralised the opposition put up by skilled white miners. The law protected skilled and semi-skilled white workers by reserving certificates of competency in skilled trades for white and Coloured people and by excluding blacks and Asians from qualifying for them (Grossett & Venter 1998:35; Johnstone 1976:150,156,166-167; Liebenberg & Spies 1993:180-182; Davenport 1987:287,531-534).

These acts effectively led to the incorporation, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of white unions within state structures, thus eliminating them as a potentially militant political threat (Davies 1979:179-181,195-198,231). In short, organised white labour was subjugated and pacified by being formally coopted into the structures of the state (Yudelman 1983:9,114-115,186,208-211,221-233). Furthermore, the exclusion of pass-bearing blacks from the definition of employees excluded them from the provisions of these acts and thus began a dual system of industrial relations in South Africa, with the white workers increasingly drawn into a protected position in the capitalist system, while black workers remained excluded from political and economic power (Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:21).

2.4 The Netherlands after the First World War

The Netherlands did not take part in the Great War, but being a trading nation the Dutch nevertheless felt the consequences of the war. At first the Netherlands benefited from their neutrality. 1916 was a peak year, but then the economy was cut off from international trade. In 1917 many people suffered from a famine and strikes and riots broke out.

One of the noteworthy strikes during the war years took place in the coal mines. Digging coal had only recently become a large-scale enterprise in the Netherlands and the biggest company was state owned. The state took greater care to improve labour conditions in the Netherlands than was the case in the surrounding countries. In those countries life in the mining districts was hard and strikes were endemic. As a result of the better conditions and the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the unions, strikes were rare in the Netherlands. In 1917 the socialist union nevertheless managed to organise a strike in response to pressure from the rank and file, because conditions had deteriorated as a result of the war. In June some 14 000 miners went on strike for a minimum wage. This happened in spite of the remark by the Catholic foreman Poels, "Er zal niet gestaakt worden als ik 't niet wil; ik wil 't niet en dus wordt er niet gestaakt" (Kreukels 1986:233). The mining companies were not willing to give in and after ten days the workers resumed work.

This general strike was unique in the history of Dutch mining. Dutch miners showed a low propensity to strike and they were an exception to the international rule that miners are very strike-prone (Kerr & Siegel 1954:190-212; Van Zyl 1986:261).

The 1917 strike broke out in the Netherlands was contemporaneous with the Russian and German revolutions. In November 1918 the leader of the socialist party, Troelstra, declared a revolution in the Netherlands. The mayor of Rotterdam even wanted to negotiate with the revolutionaries, but it soon became apparent that the conservative powers were far stronger than the revolutionaries. The revolution ended in disarray, but government and employers understood that they had to give in on many demands. Wages were raised, working time was legally reduced to eight hours a day and universal suffrage finally declared.

1920

The last offensive strike during the period of post-war rebellion took place in 1920. In February the socialist unions declared a strike for 17 000 Amsterdam and Rotterdam dockers and seamen (Harmsen & Gelder 1986:113-118). They demanded a wage increase and the implementation of the eight-hour day.

There was dissension among the workers. The Protestant union refused to participate, the Roman Catholic union confined itself to a promise not to blackleg and the socialist unions were divided. The revolutionary NAS tried to extend the strike to other professions through solidarity strikes, but the social-democratic NVV vehemently warned the unions against this kind of action. The defeat of 1903 was still fresh in their memory.

After ten weeks the unions decided to go back to work and the strike failed. This failure marks the end of an era in which workers were able to win many battles. The economy was still

booming, but signs of the coming recession could already be seen. The balance of power shifted to the employers.

1921

The tables had turned and now the workers were on the defensive. Not only was there a downturn in the trade cycle, but economic developments were accompanied by a similar decline in the world revolutionary movement. In this atmosphere the Dutch employers launched an attack. The benefits the workers had gained were threatened. The steady growth of unemployment made it all the easier for employers to make their move.

In October 1921 the metal industry gave notice of a ten percent reduction in wages (Harmsen & Reinalda 1975:140). All four unions advised their members not to accept this reduction and they even went so far as to be willing to support non-members during a possible strike. On 31 October the strike broke out and 15 000 workers downed tools, with a few thousand more joining them later. After futile negotiations and mediation efforts by the mayors of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, a referendum was held. Only the organised socialist workers and the unorganised workers were willing to continue with the strike; the denominational workers wanted to stop. Because of this dissension the strike went wrong and the workers resumed work on 9 January 1922.

After this second defeat in two years the union movement renounced the use of strikes as a means of bargaining. An increasing number of the strikes that took place after 1921 was spontaneous and the unions increasingly tried to reach a better understanding with the employers. Only in those cases where the capitalists refused to acknowledge the unions was there sustained tension. This was the case in the Twente textile industry. In both 1923 and 1931 the textile barons announced a ten percent wage cut. Because of the lockout of 22 000 workers, the first conflict grew until there was an unprecedented loss of working days. The second conflict lasted 20 weeks and also ended in defeat.

Apart from sporadic but occasionally grim strikes, the twenties and thirties did not see much strike activity. This was also due to intervention by the state. From 1924 onwards state mediators were appointed, whose job it was to mediate during strikes involving more than fifty workers. In their annual reports they proudly gave an account of the strikes they had prevented or brought to a rapid conclusion (Verslag 1924-1939).

1943

In 1940 the German army overran the Netherlands and this was the beginning of an occupation that was to last for five years. One of the first measures the Nazis took was the prohibition of strikes. Consequently, almost no strikes occurred during the German occupation.

Apart from a few other small strikes, it was only in 1941, 1943 and 1944 that strikes broke out. In February 1941 about 50 000 workers in the Amsterdam region struck in protest against the racist policies of the German oppressor. Jews were legally forced out of certain occupations and were also forced to carry a Star of David. These measures, comparable to the situation that black South Africans had to face in the apartheid years, induced their fellow Dutch citizens to declare a two-day strike, during which 27 workers were killed.

Two years later the Germans announced that the former Dutch soldiers would be sent to Germany as slave labour. A spontaneous strike broke out in which 200 000 workers participated. The Nazis again reacted with brutal force and dozens of workers were murdered.

The last strike under Nazi occupation occurred in 1944, when the Dutch government in exile summoned the railwaymen to go on strike. This strike was supposed to support the Allied war effort, but in effect it was one of the causes of a famine. This famine during the winter of 1944-1945 cost the lives of some 15 000 men, women and children in the big cities.

After the defeat of the Nazis many people hoped for a new world - a society without the shortcomings of the pre-war society, but one in which the workers would be treated as full citizens. It soon turned out, however, that the conservative forces were not yet willing to give up their dominion.

2.5 South Africa after the Second World War

1946

From the late 1920s onwards black males began to be employed in increasing numbers in South Africa's rapidly growing industries. Consequently several black industrial unions sprung up, initiated *inter alia* by members of the South African Communist Party (Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:21). Although it was extraordinarily difficult to organise black mineworkers in view of the Chamber of Mines' refusal to recognise black unions, these workers succeeded in founding the rapidly growing African Mineworkers Union (AMWU) in 1941. During the war years their wages were inadequate. Conditions worsened in 1945 when post-war food shortages contributed to a decline in the quality of mine rations. AMWU drew up a list of demands to present to the Chamber of Mines. These included unhindered organisation of workers on the mines, family housing instead of the compound system, two weeks' paid leave every year, and a minimum daily wage of 10 shillings.

In August 1946 the workers decided at a mass meeting that in the light of what they considered the intransigent attitude of the Chamber of Mines, they had no alternative but to embark on a general strike. Approximately 70 000 workers out of a force of 308 000 went on strike. Although this represented only 22% of the total number of workers, it was nevertheless at that time the largest industrial strike to have taken place in South Africa. After five days, however, the police forcibly squashed the strike, leaving 12 workers dead and 1 200 injured. Although the strike raised awareness among the workers, it failed to achieve any of its aims and AMWU had to retreat in disarray. The strike nevertheless demonstrated the possibilities of mobilising workers on the mines against the cheap labour system. It also had the effect of pushing the Youth League of the ANC, which had followed the strike closely, into a more militant position (Liebenberg&Spies, 1993:312-213).

1961

Although there was no official strike organised by any section of the South African labour movement in 1961, there was a call by anti-apartheid organisations such as the ANC for stay-aways from work, boycotts and a general strike between 29 and 31 May 1961 in protest against the inauguration of the Republic of South Africa. However, the strike had an uneven effect and

because of the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) and the declaration of the ANC and PAC as illegal organisations in 1960, many black political and labour leaders had been either detained or exiled. The result was that the 1960s were relatively free of industrial conflict (Davenport 1987:396,402; Grossett & Venter 1998:37).

2.6 The Netherlands after the Second World War

1946

Europe emerged from the Second World War in a state of devastation. This also applied to the Netherlands and therefore one of the first tasks of the new government was the rebuilding of society. The social democrats participated in the 1945 administration. This was the first time that socialists had participated in any Dutch government, but the representatives of the working class were not in a position to do anything about inequality at that time. On the contrary, they were forced to ask the workers to be patient. Wages were to be frozen for more than a decade and the unions supported this government policy.

Many workers were not willing to wait. They formed a new radical union, the Eenheids Vak Centrale (EVC), since the former NAS had not been revived after the war. This union, however, was soon strongly influenced by the Communist Party and therefore lost a lot of sympathy. Workers also embarked upon many bitter strikes. They were sometimes supported by the EVC, but since this union sought recognition from the government, the EVC was very careful. A wave of wildcat strikes swept the country. Especially the dockers in Rotterdam went on strike several times.

In March 1946 a strike broke out in protest against the importing of oranges from Spain. The protest was directed against Spain because together with Portugal, this country was one of the two remaining fascist regimes in Europe. The social-democratic union NVV strongly opposed this strike, which failed within a week. A month later the NVV also opposed the seamen. The dockworkers went on strike in support of the striking seamen. In Amsterdam and especially in Rotterdam 10 000 dockers left the ships. The EVC was not happy about the strike, because this endangered the possible participation of the communists in the government. The workers were left out on a limb and after two months they resumed work.

Meanwhile the country was recovering from the war. This recovery was supported by aid from the US Marshall Plan. Billions of guilders were injected into the Dutch economy to fight the communist threat and to create a market for the American economy. The mistakes of the post-World War I period were not to be repeated!

Because of the growth of the economy, foreign aid and massive anti-communist propaganda the workers adopted a less militant stance. The unions were too busy holding conferences with one another, with politicians and with employers to realise that they were losing contact with their members. The only union that might have stood up for the interests of the working class was the architect of its own downfall because the communists in the EVC alienated many of the rank and file members.

During the early fifties strikes as a phenomenon just about died out. This caused many politicians and social scientists to declare the end of the class struggle. But as usual history silenced them.

1960-1963

In the mid-fifties there were too many workers in the Dutch labour market. To reduce their numbers the government supported the emigration of thousands of workers to Canada, Australia and South Africa. In the latter country most of these workers were absorbed into the white labour aristocracy.

During the fifties, which was a period of economic growth, the situation changed. Now there was a shortage of labour. Workers were therefore imported from Mediterranean low-wage countries in Europe and from northern Africa. This, however, was not enough to solve the problem. Under free market conditions more workers migrate to the country where labour is scarce. Otherwise wages would rise. Because the system was very rigid, neither of these scenarios came true. There was no free movement of labour and wages were determined by the state.

The workers, on the other hand, saw their chance. There were massive waves of wildcat strikes in 1956, 1960 and 1963. When 25 000 workers took part in the 1963 strikes the government's resistance broke. The system of a planned wage policy collapsed and after 1963 wages increased enormously.

1970-1972

Whatever the differences between the Western countries may have been, they had one thing in common. The workers continued their offensive. In 1968 ten million French workers went out on strike and occupied their companies. A year later Italy and Germany followed suit. In 1970 it was the turn of the Netherlands.

At the end of the summer 20 000 metal workers in the Rotterdam area struck for higher wages. After three days almost 20 000 dockers from Amsterdam and other areas, mainly Rotterdam, joined them. Because the unions did not support the strikers, they were seen as ranking among the enemies of the workers. A pamphlet by the strike committee, *'Arbeidersmacht Rotterdamse Haven'*, said: "De bonden steunen ons niet. De bonden steunen de direktie. De bonden vechten tegen ons. DE BONDEN ZIJN ONZE VIJANDEN" (NN 1971:70).

Whereas the metal workers won a victory after a week, the dockers had to fight on. It cost them three weeks, but then they also attained their goal. It was agreed that wages would rise further.

These strikes unleashed a wave of strike action that swept the country. Almost all these strikes started spontaneously and they caused the unions to radicalise. The leaders of the labour unions came to the realisation that they could not do without the support of their members. In the 25 years since the end of the war these leaders had completely lost contact with their material basis. In the view of many ordinary members they did no more than wine and dine with politicians and managers. The wildcat strikes of 1970 and before forced the leaders to listen to their rank and file membership. When the government announced that wages would be frozen, the unions organised a one-hour protest strike once more. This took place on December 15th and one million workers participated in it. However, the strike was in vain.

As a result, the NVV organised a strike by 30 000 construction workers in 1971. The next year saw a strike by some 30 000 metal workers. They again fought for higher wages. Officially this was a wildcat strike, but this time the unions supported the strikers. Because a judge forbade the unions to support the strike action, they did so in secret.

As a result of the strikes of 1972 the unions regained a lot of the support they had enjoyed among the Dutch workers. But in these years the economic recession militated against radicalism. The phase of offensive strike action had come to an end and from now on most strikes would be defensive.

2.7 South Africa and the final phase of apartheid

1973

The mass strikes in Durban in 1973 can be regarded as a watershed event in the history of the black labour movement that also heralded the renaissance of black trade union organisation in South Africa (Van Niekerk 1988:154). These widespread strikes over low wages, mounting unemployment and poverty, involved an estimated 60 000 to 100 000 black employees. The strikes, which involved workers from the brick, textile, chemical, rubber, iron, steel and electrical services industries, as well as municipal services employees, erupted in Durban and spread to surrounding industrial centres. Industry was brought to a near standstill. The strikers made no fixed demands, but the actions were indicative of general dissatisfaction among black employees. For the first time the real power of black workers was demonstrated. The strikes proved that even without the backing of any formal organisation worker action was able to bring pressure to bear on a labour issue and also that it was necessary to accommodate workers' interests within the industrial relations system (Macshane 1984:16-17,20-23; Luckhardt & Wall 1980:447-453; Friedman 1987:37-40,46-47; Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:24; Grossett & Venter 1998:37).

The institutionalised racial separatism entrenched in labour structures and the 1973 strike waves prepared the ground for the unprecedented growth of a new brand of trade unionism in the history of the South African labour movement. The work stoppages signalled the evolution of a profound consciousness of power among the black working masses (Ncube 1985:114,143).

1976

As was the case in 1961, the stay-aways, strikes and boycotts in 1976 were inspired by political rather than labour grievances. By 1976 it had become obvious that the government had not solved the problem of black worker militancy. Pressured by the political consequences of the Soweto student uprisings of that year, combined with the threat of sanctions and disinvestment, in 1977 the government appointed a commission of enquiry into labour legislation, commonly known as the Wiehahn Commission. The most notable recommendations that the government accepted and implemented included the registration of black trade unions and the abolition of statutory job reservation. The interests of black employees were being given prominence. Trade union growth coincided with the mushrooming of protest movements. Hence trade unions, as the major representatives of the black working class, increasingly found themselves in a politically prominent position (Macshane 1984:55-56; Wiehahn 1983:186-189; Bendix 2001:74-76).

1987

Strikes of substantial magnitude in 1987 were preceded by an intensification of the anti-apartheid movement's struggle for political freedom. Black worker organisations, which continued to grow rapidly, became increasingly politicised as they rejected South Africa's political *status quo*. Strikes had increased since the early 1980s. As the black union movement was now the only form of opposition that was offered some recognition by the Labour Relations Act of 1956, it was at the forefront of vociferous opposition to the government's political policies. It supported the political struggle and calls for sanctions, boycotts, stay-aways, recognition of public holidays such as June 16 and Soweto Day, and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.

In September 1984 large-scale disturbances erupted in the black townships of the industrial complexes surrounding Johannesburg. The economic recession of the middle eighties, the ANC's intention to make the country ungovernable and dissatisfaction with the constitution of 1983 that excluded blacks from South Africa's political dispensation were among the issues responsible for the political and economic discontent. In June 1986 a general state of emergency was declared in anticipation of demonstrations against the government on the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. Approximately 2700 unionists, including officials and members, were detained (Finnemore & Van Rensburg 2002:31; Liebenberg & Spies 1993:498-499; Grossett & Venter 1998:40).

The unions emerging in the 1980s displayed the militancy to be expected of a new movement and particularly of one attempting to establish itself in an entrenched system. Working in close cooperation with shop stewards, they took up every issue affecting their members. Strike frequency increased from 101 strikes in 1979 to 1148 in 1987 (Oberholzer 1992:152). The greatest number of workdays lost occurred in 1987, when almost 6 million workdays were lost due to a long and massive strike in the mining industry. Nine people were killed and 500 injured. Workers in the public sector also began to mobilise. Their unions, which fell under the COSATU banner, were strongly resisted by government, which favoured their own in-house unions, whose leaders were coopted by management. In 1987 a strike by 18 000 employees in the South African Transport Services, initially triggered by the dismissal of an individual employee, escalated into a massive confrontation between the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU) and the state. As gains were made by unions in the private sector, so workers in the public sector perceived their deprivation more keenly. The strike was triggered by the dismissal of an employee following a cash irregularity. Disciplinary action was taken only five months after the irregularity had occurred and workers perceived management's action to be grossly unfair.

The issues proliferated rapidly beyond the reinstatement of the dismissed employee to the inclusion of payment for wages lost during the strike, the removal of racial discrimination in management practices and ultimately the recognition of SARHWU. The incident of dismissal was used by SARHWU to mobilise the workers against management and confront the state over its suppression of black trade unions. In response management initiated Operation Telbord, a strategy to crush the strike with the help of the police and the Defence Force. Confrontations escalated, workers were shot and protest marches were initiated in response. Altogether 11 workers lost their lives and several unionists were subsequently charged with the murder of four railway employees, who had not supported the strike (Finnemore & Van Rensburg 2002:33,374,376,378).

1997

Workdays lost due to strikes remained high in the volatile decade of worker militancy prior to the national democratic elections in 1994. In the years immediately after the election, there was a decline in strike activity, largely due to the decline in activity in the mining and manufacturing sectors. However, wage disputes in the public and private sectors, such as the health, police and municipal services and the fishing and transport industries, led to a renewed spate of strikes from 1996 to 1999 (Finnemore & Van Rensburg 2002:374; Bendix 2001:83).

2.8 The Netherlands at the end of the 20th century

1973

In the sixties and early seventies the workers had won several victories. Wages had risen substantially, working hours had diminished and it was commonly accepted that workers should have a say in the management of a company. This power in the hands of the working class however, contained the seeds of its own downfall. From 1967 onwards wholesale dismissals were frequently headline news in the newspapers. Whole industries disappeared from the Netherlands to low wage-countries, mainly in Asia.

1973 is the year regarded by most economists as the beginning of a deep recession - an economic crisis that the apologists of capitalism had believed would never happen again. But still it happened. Unemployment rose to a pre-war level and the companies started their attack on the wage level. The unions were still partially committed to official negotiations with the bosses. The realisation of their dependence on the ordinary members, however, made the leaders responsive to workers' demands.

When wages were threatened in 1973, the unions organised a massive strike; at one time over 80 000 workers had joined the strike. After more than a month the unions and employers reached an agreement in what has come to be known as the Easter truce. During the Easter weekend the strikers were told on national television that they were supposed to go back to work the following Tuesday. No mass meetings, no consultation. The leaders decided that their members had to obey and that was final.

This attitude persisted during the seventies, although the leadership had promised not to ignore the rank and file any longer. On many occasions it even looked as if the unions were really acting in accordance with the demands of the ordinary workers. For example, several occupations of factory premises took place. In reaction to the many closures of factories the workers often occupied the premises of the company. In most cases the unions supported the workers or even initiated the occupation.

1979

The reaction from the union leaders was quite different when the workers demanded higher wages at the end of the decade. After several years of wage cuts some groups of industrial workers and the dockers of Rotterdam wanted another raise. Wildcat strikes broke out in 1979 and once again the unions felt that their grip on the workers had slipped (Homma & Hoeksema 1979). After the dock strike in Rotterdam angry union members condemned the leaders for "class treason in the

first degree". Their decision, however, was overruled by the higher echelons in the trade union organisation. It was nevertheless clear that something should be done.

In 1980, therefore, the union leaders therefore played the same trick as in the early seventies by simulating radicalism. This radicalism was also furthered by the government's policy of curtailing the power of the unions. Thus the right of existence of the unions was endangered from two sides. Members were dissatisfied with the unions' actions and the state also tried to minimise union influence.

The NVV, which was engaged in a process of fusion with the Roman Catholic union, called for a strike against a forthcoming moratorium on wage increases. Some 100 000 workers supported the strike. Two years later the same NVV (now Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, FNV) signed a contract with the employers. The unions would stop asking for higher wages and the employers would try to create more jobs. The willingness of the unions to make this concession in exchange for nothing more than a promise can be explained by looking at the prevailing economic situation. Since the seventies many industries had disappeared from the Netherlands and unemployment was very high.

The contract did not prevent the unions from taking action in other respects. In this regard we refer to the 1984 strike against the positioning of US cruise missiles on Dutch territory. It is estimated that 200 000 people took part in this 15-minute strike.

1991

In this year the government came up with a plan to reduce the benefits of an allowance for the mentally or physically disabled as stipulated by law. This plan was presented by a former chairman of the FNV, who rose to prominence. In solidarity with their fellow citizens some 500 000 workers agitated against the plan, but in vain.

The nineties saw some more big strikes against government policy. They were mostly directed against the neo-classical ideology of privatisation and a retreating state. Public health and education were the two professions that suffered most from this. In reaction teachers and nurses struck several times in those years, as did railwaymen and other workers in public transport. All these strikers had to force their union leaders to act on their behalf and groups of workers even founded new unions because they were dissatisfied.

2.9 South Africa and the Netherlands compared

In the preceding overviews of the most prominent strike movements in South Africa and the Netherlands it is obvious that there have been many differences between the two countries. One of the most salient differences is the number of workers killed during strikes.

But there are many similarities as well. Both countries saw an upsurge of strikes immediately after the two world wars and also during the seventies. Especially the year 1973 is astonishing. In both histories a conflict of interests between the skilled and unskilled or semi-skilled workers is apparent. In the mid-twenties the governments of both countries made an effort to become involved in labour relations.

These patterns are not peculiar to these two countries, however. In an overview of the strike movements in 16 countries (the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Austria, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) the same pattern was discovered (Van der Velden 2000:280). From this it might perhaps be concluded that the influence of international capitalism on developments in individual countries outweighs that of national patterns.

In order to make a quantitative comparison we need to consider some statistics.

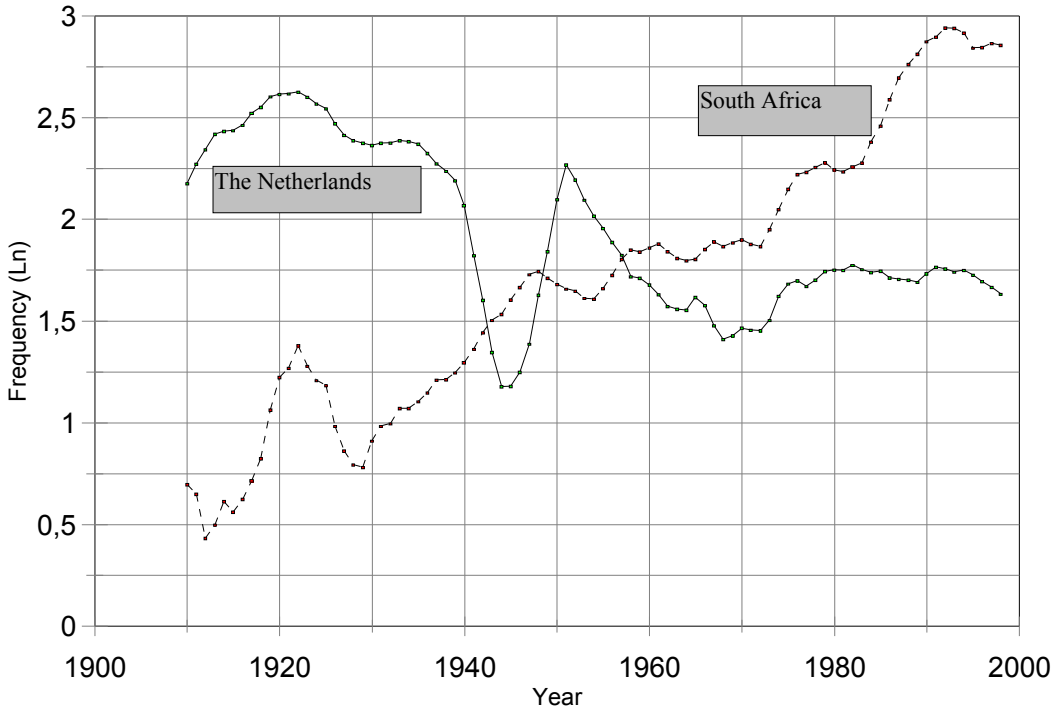
3. The measurement of strikes

3.1 Frequency

The number of strikes (frequency, N) is one of the indicators of strike activity. Graph 1 indicates a comparison between the frequencies in the Netherlands and South Africa during the period 1900-1998. In the South African historical series some years are missing. For these years dummy variables were calculated by taking the average of the preceding and following year. The missing years are 1908-1909, 1925 and 1940-1941.

In order to make the two lines easier to compare, the numbers have been log-transformed, to prevent outliers from distorting the overall picture. In addition, the two series are shown as a trend by calculating a moving average.

Graph 1. The frequency of strikes in the Netherlands and South Africa (log-transformed and 5-year moving average), 1906-1998



Source 1. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html; Oberholzer(1992); ILO

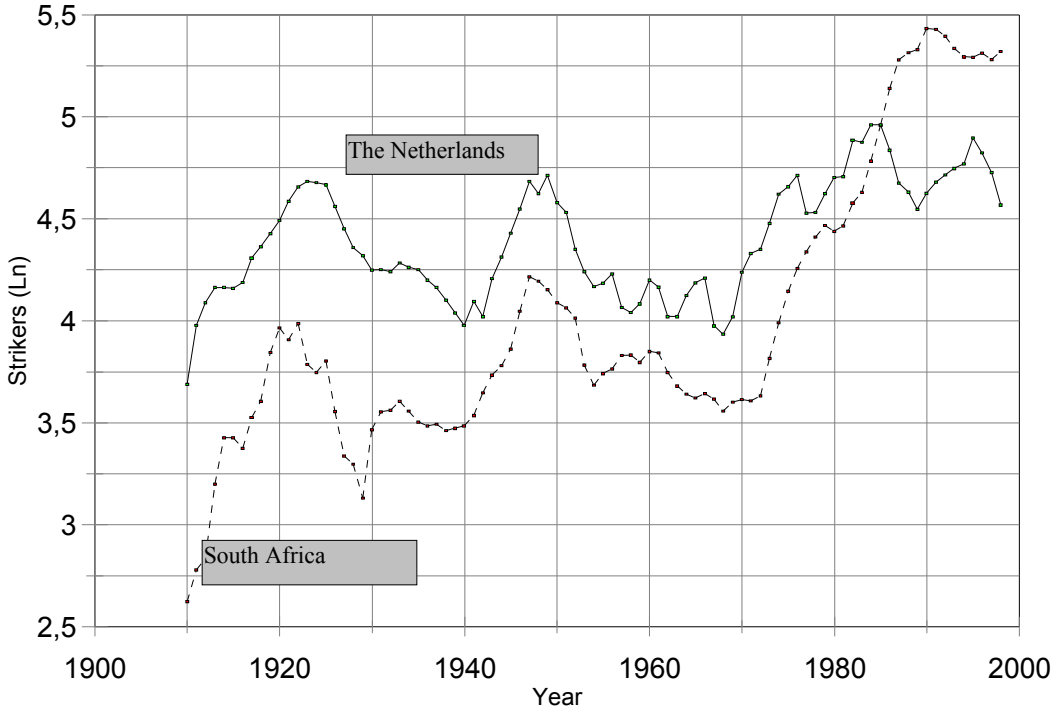
Graph 1 is a quantitative representation of the qualitative histories of both national strike movements as presented in the foregoing paragraphs. The Dutch trend clearly coincided with the South African trend until the late twenties. As is evident, the two lines cross one another in the forties and fifties. After this period the number of strikes becomes relatively stable in the Netherlands. In South Africa, however, the number shot up dramatically, mainly as a result of the awakening of the black labour movement and the legalisation of black trade union structures.

A brief explanation of the racial division of the data on strikes should also be offered. In this article South African workers are treated as a class - a divided class, but one class nevertheless. The dissension among the South African working class runs along some arbitrary racial lines. These lines were also translated into economic lines by the legal exclusion of blacks from certain professions. This turned white workers into a labour aristocracy, such as the Dutch labour aristocracy of better-paid foremen. This is not to say, of course, that we do not understand that the South African situation was morally and emotionally more inhuman than the Dutch situation.

Frequency is just one indicator and, in our opinion, one of the less important indicators of strike activity. The smallest strike that occurred in the Netherlands involved only two workers, while the largest one took place on 15 December 1970 and involved one million workers. Both strikes are weighted evenly in simple statistics. The number of strikes, however, cannot in itself lead to any valuable conclusions.
Another important indicator of strike activity is the number of strikers (intensity, S).

3.2 *Intensity*

Graph 2. The number of strikers in the Netherlands and South Africa (log-transformed 7-year moving average), 1910-1998



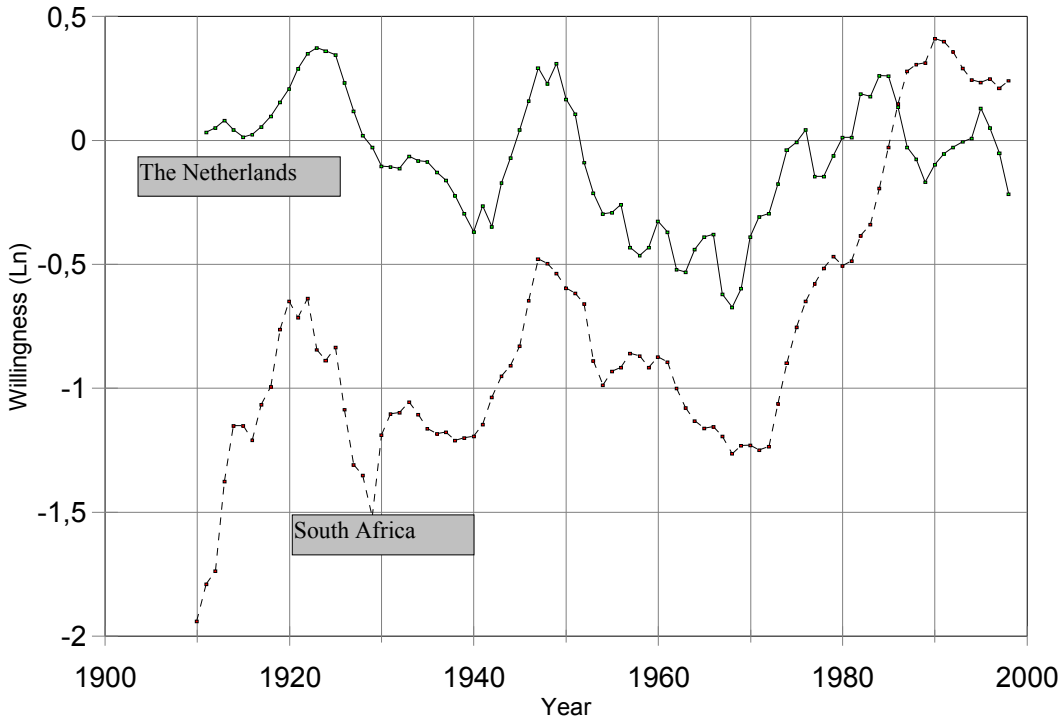
Source 2. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html; Oberholzer (1992); ILO

Graph 2 shows us that in both countries the number of strikers has increased over time. Again, we log-transformed and trended the data in order to avoid outliers that would distort the picture. The two lines follow roughly the same pattern until the late 1980s. During the climax of the anti-apartheid struggle South African strikers outnumbered the Dutch. Of course, the bare numbers of strikers should be related to the number of workers (W). We can do this by calculating the willingness to strike.

(S/W) *100

Willingness to strike is presented in graph 3.

Graph 3. Willingness to strike in South Africa and the Netherlands (log-transformed 7- year moving average, 1910-1998)



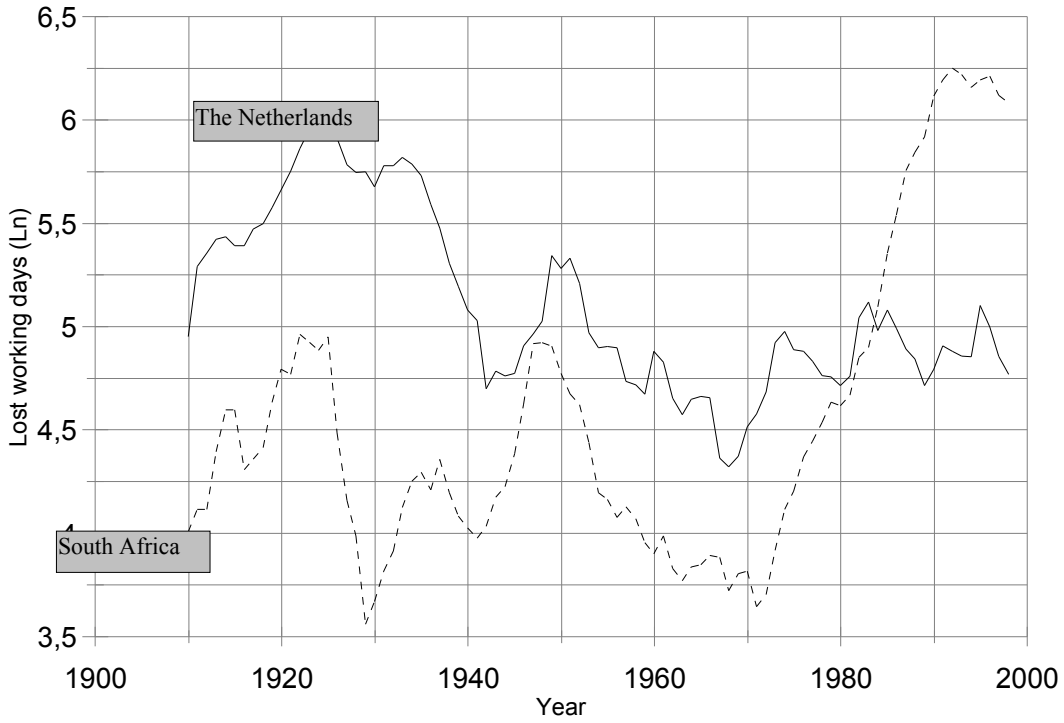
Source 3. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html ; Oberholzer (1992); ILO

The lines of the Netherlands and South Africa still look the same. The Dutch development seems to have flattened, however, while in South Africa the growth is sustained. When we look at the original figures, this impression for the Netherlands does not appear to be accurate. Except for 1903 and 1943, the strike-proneness (S/W) of Dutch workers was highest during the last three decades of the twentieth century. The figures show in fact that for the period 1911-1930 the average number of strikers was equivalent to 1.5% of the total dependent labour force; the corresponding figure for 1976-1995 was 2%.

3.3 *Duration*

When workers go on strike, they cause a number of working days' production to be lost. Or, from the workers' point of view, they cause the loss of a day's earnings, or, seen in yet another light, an increase in the number of days on which they can enjoy freedom from wage slavery. The following graph illustrates the annual number of working days lost through strikes (Duration, D). The 1944 railway strike in the Netherlands is omitted because of its magnitude and special character.

Graph 4. Working days lost through strikes (log-transformed 7-year moving average), 1910-1998



Source 4. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html; Oberholzer (1992); ILO

Graph 4 indicates the impact of strikes on the Dutch and South African economies, and this impact appears to have diminished in the Netherlands and to have grown in South Africa. However, it should not be forgotten that occupations of company premises and factories are included in the Dutch numbers even though they do not lead to lost working days. Besides this, the number of working days lost through strikes is only one part of the story and some remarks need to be made on this issue.

First of all, the effect of a strike is not easily measured. For example, Dutch dockworkers who go on strike cause serious problems for the paper industry, because in the Netherlands paper mills are dependent on imported raw materials. In order to reflect this problem, the official statistics give the number of workers who are out of work due to a strike, but in most cases this calculation is restricted to the company where the strike occurred. When Ford workers in the UK went on strike in 1978, 1 200 workers at the Ford plant in Amsterdam were sent home. They were unable to work for almost two months, but these lost working days are included in neither the Dutch nor the UK statistics. Moreover, it would be better to express the costs of a strike in monetary terms, since the value of a working hour in one economic sector is not necessarily the same as that in another sector (Perrone 1984). We find figures of this nature in South African statistics, but in the Netherlands they are not included.

Secondly, the social and economic impact of a strike cannot be measured. In a highly centralised economy a rise in wages resulting from a strike in one sector might be quickly followed by rises in other sectors. Dustmen going on strike might even endanger public health. The impact of a strike on society is multi-faceted.

Thirdly, the number of working days lost under the condition of freedom to strike is largely a function of employer behaviour. The more eager employers are to resume production quickly, the more prepared they might be to give in to strikers' demands. As a result fewer working days will be lost. Research on Dutch strikes has shown that in the period 1970-2000, when strikes were shorter than in earlier years, over 70% of all strikes ended either in victory for the strikers or in a compromise. The corresponding figure for all other years was less than 60%, which supports the idea that lengthy strikes are often to the detriment of strikers. In other words, a high number of working days lost might indicate a strong working class, but it might also reflect the strength of capital.

Duration is, just like frequency and intensity, merely one indicator of strike activity and not in itself the most decisive. It is surprising therefore that the number of days lost as a proportion of the labour volume is often taken as the standard measure of strike activity. In what follows we will try to construct a more sensitive index of strike activity based on the four indicators we have just examined: frequency, number of companies affected, intensity and duration.

4. Composite indices[‡]

As far back as 1944 Spielmans suggested using rectangles. One side would represent the number of strikers (S) and the other side the number of working days lost per striker (D/S). The surface of the rectangle, or S(D/S), = D. So in a roundabout way Spielmans used D as a standard.

Before looking at more sophisticated ways of combining the indicators of strike activity, we shall examine the easiest way. This is the unweighted average of the indicators[§] in any given year (t) compared with the average of all years ($\sum X/n$), in the equation:

$$I = (N_t /(\sum N/n) + S_t / (\sum S/n) + D_t /(\sum D/n)) \text{ X } 100$$

where

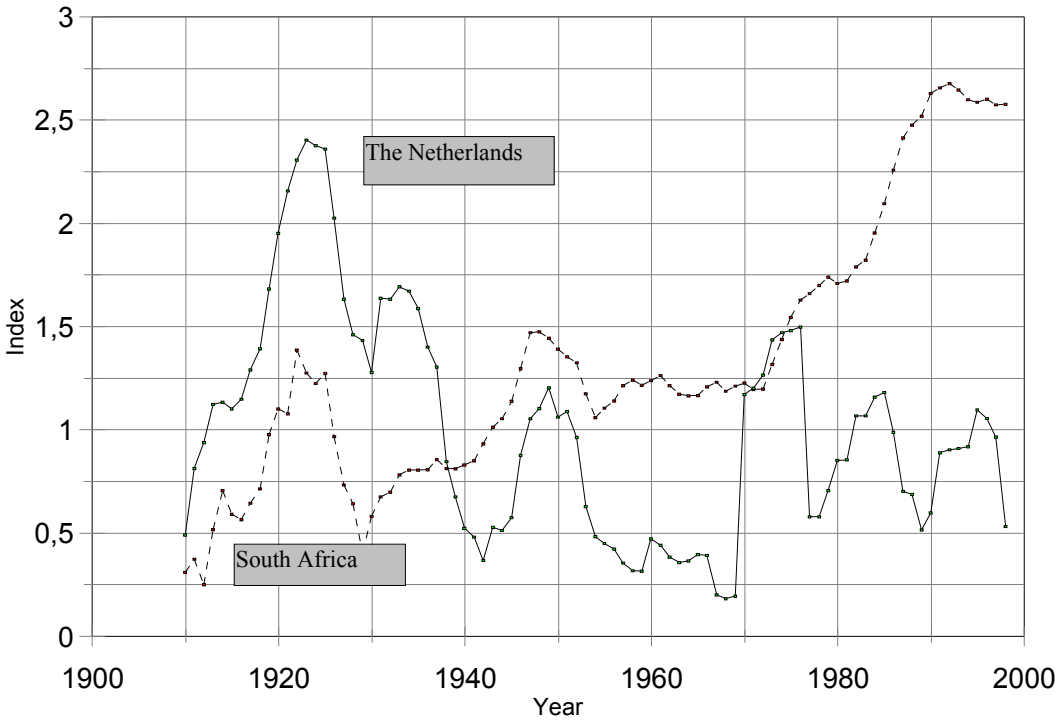
I = Index of strike activity (frequency)
N= Number of strikes (intensity)
S= Number of strikers (duration)
D= Number of workings days lost due to strikes
$\sum$= Total of all values of a specific indicator
n = Number of years for which data are available

[‡] The historiography of attempts to construct a composite index is taken from Kooten (1988).

[§] We abandoned the idea of using the number of companies (C) as an indicator, because we do not possess the data for South Africa.

Graph 5 is constructed from data using this equation.

Graph 5. Strike index as an unweighted average of three indicators, 1910-1998



Source 5. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html; Oberholzer (1992); ILO

There are two problems with constructing an index in this way. First, changes in the size of the working class need to be taken into account when comparing the level of strike activity over such a long period. A second, and perhaps more serious, problem is that the three indicators are each given the same weight, while it is clear that socio-historical research should put people first.

It was Galambos and Evans (1966:33-55) who partly solved the first problem by including the total dependent labour force (W) in an index, as follows:[**]

$I = (N_t/N_b + (S_t/S_b + D_t/D_b)/(W_t/W_b)) \text{ X } 100/3$

N = Number of strikes (frequency)
S = Number of strikers (intensity)
D = Number of working days lost due to strikes (duration)
W = Total dependent labour force
t = year

[**] We have amended their notation slightly to make the equation comparable with the others used in this article. In order to make I=100 if $_t=_b$, the outcome is multiplied by 100 and divided by 3.

b = base year

In the same issue of the *Bulletin* of the Oxford University Institute of Economics and Statistics, Knowles criticised this equation because it fails to relate the frequency to the number of workers (W). A more serious problem is that the results of the calculation are dependent on the chosen base year. We calculated the Galambos-Evans index for the Netherlands alternatively using 1920 and 1970 as the base year. The results were quite different. When using 1920 the year 1970 peaked and the reverse is also true.

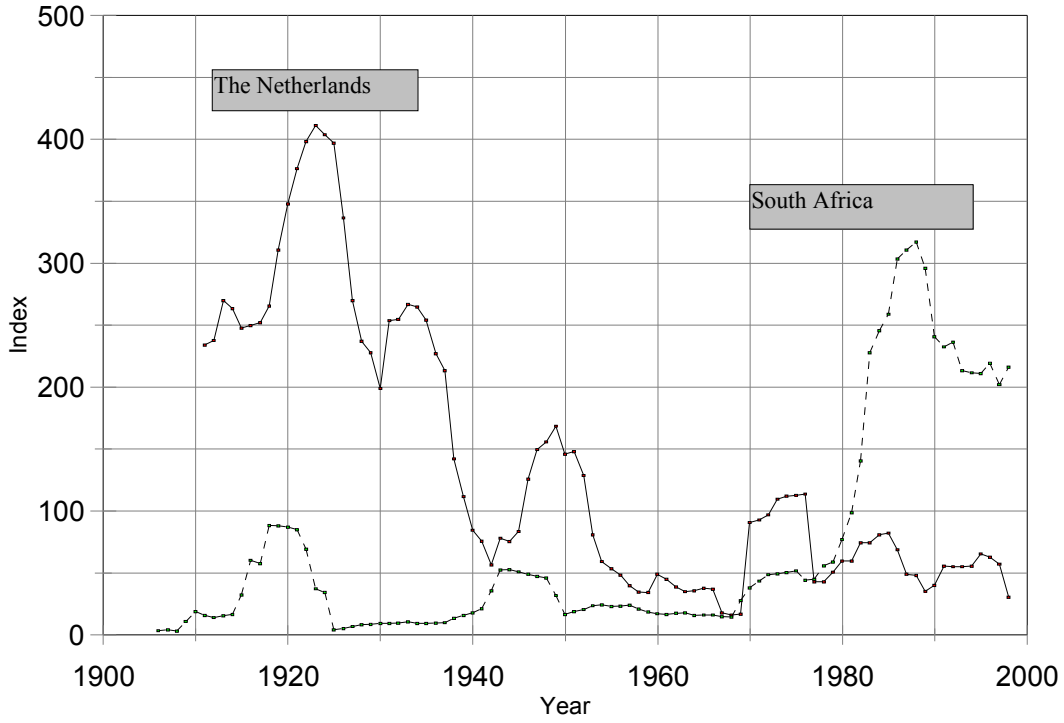
This implies that the Galambos-Evans index does not offer a valid way of calculating an index, because the results are dependent on the base year adopted. We nevertheless show their attempt in order to arrive at a more logical method of calculating a strike index.

Gerrit van Kooten addressed Knowles's criticism of the Galambos-Evans Index by also dividing the frequency (N) by the workforce (W):

$$I = ((N_t/N_b + S_t/S_b + D_t/D_b)/(W_t/W_b)) \text{ X } 100/3$$

Using the Van Kooten index solves the Knowles problem. However, the problem of base-year dependence still exists. We will address this problem by using the annual average for the whole period as the base in Van Kooten's equation. This adjusted Van Kooten index is shown in graph 6.

Graph 6. Strike index 1920-1998, Van Kooten method, adjusted (1910-1998=100)



Source 6. http:\\www.iisg.nl\databases\stakingen.html; Oberholzer (1992); ILO

Graph 6 is not base-year dependent. One problem remains, however. This method fails to relate strike frequency to the number of companies affected. But there is also an advantage to this approach. To demonstrate this advantage, in table 1 we calculated the coefficients between the five ways of calculating an index and the three original indicators: frequency, intensity and duration.

Table 1 *Correlation coefficients between the log-transformed and de-trended indices and the four log-transformed and de-trended original indicators, 1850-2000*[††]

R	*Adjusted Van Kooten index*	*Van Kooten index (1920=100)*	*Van Kooten index (1970=100)*	*Galambos index (1920=100)*	*Galambos index (1970=100)*
Frequency	0.47	0.45	0.76	0.45	0.76
Intensity	0.85	0.89	0.65	0.89	0.65
Duration	0.8	0.76	0.66	0.76	0.66

The correlation coefficients imply that the adjusted Van Kooten Index represents intensity (S) and duration (D) much more than it represents changes in frequency (N). It does so in a more consistent way than the four other indices because it is not year-dependent.

There is still a problem, however, with the adjusted Van Kooten Index. It would be a methodological error to compare frequency and duration with the labour force. The only indicator that should be compared with the labour force is the number of strikers. This problem is especially relevant today, when many workers have part-time jobs and, at least in the Netherlands, there is a growing divergence between the size of the labour force and the labour volume. In his thesis Van der Velden (2000) therefore constructed a new index to overcome these problems. This new index reflects the original indicators much better than does the Van Kooten index. The correlations are: index-frequency 0.7, index-intensity 0.95 and index-duration 0.86. However, this index requires data on the number of companies, and these data are not available for South Africa. We are therefore forced to use the adjusted Van Kooten index. This calculation turned out to be the best alternative.

5. Conclusion

In the preceding pages we analysed the strike movements in the Netherlands and South Africa in a qualitative and in a quantitative way to come to a final conclusion. We have recapitulated the qualitative histories in table 2.

[††] To eliminate the influence of extreme values, the logarithms of all series are taken and the figures de-trended by taking the first differences. The reason for transforming the series is explained extensively in Van der Velden & Doorn (2001).

Table 2. Comparison between the most important strike movements in South Africa and the Netherlands.

Year	South Africa	The Netherlands
1903		General strike (legal strike prohibition)
1907	Gold mines	
1913	Gold mines	
1914	Railways	
1921		Strikes against wage losses
1922	Rand revolt	
1943		General strike (German occupation)
1946	Mines (wage issue)	Strike wave
1960	General strike	Strike wave (wage issue)
1961	General strike (political)	
1970		Strike wave and general strike
1973	Strike wave (Durban)	
1976	Strike wave (Soweto)	
1979-1980		Strike wave
1987	General strike (anti-apartheid)	
1997	General strike (conditions of work)	

Table 2 shows that in certain periods both countries witnessed big strikes: 1921-1922, 1946 and the early 1970s. These moments are also reflected in the calculated correlations between the Dutch and the South African indices:

1906-1945 0,6
1945-1970 0,5
1970-1998 -0,3.

It is clear that, despite the differences between the two countries, their histories were quite similar until 1970. Then the South African strike movement grew at an unprecedented rate. In general, we have shown that it is possible to compare the histories of two countries that seem to have little or nothing in common besides the fact that they are both part of a global economic system. If researchers want to write a real global labour history, they would require comparable data and comparable ways of calculating strike activity. Using the adjusted Van Kooten index seems a good way of doing the calculation.

To make proper calculations and comparisons, a South African database on strikes is also required. The effects of such an enterprise would be multifarious. Not only would this database make it easier to draw more reliable comparisons with other countries in order to measure propensity to strike against global tendencies, but it would also be a monument in cyberspace to

all those South Africans, black and white alike, who have stood up against capitalism and the state.

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