



**LABOURING FOR A BETTER LIFE: THE STRUGGLE OF ANNA  
SCHEEPERS AND LUCY MVUBELO FOR BETTER LABOUR  
CONDITIONS, 1960-1980**

by

**IRENE STRYDOM**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DEDICATION

DECLARATION

INTRODUCTION

ELUCIDATION

### CHAPTER 1

#### ANNA ELIZABETH PRINSLOO SCHEEPERS: THE FARM GIRL FROM KRUGERSDORP WHO BECAME A TRADE UNION LEADER

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1.1. Historical background of Scheepers.   | 1  |
| 1.2. Personality and character.  | 16 |
| 1.3. Contributions to improve labour relations and conditions.                           | 20 |
| 1.3.1. Better relationship between all the peoples of South Africa.                      | 21 |
| 1.3.2. Senator Scheepers continues the struggle for all workers.                         | 43 |
| 1.3.3. Scheepers' reaction to the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions.                       | 55 |
| 1.3.4. Scheepers' struggle for the recognition of the dignity of labour for all workers. | 60 |
| 1.3.5. The struggle for the equality of women in all spheres.                            | 62 |

### CHAPTER 2

#### THE CHAMPION OF THE WORKERS: LUCY BUYAPHI MVUBELO – FROM TEACHER TO TRADE UNION LEADER

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1.1 Historical background of Mvubelo.   | 72  |
| 1.2 Contributions made to improve labour conditions and relations.  | 88  |
| 1.2.1 Mvubelo determined to fight for equal union rights, wages and recognition of all workers (1970 – 1974).                       | 105 |
| 1.2.2 Mvubelo still canvassing for support for South Africa nationally and internationally, by fighting disinvestment (1975 –1980). | 142 |
| 1.2.3 Mvubelo's fight for the staple food of survival – bread and butter issues.  | 207 |

CONCLUSION

215

## **SOURCE LIST**

### **APPENDICES**

#### **Appendix 1**

Timeline: Trade unions and councils for Garment Workers: Labour laws affecting them and other highlights between 1896 and 1960.

#### **Appendix 2**

Statistics

#### **Abstract**

#### **Opsomming**

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To all future researchers, remember: Through faith, love and hope everything is possible.

Irene Strydom

25 January 2007

I dedicate this study to my husband, Danie,  
who gave me unfailing support and encouragement  
throughout the preparation of this dissertation.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis hereby submitted by me for the Master of Arts degree at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not been previously submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

## INTRODUCTION

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE EARLY TEXTILE AND GARMENT UNIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA**

This dissertation on the work and achievements of Anna Scheepers and Lucy Mvubelo will be thematic in its approach and each theme will be approached chronologically. Although the relevant time period is from 1960 to 1980, it is necessary to give a very concise history of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa (GWUSA) and the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), the two unions Scheepers and Mvubelo respectively represented.

Several dissertations and especially research done by people like Leslie Witz, John Lewsen, MA du Toit, Martin Nicol, Brian Touyz, EA Brink and L Callinicos give a detailed background of the early history of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa and the parallel unions like Mvubelo's NUCW. Not to repeat what these researchers wrote, but to put the work done by Mvubelo and Scheepers in perspective, a timeline will be included of the period 1896 to 1962.

A broad outline of the characteristics and lives of Scheepers and Mvubelo will also be included to be able to understand who or what motivated these two women in their struggle for the garment workers.

The earliest form of organization in the clothing industry was the Witwatersrand Middleman Tailors' Association (WMTA) established in 1896.<sup>1</sup> The WMTA, which was to be the forerunner of the GWU, did not concern itself with sweating and unemployment in the garment industry.

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<sup>1</sup> GWU, Bbc 1.36 :Sachs, ES, "The split in the GWU, Transvaal 1934"; GWU Bcd 4 : Proceedings of GWU. Commission of Inquiry 1949, Evidence of ES Sachs, p. 957.

(ii)

Before the outbreak of World War I the clothing industry in South Africa grew sporadically. In 1913 a meeting of workers in the tailoring establishments founded the Witwatersrand Tailors' Association.<sup>2</sup> This association was a separate entity to the WMTA referred to earlier. The WTA's main tasks were to attempt to eliminate sweating in tailoring workshops and increase wages for workers.<sup>3</sup>

For the garment workers, perhaps the first important event in the early history of the clothing industry was the decision minuted by a handful of tailors of the WTA in May, 1918 "to take pity on the much sweated and poorly paid girls in the clothing factories and to call on the government for protection for them ..."<sup>4</sup>

In July, 1929, the GWU adopted a constitution which changed the name of the union from WTA to GWU and which set out the rules and aims of the new organization.<sup>5</sup> After the Depression and submission of wage cuts in the clothing industry, Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers started working in the clothing industry in 1934. In 1938 she was elected President of the GWU.<sup>6</sup>

Scheepers and Lucy Mvubelo were leaders chosen out of the people (workers) who worked for the people (workers). They were real "people", persons who cared and struggled for the best workers' conditions and relations. They were both definitely influenced by the ideas of solidarity and democracy within the GWU of Solly Sachs (first General Secretary of the GWU), who inter alia said: "A trade union which really wants to serve its members and achieve something must not only have efficient administrators and expert negotiators, it must also create a feeling of solidarity and inspire hope and confidence in its members."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gytsham E and Trembath YF, **Labour organization in South Africa**, Durban, 1926, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Witz, L, **Servant of the workers: Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers' Union, 1928-1952**, M.Com dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Nr. 1 Taknuus, "Historical events of the Union in brief", 24 May 1968, II (19), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> GWU. Bbc 1.33. Constitution of the GWU, July 1929 in Witz, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> **Supplement to the Star**, 7 December 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Callinicos L, "New workers, new unions: The story of the Garment Workers' Union to 1941". <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/specialprojects/luli/workingliofe/unit6/topics.htm>>, [2005, April 4] p. 6.

(iii)

The GWU also believed that workers in all industries needed their own organizations. Scheepers and Mvubelo played an important role in uniting workers and establishing new workers' unions (as it is discussed in detail later).

Just as white workers had to fight bitter battles for recognition of their trade unions through strikes in 1913 – 14 and 1922, Africans had to do the same. These strikes resulted in the birth of the first Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. This act and later ones made provision for registration of trade unions, employers' organizations and the establishment of industrial councils.<sup>8</sup> Immediately it established a channel of communication between workers and employers and industrial relations improved.

The industrial expansion brought with it a dramatic growth of the urban proletariat, both black and white. The large influx of black workers presented the GWU with severe organizational problems. In Stanley Greenberg's terms, the GWU was confronted by the decision of whether to organize on an inclusive or exclusive basis. The GWU did not adopt either of these approaches; instead it opted for an immediate course of organizing black workers in a parallel union.<sup>9</sup>

During World War II the clothing industry expanded considerably and experienced a grave shortage of European labour, with the result that large numbers of black workers came into the industry. The GWU was, however, forced by legislation to have separate unions for whites and another for coloureds and Indians.<sup>10</sup>

In 1935 the Number 2 branch for coloured members was formed.<sup>11</sup> Africans who were barred from joining a registered union<sup>12</sup> formed their own union and constituted a second level of parallelism. Johanna Cornelius (General Secretary of the GWU), who succeeded Sachs, and Scheepers, together with Lucy Mvubelo, Sara Chitja and others established an African Union of Garment Workers. They held joint meetings of the

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<sup>8</sup> De Kock MH, **Economic History of South Africa**, Juta, Cape Town, 1924, p. 451; De Kock A, **Industrial Laws of South Africa**, Juta, Cape Town, 1965, p. 501.

<sup>9</sup> Greenberg Stanley B, **Race and State in capitalist development: South Africa in comparative perspective**, Raven Press in association with Yale University Press, 1980, p. 311.

<sup>10</sup> Industrial Conciliation Act GG 138, 31 March 1924.

<sup>11</sup> Witz, pp. 141-2.

<sup>12</sup> Sachs ES, **Rebels Daughters**, Robert Cunningham & Sons Ltd, Great Britain, 1957, pp. 90-2.

(iv)

unions (in defiance of the government) but produced separate minutes to create the impression that they were independent.<sup>13</sup>

In 1944 the Transvaal Supreme Court ruled that since African women did not carry passes, "native" female workers were "employees" in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. African women could therefore be members of registered trade unions.<sup>14</sup> So, African women became members of registered unions before their men folk, even though they were in the minority at that time. In 1945 Lucy Mvubelo became one of the first five black women to be elected as representatives on the executive of the registered GWU.<sup>15</sup> Black women remained members of registered unions until 1953, when government proclaimed the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, and changed the term "employee" in the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act.<sup>16</sup>

There were thus two branches of the GWU - a "Number 1 branch" for white members and a "Number 2 branch" for coloured, Indian and African women workers. The division into two branches went against the ideals of trade unionism, for the union was now not divided by skill as it was in the 1920's with the "Bespoke" and "Factory" sections, but by race. However, the GWU was able to improve the wages and working conditions of the "Number 2 branch" and its members were active and interested.<sup>17</sup>

Race prejudice increased especially after the National Party had come to power in 1948 and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism in the unions. Their policy was to separate whites from other workers.<sup>18</sup> The garment workers worked side by side with black workers, taking part in the same process on the shop floor. So although many of the workers were not free from racial prejudice, they recognized the value of class solidarity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Callinicos, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Bcd 3. AH 1092. GWU Commission of Enquiry, S, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 March 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Bcd 3. AH 1092. GWU Commission of Enquiry, S, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Callinicos, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Bcd 3. AH 1092. Commission of Enquiry, S, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Jon, **Industrialisation and trade union organisation in South Africa, 1924-1945**, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1984.

(v)

That the Nationalists did not take control of the union even after their General Secretary Sachs had been banned from South Africa<sup>20</sup> was a tribute to the skilled leadership of Sachs and his "lieutenants", Anna Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius. They stressed the primacy of "bread and butter" issues, and successfully fought off the attempts of the Nationalists to take control of the GWU.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding nationwide strikes and response to the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960, the clothing industry kept on expanding. In 1962 Lucy Mvubelo and some of the other leading trade union leaders succeeded in uniting the black women and black men in one strong union,<sup>22</sup> namely the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), that was treated as a parallel union of the GWU of South Africa from the sixties onwards.

This research focuses especially on the work done by Mvubelo as the General Secretary of the NUCW as well as the struggles Anna Scheepers waged on behalf of the clothing workers as President of the GWU of SA.

A timeline, Addendum I, chronicles the period 1890 to 1962 and sheds more light on the early history of the garment industry before 1960.

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<sup>20</sup> Sachs, pp. 104-57.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> **SA Panorama**, 31 March 1982.

## ELUCIDATION

"An isolated life has no significance.  
The significance of a person is the  
contribution to be made in the lives of  
others".

Sybrand van Niekerk

This research is a historical-descriptive study of Anna Prinsloo Scheepers and Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo's struggle to ensure better labour relations and general conditions for SA workers in the garment industry.

These two women, the Afrikaner and the Swazi, were very active in the garment industry from the early 1930s to the late 1980s. Although from totally different cultures, both women were forced to leave their rural lives and move to the city in search of a better life. Notwithstanding the fact that the work of the two women started in the 1930s and continued till the late 1980s, it was decided to limit the research to the period 1960-1980, as the major struggle Scheepers and Mvubelo experienced can be ascribed to the racial division (apartheid) at the factories and the trade unions. The Wiehahn and Riekert Reports of 1979, introduced a new era for black labour in South Africa. Most of the previous studies on the garment workers focussed on the period before 1960.

It was necessary to very briefly sketch the history of the Garment Workers' Union of SA and the National Union of Clothing Workers to give a background of the unions in which Scheepers and Mvubelo were actively involved. The research could also not just stop in 1980 because many important contributions were still made, especially by Mvubelo after 1980. This period after 1980 is also concisely highlighted.

Although Scheepers and Mvubelo did not only bring about changes and made contributions in the garment industry, but also in the communities and in other unions

and organizations, this research will concentrate on their work and achievements in the garment industry.

The contexts that gave rise to the research project are manifold. The identification of a researchable problem was not only based on personal interests, but also on a literature study and discussions with experts. Relatives who were garment workers in the 1940s provided some first-hand information on conditions during the early history of the garment industry. This was an incentive for this study.

The preliminary literary study assisted in formulating this research problem. To give a balanced outlook of the work done by women leaders of the garment industry it was decided to research both ladies, Scheepers of the GWU of SA and Mvubelo who belonged to the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA) (NUCW of SA), the parallel No. 2 branch. The research indicated that the majority of the garment workers belonged to the parallel branch.

Numerous libraries and archives provided the material on which this research is based, particularly the Church of the Province Archives in the William Cullen Library of the Witwatersrand and the Archives for Contemporary Affairs at the University of the Free State (ARCH).

Several books, dissertations, periodicals and **Hansards** (1947-79) were studied. The **Hansards** were only studied from 1974-79 because Scheepers was elected senator in 1974 and the Senate dissolved in 1979. Research showed that no one of the sources has specifically attempted to analyse the contributions made by Scheepers and Mvubelo.

Once the research problem was finalized, specific literature was reviewed. The major sources of the study can neatly be divided into three categories: Trade Union Archives; Government records and reports; and published journals and newspapers. They were supplemented by more general archival material as well as secondary

works. This variety of sources was required in order to obtain answers to the many questions asked about the life and work of Scheepers and Mvubelo.

The archives of the GWU illuminated the history of the largest and most successful of the open industrial unions. It also contained much information about general left-wing labour politics during the period.

The personal papers and correspondence of Scheepers and Mvubelo, that form part of the records of the GWU, gave insight into the lives of these women and their professional relationship. The documents (private collections) of Catherine Taylor, MJ van den Berg, Albert Hertzog, the National Party, the United Party and the New Order of Oswald Pirow provided relevant information on the apartheid era and the years that preceded it.

More detailed information on the leadership of Scheepers and Mvubelo was available in their reports of visits to GWU branches in SA and reports of their overseas fact finding missions. Newspapers, especially the **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, the official paper of the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA), proved invaluable for this research.

The Wiehahn and Riekert (government) Reports introduced a new era for black labour in South Africa. These two women fought for all the recommendations made by these commissions of enquiry.

This research aims to fill the hiatus in existing knowledge on the early leaders of the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA). By studying the work done by Scheepers and Mvubelo as leaders of early garment unions, one might learn from their successes and failures while improving the working conditions of all workers in South Africa. This thesis will have practical relevance to trade union leaders, policy and law makers, workers and employers because the research will improve the knowledge and understanding of trade unions and trade union leaders.

Current events, especially media coverage of the problems experienced by the garment and textile workers in South Africa, prove that contemporary trade unionist leaders and workers can learn from Scheepers and Mvubelo's way of minimizing and overcoming problems in their industry.

Although from different cultures, as already pointed out, these two women both started working as factory hands before they proved through their leadership qualities, warm personalities and positive attitudes, that in spite of government policies and legislation as well as rejection by their own people, they stood so strongly that they became agents of change.

The thesis is organized into a short introduction on the early textile and garment unions followed by two chapters describing the massive contributions made by these two ladies. Chapter One is organized in a concise historical portrayal of Anna Scheepers and highlights the major contributions made by her. Chapter two gives a brief account of Lucy Mvubelo's work and achievements from 1960 to 1980.

This research aims to prove that Scheepers and Mvubelo did not lead isolated lives. Their significance lies in the contributions they made in the lives of others, especially workers in the garment industry. Many similarities and their attitude towards workers and their country made it imperative for them to become friends and to work very closely together in their aim for a better South Africa.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE FARM GIRL FROM KRUGERSDORP WHO BECAME A TRADE UNION LEADER

Anna Scheepers' and Lucy Mvubelo's own personal histories are not only of importance because they help to explain the extraordinary sympathy and understanding they held for workers (not only in the clothing industry), but also because they largely account for their attitudes on racial issues and the concepts of law and justice.

#### 1.1 Historical background of Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers.

Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers was born on 18 March 1914 on the farm De la Rey where her family have lived for more than a hundred years. She was to be the second of nine children with a spread of twenty years from the oldest to the youngest. They were a happy family living comfortably.<sup>1</sup>

A puzzled Afrikaans women journalist once asked how Anna Scheepers could be the staunch Afrikaner she is - yet "hold such different views from us". Scheepers' blunt reply was: "I believe I am a better Afrikaner."<sup>2</sup> In this respect she had impeccable credentials. Her mother, Johanna de la Rey, was a second cousin of General Koos de la Rey, one of the famous Boer generals of the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>3</sup> Both Scheepers' grandfathers fought in this war, one was imprisoned in Ceylon, the other at St Helena.<sup>4</sup>

In her early years, she was taught by a tutor, and then when she was 11 years, she started attending the farm school. In an interview Scheepers said: "I was very clever, and they thought I

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<sup>1</sup> Knox, C, "The total woman" in **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Imrie, T, "The woman who overcame" in **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>3</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>4</sup> AH 1092. GWU. International Organisations/Transactions/Personal Papers of Officials/Anna Scheepers' Resignation 1972-1973; "UP remembers Emilie Myer in choosing Dr Anna Scheepers" in **Boksburg Advertiser**, 11 January 1974.

should become a doctor. But I don't think it would have worked. I still can't stand the sight of blood and I am not very good with sick people."<sup>5</sup>

Just about the time Scheepers was ready to enter high school, her whole world turned upside down. Her father fell pray to the Depression. He lost all his money. He had to sell his maize at six shillings a bag and cattle were sold for almost nothing.<sup>6</sup> For Scheepers it was very hard: "As children we'd known where we were, who we were. Suddenly all that changed ... you know what teenagers are like. And I was especially sensitive. I remember I was one of the children who couldn't afford the school colours. I had to wear a plain blue blazer. That sort of things affects you. That is when I decided to work hard and save. I didn't have a set ambition about a career; I just wanted to get on top of things."<sup>7</sup>

Scheepers attended Monument High School in Krugersdorp.<sup>8</sup> Although she came from a wealthy background - her grandfather was once said to be the richest man in the then Transvaal - she was obliged to leave school in her grade 12 year, because her family suffered financially due to the Depression,<sup>9</sup> leaving her to a lifetime of "self-education".

In those days people had fixed ideas about Johannesburg - it was Sodom and Gomorrah to them. Scheepers' father wouldn't let her go to work there. Eventually, after two years on the farm her father relented. In 1932 the young girl arrived in Johannesburg and stayed with a friend who worked in the clothing industry.

Scheepers entered the labour market as a teenage fruit-counter hand in Malvern at a wage of £4 a month<sup>10</sup> - a job she described as having long hours, working at times from 7:00 to 23:00 and a job with no future.<sup>11</sup> "I had no choice, in those years as even teachers were without jobs, and I had to earn a living."<sup>12</sup> An average of 200 applicants sought each and every job.<sup>13</sup> Scheepers had to take what jobs she could.

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<sup>5</sup> Knox, in **Fair Lady**.

<sup>6</sup> Brooks, T, "Clocking Out. Anna Scheepers doffing union mantle after 50 years" in **Sunday Times**, 27 May 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Knox, in **Fair Lady**.

<sup>8</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 9 August 1968 (leader).

<sup>9</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>10</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>11</sup> **Krugersdorp News**, 27 June 1986.

<sup>12</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>13</sup> **Boksburg Advertiser**, 11 January 1974.

After she had left the delicatessen in June 1933, she started to work for Messrs S Jaffe & Co., dress manufacturers in Johannesburg.<sup>14</sup> She started to work at a wage of 19/- per week as a presser. "We used ordinary hot irons to press the new clothes in those days", Scheepers remarked.<sup>15</sup> She had to pay 10/- per week for a room, 3/- for tram fares and she had to support herself on the balance. Hundreds of other workers in 1933/1934 received even less than Scheepers did, as the agreement for the clothing industry at that time did not apply to the ladies' section.<sup>16</sup>

Scheepers' involvement with the Garment Workers' Union (GWU) started when she was employed by Jaffe and Co. early in 1934. Mr ES Sachs, General Secretary of the GWU, addressed a meeting of the workers of S Jaff & Co., appealing to them to join the union.<sup>17</sup> He told them of all the benefits a union could offer, and what impressed Scheepers most was the offer of a comprehensive medical aid scheme to which each employee contributed a tickey (2½c) a week. The employer contributed a further tickey a week.<sup>18</sup> No one befriended the workers or helped to improve their conditions except the union and its officials, and she therefore turned to the union,<sup>19</sup> Scheepers said in a statement to the Garment Workers' Union Commission of Enquiry, in 1948.

She was so impressed by the fact that for a small amount workers could get medicine and the services of a practitioner, and the possibility of getting the services of a dentist at a later date, that she was one of five out of about 90 workers who joined up immediately; the rest became members of the GWU subsequently.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> GWU, Part I. Commission of Enquiry. Statement by Anna Scheepers, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>16</sup> GWU, Part I. Commission of Enquiry. Statement by Anna Scheepers, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 10 August 1982.

<sup>18</sup> **Krugersdorp News**, 27 June 1986.

<sup>19</sup> AH 1092, Bce 3.5. GWU. International Organisations/Personal Papers of Officials. Anna Scheepers 1969-1970. Rotary—East Rand, 4 March 1969.

<sup>20</sup> **Krugersdorp News**, 27 June 1986.

Workers began to take an active interest in the union which was acquiring these benefits for them. Scheepers was soon elected as a shop steward. In 1937 she was elected as a member of the Central Executive Committee of the union and in 1939 she was appointed temporary organizer by the Central Executive Committee of the union. After four months' probation she was appointed as a full-time paid official of the union.<sup>21</sup> What attributed to Scheepers' climbing of the success ladder at such a tender age? Many reasons can be given, but as it is discussed in detail later in this chapter, the environment in which she grew up as well as her strong personality played important roles to mould her into the strong leader she became. Her faith in God was her anchor in life. Like she once rightly said: "Let nothing be too big or small to ask for God's guidance and help."

It was on 11 August 1938, that Scheepers, then a shy Johannesburg dress factory supervisor, aged 24, rose to diffidently accept nomination for presidency of an even younger trade union.<sup>22</sup> She took office as President of the GWUSA, and in spite of the election being by ballot of the members on all the following occasions, she was always returned with overwhelming majorities over her opponents.<sup>23</sup> Scheepers had been president for an historic 46 years. This is believed to be a world record for any person, depending on return to office through democratic free choice by an electorate.<sup>24</sup> It is clear today that Scheepers really practised what she preached. She believed in equal opportunities for all, no racial prejudice and absolute dedication to the workers' cause. She spent most of her life fighting for all workers to have a better life. The workers realised that Scheepers was a true "ambassador" for them, they trusted and respected her and therefore they always voted for her to be their president and "mother".

During four consecutive decades she helped to lift the GWUSA into one of the most influential unions in organized labour. She learned a lot from the then secretary, Solly Sachs. Not that she always agreed with him - "I always thought my own mind. Solly never tried to get me to become a communist, but many others did. They never succeeded - I am a democrat."<sup>25</sup> Scheepers' association with Sachs lasted until May 1952, when Sachs was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Commission of Enquiry. GWU, Part I. Statement by Anna Scheepers, Johannesburg, May 1949, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> **Supplement to The Star**, 7 December 1972.

<sup>23</sup> AH 1092, Bce 3.5. GWU. International Organisation/Transactions/Personal Papers of Officials. Anna Scheepers 1969-1970. Rotary-East Rand, 4 March 1969.

<sup>24</sup> **Supplement to The Star**, 7 December 1972; **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>25</sup> **Financial Mail**, 26 January 1973.

<sup>26</sup> **The Star**, 18 January 1952.

Her association with Sachs, and the fact that she attended - as a trade union delegate among scores of other such delegates from all parts of the world - Soviet anniversary celebrations in Moscow in 1938, that she expressed an admiration for the USSR and Communism on her return, and that she later sent greetings to the Society for Peace and Friendship with the USSR, she was labelled the sort of person whose activities had to be suppressed in the interests of national security and well-being.

This subsequently led to a great many smear attacks on her. Scheepers was labelled one of 'The Big Four' of the GWU together with Sachs and Hester and Johanna Cornelius by Oswald Pirow, the then Minister of Justice. Pirow branded them as communists who propagated communism amongst the garment workers. In an article in **Die Vaderland** of September 1945 under the heading "*Groot Vier Propageer Kommunisme by Werkers*", Pirow launched an attack where he said that the articles written in the **Garment Worker** by 'The Big Four' "*was daarop gemik om Russiese Kommunisme te versprei onder lede van die vakbond ...*"<sup>27</sup> ("was aimed at spreading Russian Communism amongst members of the trade union ...")

From 1935 onwards the Garment Workers' Union was subjected to the most scurrilous attacks by the Blackshirts, Greyshirts, and leaders of the National Party in Parliament, by the National Party Press and by other reactionary elements. Scheepers wrote in 1944 that the greatest menace to the conditions of the workers of South Africa, and more particularly to the Afrikaans-speaking workers, was the pro-Fascist element. She emphasized that "at no time in the history of the GWU had any National Party politician, Blackshirt, Greyshirt, political predikant or any other reactionary done a thing to help the struggling women Garment Workers in any way whatsoever".<sup>28</sup> The first support came from the Jewish tailors.

The thousands of Garment Workers showed their loyalty and devotion to the GWU and its leaders when the GWU was assailed by people and organizations aiming at splitting and slandering the GWU or any official of the GWU.

After the National Party had come to power in 1948, it followed a policy of separate development (Apartheid) which became a highly charged issue. Apartheid is an Afrikaans word

<sup>27</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 29 September 1945.

<sup>28</sup> The Fascist Reaction, No. 2. Attack On Garment Workers, in **Forward**, 14 July 1944.

meaning separateness or segregation. It has long been used by the South African government to describe its policy of pursuing the separate development of the races of South Africa. Apartheid was considered by some members of the Blanke Werkersbeskermingsbond<sup>29</sup> to be more important than wages.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, Garment Workers were not interested in ideologies and constitutions but in working hours and wages - bread-and-butter issues. The South African government under Premiers Malan, Strijdom, Vorster and Verwoerd followed this policy of separate development to the letter. The South African government was anti-communistic and certain prominent government officials, like Oswald Pirow, were pro-Nazi. It was with these policies of anti-communism and apartheid that Scheepers very often in her lifetime clashed.

Scheepers also warned the workers against Nazi propaganda. She clearly stated, already in 1941, that there never had been any room for Hitlerites in their union. Scheepers attacked Dr Malan's statement on the German invasion of Russia. She accused him of trying to cover up his master's crime by introducing the bogey of Communism. At a meeting of the Reef Garment Workers she made the following statement: "The job of crushing Nazism is not only the job of Mr Churchill or General Smuts. It is our job, the job of all workers and common people."<sup>31</sup>

Scheepers clashed with the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB), the "machine room" of the National Party. The AB, which was described as the "Reform Committee", alleged that the GWU was a communist organization and was a source of danger to young Afrikaans speaking-members. The AB was not concerned with the economic problems of the workers, but was preaching racial hatred. Scheepers helped to motivate workers to participate in a campaign against racialism in trade unions.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> **Cape Times**, 1 February 1937. The Nationalist Party attempted to split the trade union on racial lines.

<sup>30</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 25 January 1949.

<sup>31</sup> **Sunday Times**, 29 June 1941. Workers flay Malan for worshipping "Monsters".

<sup>32</sup> **Sunday Express**, 11 June 1939. Afrikaner Bond attack on trade unions.

There was, however, no suggestion that Scheepers had actively promoted the communist doctrine or fostered communistic dissension at any time in South Africa. She was advised in a letter dated December 28, 1951, that she would not be included in the list of persons under Section 4(1) of the Suppression of Communism Act.<sup>33</sup>

Scheepers said that in those days anybody who fought for the workers was branded as a communist. In the eyes of the public they thus came to be regarded as communists, though they might not be. Propaganda was made against them. "As trade unionists we deal with trade union matters. We do not talk about revolutions," she said. "We have not got the weapons that the Ossewa-Brandwag has."<sup>34</sup>

But Scheepers hit back where it hurt - she collected more than R5 000 she had won (mostly settled out of court) in various libel actions.<sup>35</sup> It was through this stormy period that she proved her leadership and courage. While the Union and its leaders were being branded 'Kafferboeties' and 'communists';<sup>36</sup> its meetings being disrupted by violent opponents; its demonstrators facing police baton charges, in less dramatic terms, she was instrumental in vastly improving the lot of the garment workers.

From the time Scheepers had become a member of the GWUSA, she devoted all the time and energy she could to trade union work. "Life was one continuous and bitter struggle for me and thousands of other workers in our Industry, the overwhelming majority of whom were Afrikaner women, driven off the land by poverty. From the very beginning I realised the numerous and terrible problems facing the workers, and especially the women workers in the Industry and throughout the years, I have tried to study and understand these problems and to find solutions to them," Anna said to the GWU Commission of Enquiry in 1948.<sup>37</sup>

Scheepers was unrepentant about her past, or the path along which she took her union. "We built up from nothing - we looked after the down-trodden."<sup>38</sup> When Scheepers became President of the

<sup>33</sup> Natal Mercury, 7 January 1952.

<sup>34</sup> The Star, 12 August 1941.

<sup>35</sup> Brink, E, "Kappies, kopdoeke en kommuniste - Afrikaanse vroue van toeka tot nou," <http://www.litnet.co.za/seminaar/ebrink.asp> ca. 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, WH (ed.), **Labour Perspectives on South Africa**, David Philip Publisher, Cape Town, 1974, p.125.

<sup>37</sup> GWU, Part I. Commission of Enquiry. Statement by Anna Scheepers, Johannesburg, May 1949, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> The Citizen, 6 June 1984.

GWU, dressmakers worked a 48-hour week, had one day's holiday a year, and constantly faced the threat of having their wages cut.<sup>39</sup>

As president of the GWU her work demanded physical as well as psychological courage. The young Anna frequently fell foul of counter-demonstrations when she did the rounds with her loud hailer, rallying the support of fellow workers for the reforms she felt they were entitled to. In August 1941, for example, she was pelted with eggs and tomatoes while she tried to address a meeting of textile workers in Industria, Johannesburg.<sup>40</sup> She alleged she was attacked, overthrown, snatched and had her hair pulled. In an interview with the **Sunday Express** shortly after this meeting, Scheepers said that despite the incident she hoped to address the workers there at some future date.<sup>41</sup> This once again proved how dedicated she was to the workers' cause.

The sweet-workers' strike in Doornfontein in February 1943, was probably Scheepers' most traumatic experience of violence. The factory girls, who faced a cut in their already miserable salary of £2.5 a week, picketed the factory. Scheepers, who always encouraged other workers to fight for their rights as the garment workers had done, addressed the strikers. The police intervened. A scuffle developed during the course of which Scheepers was picked up by the collar and shaken, slapped in the face, and thrown in the gutter. "My whole body was black and blue," she said. She objected vociferously to this treatment, so she was bundled into a police car and hauled off for her first (and only) night in jail.<sup>42</sup>

At her trial she laid a counter-charge of assault against the men who had arrested her. She was then accused of obstructing the law and of encouraging the factory girls to assault policemen. "Young girls who work for starvation wages are badly fed and do not have the strength to assault strong men," she retorted.<sup>43</sup> The sweet workers' strike was strengthened by solidarity between the black and white unions, and the workers won their demands.<sup>44</sup>

On one occasion Scheepers found herself in Rustenburg fighting the cause of the tobacco workers. "Most of the factory girls were staying in a church hostel called Môreilig. The

<sup>39</sup> **The Argus**, 12 May 1978.

<sup>40</sup> **Sunday Express**, 24 August 1941.

<sup>41</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>42</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>43</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>44</sup> Callinicos, L, "New workers, new unions", <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/specialprojects/luli/place-in-the-city/unit3/union.htm>, s.a.

'dominees' had warned them that anybody participating in the strike would not be confirmed and would be placed under censure," she said. The strike organizers knew the company was determined to break the strike by bringing in "scabs" (non-union workers brought in as strike-breakers by factory owners).<sup>45</sup>

"I knew about a certain ant poison which had a dreadful smell," said Scheepers. "On the morning of the strike the bus carrying the scabs tried to storm the gates. The chain we had formed broke, and as it was moving in, Johanna Cornelius, who later became the national organiser of the GWU for many years, opened the door and threw in a bottle of ant poison. The effect was awful. The girls inside started screaming. Some vomited and had to be treated in hospital. The factory was closed for two days."<sup>46</sup>

The scabs never discovered what was in the bottles because Anna had soaked off the labels. Johanna told the scabs that they were special 'AS-Bomme' (Anna Scheepers' bombs).<sup>47</sup> This story is once again a wonderful example of the extremes to which Anna would go to fight for workers' rights.

Scheepers always believed it essential for women to have physical as well as psychological courage. "I feel a gathering like a strike or a picket has to be very carefully controlled. Emotions run high and people tend to forget what they're there for. This is when agitators can step in and sway the feeling in a direction which suits their own ends."<sup>48</sup>

Although officials of the GWU actively worked for the Labour Party, and Johanna Cornelius, Solly Sachs and Anna Scheepers fought elections as party candidates, they never attempted to interfere with members whose political views differed from theirs.<sup>49</sup>

In June 1943 Scheepers stood for Parliament as an Independent Labour Party candidate in Fordsburg.<sup>50</sup> Her fiery manifesto included the statement that "the capitalists encourage racial hatred because it serves to divide the workers so they won't present a united front".<sup>51</sup> She was

<sup>45</sup> **The Friend**, 26 June 1984.

<sup>46</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>47</sup> **Sunday Times**, 27 May 1984.

<sup>48</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Sachs, ES, **Rebels Daughters**, Robert Cunningham & Sons Ltd. Alva, Great Britain, 1957, p. 221.

<sup>50</sup> G.G. No. 3230. General Election Results 1943, 13 August 1943.

<sup>51</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

well known for her tireless efforts to bridge the barrier of racial differences. This later caused Scheepers to clash very often with the ruling National Party and their policy of separate development.

"I have always worked for all people: that's my fundamental principle," she said. "And I have never regretted it. A human being is a human being as far as I am concerned. If everyone worked for the betterment of all people we would not be in the danger we are today."<sup>52</sup> She always stood on the forefront of efforts to rid workers of racial prejudice. "I have always believed that South Africa is a single nation. And that requires that there should be equal opportunity for all."<sup>53</sup>

By the time Scheepers retired, there still were not equal opportunities for all. Even after legitimate trade union rights had been extended to black workers in 1983, industrial peace and equality at the workplace were not a forgone conclusion. The process of consultation and negotiation embracing the total labour force without exclusion based on racial prejudice and discrimination, was not yet used for employee grievances to be redressed and for labour disputes to be resolved.

In an article in the **Sunday Times** of 27 May 1984, she said that Sachs had taught her that there could be no racialism in the trade union movement. Scheepers said that her father was "a Smuts man" - he was not a racist. "Others had more difficulty in accepting people as people - on merit and not on skin colour."<sup>54</sup>

During a messy smear campaign levelled at her when she stood for Parliament as the UP candidate for Boksburg at the beginning of 1974,<sup>55</sup> **Die Transvaler**, a daily Afrikaans newspaper, insinuated she had communist leanings. Scheepers immediately issued a R25 000 challenge to the newspaper to prove it.<sup>56</sup> She had already been awarded R5 000 in damages from people who had falsely made the same accusations.<sup>57</sup> The newspaper in question made a public apology before the argument was taken to court. "I have never been a communist and I never intend to become one," she said, "but I will not abandon my idea of humanity."<sup>58</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**Financial Mail**, 26 January 1973.

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**Sunday Times**, 31 March 1974.

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**Boksburg Advertiser**, 5 April 1974.

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**Rand Daily Mail**, 6 March 1974.

57

**Sunday Times**, 31 March 1974.

58

**Sunday Times**, 27 May 1974.

In addition to the impassioned anti-Nazi speeches she made in 1949, which were misinterpreted, Scheepers' egalitarian views periodically provided her critics with ammunition to use against her.<sup>59</sup>

During Scheepers' long tenure of office she gained many benefits for her union members. These vary from a 40-hour week achieved after many years of struggle in 1948, to various funds for sickness, slack pay fund for short-time work, improved wages, loan funds and funeral benefits for members. More public holidays were also granted. When Scheepers started at the GWU the only public holiday they had off was Christmas Day.<sup>60</sup>

All these were won through the Industrial Council, an employer-union round table existing in most industries. Scheepers was an ardent supporter of the council system, one of the major points of difference between her and many other unions established later. "The Industrial Council could bring about great benefits for the workers",<sup>61</sup> Scheepers believed. More militant groups, however, rejected the Industrial Council as authoritarian, bureaucratic and of no help to black members. About the achievements of the Industrial Council, Scheepers said: "It has taken a lot of effort. We haven't achieved anything easily."<sup>62</sup>

When asked, in 1972, what her most satisfying feature of her trade union life had been, she said: "To me the greatest reward is when you can finally report to your workers the news that will benefit them."<sup>63</sup>

In 1972 the GWUSA voiced the opinion of more than 8 000 white, coloured and Indian garment workers, and also consulted with African employees who numbered 35 000.<sup>64</sup> The African workers were covered by fringe benefits of the Unions Industrial Council. Outside her own union, Scheepers was one of the driving forces behind the strongest African union in South Africa, the National Union of Clothing Workers. Her drive took her into other fields too.<sup>65</sup> Scheepers plunged into organizing workers in the tobacco, sweets, food, canning and glass

<sup>59</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>60</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 24 January 1974.

<sup>61</sup> **The Friend**, 26 June 1984.

<sup>62</sup> **Supplement to the Star**, 7 December 1971.

<sup>63</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>64</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>65</sup> **Financial Mail**, 26 January 1973.

industries, as well as the coloured radio and electronics workers, indeed into any area where she was needed.<sup>66</sup>

Among the honours and awards bestowed on Scheepers over the years was a medal from General Smuts for her voluntary services during World War II. She scored a significant number of 'firsts' in her life. She was the first and only female Vice-President of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), the largest multiracial trade union federation in South Africa. She was also the first woman to be president of TUCSA. She held this position from 1938-1984, when she retired. In 1968 she was the first and only woman on the General Council of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, representing South Africa on that council, and eleven million workers from 55 countries.<sup>67</sup> This was an exceptional achievement that would not be easily repeated by any South African, be it male or female!

In 1969 she was awarded a United States Department of State Leadership Grant to tour America.<sup>68</sup> Three years later she was elected by "International Who's Who of Women" as one of the 2 000 women of achievement in the world.<sup>69</sup> At the end of 1972 she was chosen "Woman of the Year" by **The Star** newspaper. **The Star** reporter wrote: "An outstanding woman whose intelligence, courage and dedication are a byword among all who know her, she makes a most distinguished winner."<sup>70</sup>

In April 1973 the University of the Witwatersrand conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Law on her for her "devotion to the cause of uplifting of the workers of all races and to recognise her contribution to economic justice and industrial peace in our land."<sup>71</sup> In May 1974 she was elected a senator, where she served until the dissolution of the Senate in 1980.<sup>72</sup>

Scheepers served on many boards and committees, such as the Price Control Board (during the World War II), the National Memorial Health Foundation, and as an additional member of the

<sup>66</sup> The Johannesburg Branch of the National Council of Women of South Africa. "Women We Remember (1886-1986)". Photographic exhibition to mark the centenary of Johannesburg, 27 February 1886-14 March 1986.

<sup>67</sup> **The Star**, 14 November 1972.

<sup>68</sup> AH 1092, Bce 3.5. GWU. Personal Papers of Officials. Anna Scheepers' resignation 1972-1973. Personal Questionnaire No. 013177, 19 September 1972.

<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to note that Lucy Mvubelo of the National Union of Clothing Workers was also voted **The Star's** Woman of the Year, in 1979 - once again a unique achievement for a South African woman.

<sup>70</sup> **Supplement to The Star**, 7 December 1972.

<sup>71</sup> Letter GR Bozzoli-Anna Scheepers, 4 December 1972; **The Star**, 24 January 1973.

<sup>72</sup> **Boksburg Advertiser**, 11 January 1974.

Wage Board and Industrial Tribunal. She also served as Chairperson of the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (then Transvaal), was Chairman of the Medical Aid Society for many years and served on the Witwatersrand Students' Community Organization's Fund-raising Committee,<sup>73</sup> to mention just some of her committee involvement.

Scheepers represented the GWU and the Trade and Labour Council, the predecessor of TUCSA, at a number of international conferences. By 1969 she had already visited Europe seven times and the Far East on one occasion.<sup>74</sup> In 1969 she also toured the United States as a guest of the government for ten weeks. She always expressed progressive views on matters vital to the progress of industry and felt that unnecessary irritating obstacles standing in the way of economic progress should be removed.<sup>75</sup>

This woman played an important role in many subcommittees of the Trade Union Council, viz. housing, organization, industrial legislation and medical schemes. She led evidence before Select Committees on behalf of TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa). She was also one of its representatives to present evidence to the Government's Commission on Monetary and Fiscal Policy.<sup>76</sup>

After 1973, Scheepers was honoured by the GWUSA by making her lifelong Emeritus President of the union. The GWUSA also named a clinic after her, because of her dedication as chairman of the Medical Benefit Society. She was also named honorary president of the Industrial Council of the garment industry and lifelong honorary member of the Trade Union Council of South Africa.<sup>77</sup> The parallel African union of the GWUSA, the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), also made Scheepers their honorary life president.<sup>78</sup> By bestowing this honour on her, it was clearly indicated that she definitely succeeded in bridging racial barriers and in bringing closer union amongst South Africans.

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<sup>73</sup> Bce 3.5, AH 1092, GWU. International Organisations/Personal Papers of Officials. A Scheepers, 1969-1970. Rotary-East Rand, 4.03.1969. CV of Anna Scheepers. See also Appendix Chapter XII, Committees on which I have served. Commission of Enquiry GWU, May 1949.

<sup>74</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>75</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>76</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>77</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 16 April 1973.

<sup>78</sup> **The Argus**, 12 May 1978.

Scheepers avoided political affiliations until 1972 when she joined the United Party.<sup>79</sup> She came under pressure to do so for a long time and decided to join because the United Party's economic policies made provision for the primary requisites of black people. Predictably she offered her services to the United Party's economic commission.

The same year, 1972, she announced her retirement from the GWU.<sup>80</sup> Time was what Scheepers planned to have plenty of when she retired. But this was asking too much. It was unthinkable that Scheepers could be allowed to slip off to her farm Erfbloem, near Vryheid, and retire from public life.<sup>81</sup> Her announcement sparked off a round of emotional farewell meetings. She did the rounds exhorting the workers to stick together and work for better conditions. Again and again she reaffirmed the value of increased productivity, and the importance of minimising discrimination on the grounds of gender and colour. "If you want more than crumbs, if you want a slice of the cake, you must make a bigger cake," she told union members. "You must encourage the blacks and work with them so all workers can speak with one voice."<sup>82</sup>

Scheepers begged the workers to carry on where she had left off. The Kimberley branch of the GWU decided to present a personal gift to her. A diamond ring was presented to her at a gala evening in Kimberley. "I will treasure it the rest of my life. I was overwhelmed. I still cannot get over the warm-hearted gestures I have received from people in all fields since I retired. Sometimes people retire after working many years and are merely forgotten. It is really wonderful to know that one is not forgotten."<sup>83</sup>

Anna Scheepers certainly was not forgotten. She also received the following cable from the United States' Louis Stilberg, President of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union:<sup>84</sup> "We salute Miss Scheepers, who has contributed to the cause of workers' rights, has won her recognition as a leader of labour, as a woman and as a concerned world citizen."

Scheepers' retirement plans went awry almost before they came into operation. "I meant to go while I was still in demand," she said, "but I found I was so much in demand I was making the

<sup>79</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 January 1977.

<sup>80</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>81</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>82</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>83</sup> **Sunday Times**, 15 April 1973.

<sup>84</sup> **Ibid.**

long journey from Vryheid to Johannesburg every month or so."<sup>85</sup> Within a year after her 'retirement', Scheepers accepted nomination as the UP candidate for Boksburg.

A few months after she had lost the election she was put forward as UP/Prog candidate for the Senate.<sup>86</sup> In an editorial in May 1974 the Johannesburg **Star** said it was sensible of the Progs to swallow their pride and join voices with the UP in the support of Scheepers "for all she's been doing what the Progs stand for, all her life." Many people felt that Scheepers would be more effective in Senate than she would have been as a Member of Parliament. "She has never thought locally, but always nationally", said one observer.

During her election campaign in Boksburg, Arthur, Scheepers' husband, suffered a heart attack. Once she became a senator they decided regretfully to sell the Vryheid farm and to settle in Johannesburg. Scheepers was a senator for six and a half years, by which time the United Party dissolved. She was modest about her political career but once stated that she did not play a small part in the struggle for justice for black workers, even when she was in the Senate. "My **Hansard** speeches are the proof."<sup>87</sup> She also said: "When I went to the Senate, I was called a communist," then she burst out into laughter at the idiocy of the idea. "By now my accusers must realise I'm too much of an individualist to follow any form of dictatorship!", she concluded.<sup>88</sup>

After 1980 she once again became involved full-time in union work until she retired. Before her 'final' retirement in 1984, Scheepers said: "The time is nearing when I must end my work, but I cannot leave until I feel there are competent people in my place, helping the workers as I do. The workers have placed their confidence in me and I never want to fail them."<sup>89</sup>

When she retired in 1984 she said that there was no turning back. Scheepers said she felt sad, and that she could not stay and watch everything she had built up over fifty years being destroyed and workers losing everything they had worked for. She finally said: "My ideas are no longer in keeping with current trends and I feel frustrated and disappointed. We fought for so many years for all workers to be members of registered unions. Today unions are fighting against this. So I ask myself what I fought for - the unorganised are not organised and the organised are divided.

<sup>85</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>86</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>87</sup> **Convocation Commentary 1922-1982**. Publication of the Convocation, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1981, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> **The Citizen**, 1 September 1978.

And I cannot see anyone benefiting from these divisions. I would like to see more progress in organising the unorganised and to see unity instead of division."<sup>90</sup>

Battling "Suster Anna",<sup>91</sup> the lady who for fifty years dominated the South African trade union movement, was a woman of many parts: shrewd politician, dedicated homemaker and staunch supporter of human rights. One of her colleagues said: "She will leave behind her a vacuum and a legend - the legend of Anna Scheepers."<sup>92</sup>

### **1.2 Personality and character of Scheepers**

It is important to know who or what motivated Anna Scheepers and to highlight her principles and character.

Visitors to the Garment Workers' Union offices, among the warren of clothing factories which existed around Johannesburg's End Street, might have been struck by the sight of a portrait of President Kruger almost facing one of Solly Sachs. This incongruity reflected the contradiction that was Anna Scheepers.<sup>93</sup>

When Scheepers started her adult life in a hostile and depressed world, her only ambition was to work hard and everything she achieved was the product of hard work. She was in her presidential office at the Garment Workers' Union headquarters in Johannesburg at 7:30 every morning, unless she had her hair done. Then she went to the salon at 7:00 and to the office "a bit late". She went to the office early to listen to problems (usually personal!) of the workers and like a true mother gave advice.

Along with her unmistakable aura of power, Scheepers radiated femininity. It is clear that the "had her hair done" was an important part of her week. Her expression alternated between formal composure, shrewdness, and a disarming sweetness. It would have been clear even to a stranger that she was "somebody", that she had been through a lot, and had achieved a lot, that she had earned the respect she commanded ... yet at the same time there was something fresh and

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<sup>89</sup> **The Star**, 24 September 1981.

<sup>90</sup> **Financial Mail**, 1 June 1984.

<sup>91</sup> **Sunday Times**, 27 May 1984.

<sup>92</sup> **The Star**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>93</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

youthful about Anna Scheepers that was the true mark of her greatness. She was neither cynical nor snobby.<sup>94</sup>

Scheepers was a tough-minded realist who credited her success to honesty and integrity when dealing with employers.<sup>95</sup> She was a formidable opponent, and once convinced of the rightness of a cause she never gave up. Once she fought a successful two-year battle for R50, which an employer had owed to a struggling woman.<sup>96</sup>

Her character and personality were moulded by the Depression, her parents and faith. "I come from fighting stock",<sup>97</sup> she once told Moira Levy of **The Star**. To clarify this statement the following two quotes can be used: "My mother was very public-spirited," Scheepers said. "There were several poor families near us and she would go to endless trouble to help them. I don't think you could count the number of babies she must have delivered."<sup>98</sup> And: "Once it is in your blood you feel you always want to render some service to people."<sup>99</sup>

Scheepers definitely "inherited" her caring spirit from her mother. When she announced her intended retirement in 1973, one of the most heart-warming letters sent to her came from Norman Lazarus, chairman of the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturing Association, who said: "No matter how heated our exchanges may have been at times, there was never a moment I did not respect you. Your understanding and sympathy with all concerned with the clothing industry; your calmness in moments of crisis; your deep research and reasoned arguments, have made an indelible impression on all those fortunate enough to have been associated with you. I cannot imagine the Industrial Council without you."<sup>100</sup>

Her caring spirit is also reflected in what she said when she finally retired in 1984: "You must get your priorities right - first uplift the people and then other things will follow."<sup>101</sup> Scheepers' father, like her mother, taught her to persevere under very difficult circumstances. Their example to work hard and save, during the Depression, set a fine example to her. "Being poor does effect you", Scheepers said, "but how it affects you depends on your character. Some people might get

<sup>94</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>95</sup> **Financial Mail**, 26 January 1973.

<sup>96</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>97</sup> **The Star**, 24 September 1981.

<sup>98</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>99</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 24 January 1973.

<sup>100</sup> **The Star**, 14 November 1972.

very disheartened. I became more determined to work and save. Even now I get mad if I see anyone wasting money - whether it is mine or the union's. I lecture them about saving at the office. I've taught quite a few people to save."<sup>102</sup>

On the subject of thrift, Scheepers also declared "that unless you save you cannot hope to have anything. Don't envy the man who has saved and now has more than you. You could have the same if you didn't waste your resources."<sup>103</sup>

Anna's father, a staunch supporter of the United Party of JC Smuts, also taught her to be non-racialist. It is therefore no wonder that the University of the Witwatersrand conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree upon her to "show its appreciation of her devotion to the cause of the uplifting of the workers of all races, and to recognise her contribution to economic justice and industrial peace in our land".<sup>104</sup> Scheepers told the reporter of the **Weekend Post** in 1978: "We've fought racialism in our union all through the years."<sup>105</sup>

Scheepers had been married twice. She married her first husband, Jan Venter, President and Secretary of the Johannesburg Municipal Transport Workers' Union, when she was 30 years old. Unfortunately Jan died in 1953. The following year, in October 1954, she married Arthur McLaughlin, the then Secretary of the Cape Tramway and Omnibus Workers' Union.<sup>106</sup> Scheepers had the support and understanding of both her husbands which made her task as a union leader a bit easier. About Arthur she said: "He's very proud of me of course, and he understands a lot of my work, having been a Union man himself."<sup>107</sup> According to her, Arthur was often called Mr Scheepers and he didn't bat an eyelid. She had to be away from home often, but he never stood in her way. She believed that she couldn't be married to a man whose ego would suffer because of her independence and who would be demanding.<sup>108</sup>

Anna Scheepers had no children. The subject was obviously painful to her. "I was six months pregnant in 1946 when police raided our offices and I had a miscarriage. The raid, it turned out,

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<sup>101</sup> **The Friend**, 26 June 1984.

<sup>102</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>103</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>104</sup> The Johannesburg branch of the National Council of Women of South Africa presents: "Women we Remember 1886-1986".

<sup>105</sup> **Weekend Post**, 23 September 1978.

<sup>106</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>107</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 February 1977.

<sup>108</sup> **The Citizen**, 1 September 1978.

was made in error."<sup>109</sup> **The Citizen** reported that it was because of work that she had suffered two miscarriages.<sup>110</sup> Later, in 1981, she said in retrospection that perhaps it was better for her not having any children, because at the GWU all the workers consider themselves her children - and there were 60 000 of them!<sup>111</sup>

Scheepers always championed the cause of the married woman and mother and would have dearly loved to have been a mother herself. In a *Women's Year* motion in Senate she emphasized the importance of establishing more crèches so that working mothers could tackle the job unhindered by lurking worries about their domestic responsibilities. She said: "I'd have worked even if I'd had children. Full employment boosts a woman's morale and she becomes a far more companionable wife and a better-adjusted mother. But I agree to disagree with women who think differently. I say good luck to the women who'd rather sit at home and rust!"<sup>112</sup>

Scheepers always believed that her strong faith in God was the anchor in her life. Being President of the Garment Workers' Union she saw as a noble task. The trade union was the voice of the workers. She was convinced that it was very important to work for the poorly paid workers, and that her prayers and strong faith helped tens of thousands of workers to live a better life.

When she was depressed and frustrated, she prayed. She achieved unbelievable success with the help of God. "Without His help, she said that she wouldn't have been able to achieve the things she did."<sup>113</sup> Scheepers added: "Let our faith in God be our anchor and let nothing be too big or small to ask for God's guidance and help."<sup>114</sup>

Motivation, trust, encouragement and faith - according to Scheepers these are the things that let people work in their professions. "We must teach people to dream again and how to achieve their goals in life," Scheepers continued. Better salaries would not help to improve productivity of workers, unless workers have self-respect and improve their self-image.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 31 October 1972.

<sup>110</sup> **The Citizen**, 1 September 1978.

<sup>111</sup> **Volkstem**, 30 November 1981.

<sup>112</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 January 1977.

<sup>113</sup> **Die Gesant** 6(2), May 1973, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> **Beeld**, 10 August 1984.

Ms Anna Scheepers-McLaughlin, in private life, was very domesticated, and if time permitted, she practised hobbies which included art needlework, flower arrangement and baking, for all of which she claimed a reputable number of awards. She also loved pewter and mosaic work.

She once said that she had always feared old age. "Even when I was a young woman, I never want to be in need when I am old. I don't want to be miserable and bored." Then in an ironic aside: "I don't know what it is to be bored; I haven't had the time. This is why I am so pleased that I have never allowed my business life to take away from my interest in the traditional female skills like baking, embroidery and gardening. When I finally retire I'll still be able to bring joy to other people. You get a lot of pleasure out of making things for other people. There are lots of ways you can make your life more interesting."<sup>116</sup> This today is still an important aspect in every person's life, to live a balanced life by having not only work skills, but also skills that you can use to relax.

When Scheepers finally retired in 1984, nothing could stop her from pursuing all her hobbies. She also served on the church board, played bowls and was a keen gardener and homemaker.

This tough trade unionist who was arrested, who marched, fought employers and spoke and wrote millions of words for the lesser privileged people of South Africa was indeed - a woman for all seasons!

### **1.3 Contributions Scheepers made to improve labour conditions and relations**

Volumes can be written about her contributions and to fully appreciate them, it is necessary to look at Scheepers' own account of them.

In her letter of resignation as the President of the GWUSA in 1972 Scheepers wrote as follows: "I believe that I have made my contribution through many phases of the Union's history. I have helped to improve conditions of employment, not only for tens of thousands of garment workers, but also for many other workers in South Africa. I also contributed, in no small measure, to the building-up of the image of the Union."

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<sup>116</sup> **Fair Lady**, 16 January 1977.

She continued to write: "I have fought for many ideals which I hope will not be abandoned. Amongst the most important ones are the fostering of a better relationship between all the peoples of South Africa; the right of all workers to participate in the determination of their conditions of employment; the recognition of the dignity of labour for all workers and complete equality for women in all respects."<sup>117</sup>

One of the aims of this dissertation is to examine the validity of Scheepers' claims to the above mentioned contributions that she claimed to have achieved.

### 1.3.1 Better relationship between all the peoples of South Africa

To be able to "measure" whether Anna Scheepers really worked towards and helped to achieve better relationship between all the peoples of South Africa, it is necessary to give a short overview of the concept 'industrial/labour relations'. "Many South Africans hold grossly distorted ideas about trade unions and trade unionism. These are rooted in ignorance, liberally laced with racism and are manifestations of the emotions of fear and loathing that united the beneficiaries of apartheid in support of the system." This was the view of a number of prominent trade unionists following a national radio phone-in show.<sup>118</sup>

In an interview with the **Argus**, Scheepers reaffirmed her strong belief to be educated and to keep up to date with the most contemporary matters. With her active mind and wide-ranging knowledge it was possible to secure better relationships between all the peoples of South Africa. As she told the reporter of the **Argus**: "I achieved everything through honesty, hard work and continuous study and not one day goes by without doing reference work. I believe that for my work I have to remain up to date on all matters pertaining to the economy. If not I could not be a good negotiator ... in the union movement you practically have to be a lawyer, planner, organiser, diplomat, fighter and psychologist."<sup>119</sup>

To have a better understanding of the concept 'Industrial/Labour Relations' and to understand the 'world' in which Scheepers worked, a short overview of the concept, 'Labour/Industrial Relations' will be given.

<sup>117</sup> AH 1092. GWU. International Organizations/ Personal Papers of Officials. A Scheepers' letter of resignation, October 1972.

<sup>118</sup> **The Star**, 10 August 2001.

It must be remembered that good industrial relations between employers and workers consist of two components. The relationship which is established between employers and workers through the trade union forms the labour relations part, but besides this relationship, which is governed by the Garment Workers' Union, there is the other component called human relations. The human relations component of industrial relations is the direct contact between workers and the employer on the factory floor. In big companies the personnel department handles human relations. In small companies a direct personal contact is established between workers and employers. This direct contact, which can be good or bad, constitutes human relations. The labour relations component is therefore industry wide. The human relations component is found in each factory.<sup>120</sup>

A sound system of industrial relations depends on three pillars, namely the workers and their trade unions, the employers and their organizations and the government and the type of legislation it controls. For these three pillars to form a sound foundation, it is necessary that adequate channels of communication are established between them. Economic progress brings about change and adaptation to these changes has to be made by employers and trade unions. Hence the three parties must be in constant communication.<sup>121</sup>

The most important element of the concept 'industrial/labour relations' is to be found in the world 'relationship'. Industrial/labour relations are not only concerned with work or with industrial society, but especially with the relationships established between the various participants, namely employers, employees and the State, while engaged in economic activity in an industrial society.

In analysing any relationship it is necessary to find out what type of relationship it is, who the parties are, how they interact and why they interact in this manner. As already stated, the two main parties to the labour relationship are employers and employees. They may not like to work together, but they are obliged to do so. Consequently their relationship is conducted in the light of certain rules and, although there is co-operation, there is also a great deal of conflict. This conflict has to be regulated to prevent it from reaching destructive proportions. To these ends the

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<sup>119</sup> **The Argus**, 12 June 1980.

<sup>120</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 June 1971.

<sup>121</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 17 April 1970.

parties engage in collective bargaining, a process which has become central to the conduct of most labour relationships and one which leads to the conclusion of collective agreements. These agreements, in turn, regulate the relationship.

All this does not occur in a vacuum. Therefore any analysis of the labour relationship will include a discussion of the various factors within society which impact on the relationship and, in particular, on the collective bargaining process. Finally, it is accepted that most relationships, and in particular those not governed exclusively by legal determination, are best conducted in the light of certain common or universal standards and values. In the case of the labour relationship, the most widely accepted standards are those of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (see Appendix). The values most commonly adopted or debated in industrial relations are those relating to fairness, integrity, trust, the use of power and the question of individual freedom. Perceptions of these concepts vary, yet they do play an important role in the conduct of the relationship.<sup>122</sup>

Analysing the contribution Scheepers made to improve the labour relations and working conditions of all the workers, especially in the GWU and the NUCW, it is clear that she played a vital role not only in the GWU but also in other unions she helped to establish. She contributed as President of the GWU, Vice-President and later President of TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa), representative of South Africa at the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation and as ambassador of South Africa's GWU in Europe, USA and Israel. She therefore did not only contribute nationally, but internationally to improve relations of all workers.

Considering what has already been written in this chapter about Scheepers' early life, her upbringing and political views, it is clear that she was truly a democrat who accepted people as people - on merit and not on skin colour.

As early as 1939, not even a year after Scheepers had been elected President of the GWU, a big step to combat the racist war on the trade union movement had been taken by the GWU and the Tailoring Workers' Industrial Union (Transvaal). These two unions had set up a Unity

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Bendix, S, *Industrial Relations in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1989, p. 20.

Committee "for the purpose of bringing about closer co-operation between them, to eventually form one union for all clothing workers in South Africa".<sup>123</sup>

In forming this Unity Committee, with Scheepers as its chairperson, an appeal for closer unity in the ranks of the clothing workers was made. Scheepers realised at a very early stage in her career, that in order to protect the clothing trade union from various bodies which were attempting to split the workers on racial lines and set up organizations that could only lead to the disintegration of the trade union movement, she had to start campaigning for unity among the clothing workers. Scheepers was then already campaigning for a national trade union.

In March 1939 the attacks by Blackshirts, Greyshirts, and leaders of the National Party in Parliament, by the National Party press and by other reactionary elements were considered by a general meeting, and the following resolution was adopted:

"Any members of the Union -

- (a) associating with a person/s who or organisation which aims at the splitting of our Union;
- (b) slandering the Union or any official of the Union;
- (c) spreading falsehoods about the Union;
- (d) preaching racialism in order to split the ranks of the Union;
- (e) doing anything which is calculated to cause division in the ranks of the workers will be considered as a traitor to the Union and expelled forthwith."<sup>124</sup>

In spite of the tremendous and persistent efforts of the reactionaries, the Garment Workers' Union remained unscathed. The motto of the GWU always remained: "A worker is a worker - notwithstanding race or colour." The efforts of the National Party to split the Garment Worker's movement by trying to set up trade unions on racial lines, failed completely.<sup>125</sup>

In a statement to the Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the GWU in 1948, Scheepers stated that as a paid officer of the GWU she always tried to treat every member of the Central Executive Committee of the GWU and every official with the utmost respect and consideration.

<sup>123</sup> **Guardian**, 1 December 1939.

<sup>124</sup> **Forward**, 14 July 1944.

<sup>125</sup> **Cape Times**, 1 February 1937.

She said she had never attempted to form factions or cliques.<sup>126</sup> The Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond, one of the main instruments by which the Nationalists' poison of racism was injected into the trade union movement, especially a trade union like the GWU in which Afrikaner workers predominated, caused Scheepers as president of the GWU much trouble. In evidence given in 1949 by Ms P Moolman (member of the Action Committee of the BBB (Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond)) to the Wolfaard Commission of Investigation concerning matters of the GWU, it was stated: "Apartheid is more important than wages!"<sup>127</sup>

The resistance of Scheepers to racist policies was a long and painful one. It was a resistance which grew stronger as wave after wave of racist laws were implemented in South Africa. Scheepers said discriminatory laws had adverse effect on productivity. "If we get rid of these discriminatory laws and black workers are properly trained, our productivity will be very good in about three years," she said.<sup>128</sup> After World War II, war-time industrialization brought hundreds of thousands of non-whites to the cities. This influx created problems. The National Party exploited the situation by promising 'apartheid'-separation.

As already discussed labour and human relations do not occur in a vacuum. The National Party ideology - 'apartheid' - had an enormous impact on labour and human relations in South Africa. The "spanners in the works" of good human and labour relations and negotiations were discriminatory laws - there was a wide range of laws which affected black workers, including influx control. The **Financial Mail** (press cutting, s.a.) reported that these were the Bantu Trust and Land Act, the Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, the Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents; Bantu Labour Act (1964); Group Areas Act; Environment Planning Act; Bantu Employees In-service Training Act, and the Community Councils Act. The Environment Planning Act was nothing less than a nightmare to the employers and employees in the clothing industry in that the provisions of this act threatened mass unemployment of African workers and equally resulted in unemployment of white and coloured workers.

The Bantu Employees' In-Service Training Act was of such a restrictive nature that the training of African workers for the clothing industry in the existing Training College was impossible. The Group Areas Act created immense difficulties for the Indian female residents in Lenasia to take

<sup>126</sup> AH 1092 GWU Commission of Enquiry. Statement by Anna Scheepers, 1 January 1948.

<sup>127</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 25 January 1949.

<sup>128</sup> **Cape Times**, 26 May 1978.

up employment in clothing factories in Johannesburg, in that the employment of African domestic servants was not permitted in terms of provisions of this act in the Lenasia area. The result was an exodus of many valuable workers from the industry.<sup>129</sup>

There are thousands of articles to prove that Scheepers fought apartheid and racism, especially the discriminatory laws since 1950.

The Nationalist Government began putting pressure on unions in the early 1950s to become racially segregated. The first split in the South African Trade and Labour Council (SATLC) occurred in 1947 when some of the racist unions broke away to form the Co-ordination Council of South African Trade Unions (CCSATU) in protest against allowing African unions to affiliate to the SATLC. A far larger split occurred in 1950 over the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act. Although this had deepened divisions within the SATLC, the issue of African trade unions was often at the heart of these differences.<sup>130</sup>

By the mid-1950s the registered industrial unions remaining in the SATLC were deeply divided over the issue of African trade unionism. There were two main positions that emerged from this issue. Some argued that a strict policy of non-racialism should be followed. This would have made an alliance with the old craft unions impossible. Others argued that the non-racial industrial unions should follow a softer line of "parallelism". Black workers would be organized in separate branches which would not have as much power as the white branch. In this way these unions could maintain an alliance with the craft unions and increase their bargaining power.<sup>131</sup>

In 1950 the SATLC conference voted in favour of organizing African workers in parallel unions and a separate consultative committee for African workers. African workers would be in a junior position under the 'guidance' of the registered trade unions. The leaders of the Council for Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), to which most African unions were affiliated, opposed the formation of parallel unions.

In 1954, the executive of the SATLC decided to exclude African unions. This laid the basis for the re-establishment of an alliance with the craft unions at the expense of African workers.

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<sup>129</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 16 September 1977.

<sup>130</sup> **The New Nation**, 26 May 1989.

<sup>131</sup> **Ibid.**

George Maeka, President of the CNETU, condemned the actions of this committee: "We must tell the SATLC and other trade unions quite bluntly that creating a body for registered unions only is an illusion. Racialism is poison to the trade union movement. It is the very weapon that the government is using to destroy the unions. You agree to exclude Africans in order to get the racialists and nationalists to come to you conference." SATUC which became TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa), developed the policy of parallelism through to the 1980s.<sup>132</sup>

The Garment Workers' Union of South Africa, with Scheepers as their President, decided in 1944 to organize the African garment workers and Lucy Mvubelo was appointed as their president. The decision to form a parallel union, namely the National Union of Clothing Workers, was forced upon the GWU when the old Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act was promulgated in 1954. But the two sister unions worked harmoniously together towards the common purpose of improving the wages and working conditions of all garment workers. This principle was always maintained and was clearly evident in the fact that the benefits and services of all the industrial council funds and union funds were available to all workers, irrespective of race. Furthermore, during negotiations the registered union, Scheepers' GWU, consulted the African Union, the NUCW before and during bargaining for a new wage agreement. In fact, in the one agreement the white and coloured workers sacrificed increases in order to bring the African workers into the agreement.<sup>133</sup>

In an article in the **Financial Mail**, titled: 'Parallelism = Paternalism', the question was asked and answered: "When is a trade union not a trade union? When it's a 'parallel' union for Africans, administrated and sometimes even controlled by a registered union." Some further allegations were made that these parallel unions were only 'paper unions', without shop stewards, elected treasurer or secretary, or real member participation. Compulsory deduction of dues were made from workers of some parallel unions' pay packets, although they have never actually joined the union. Johannes Mathe, a delegate of NUCW, founded in the 1920s with the assistance of Anna Scheepers' registered GWU, also made allegations regarding Scheepers and the GWU. He told TUCSA the NUCW delegation had not itself decided who to vote on to TUCSA's executive, but that union general secretary, Lucy Mvubelo, "runs to consult senator Scheepers and then casts our votes".

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<sup>132</sup>

**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 31 August 1973.

Scheepers flatly denied this and said she did not interfere in NUCW affairs. Mathe and other sources also charged that Scheepers had threatened the NUCW with eviction from Garment Centre, which it shared with the registered union, if it did not join TUCSA. They also claimed that Scheepers virtually vetoed NUCW decisions if she did not approve of them. "She calls the executive in and lectures them like grade one school children and then tells them to go back and reconsider." Usually they did, one observer said.<sup>134</sup>

Scheepers also denied this. "I only intervene in the affairs of the NUCW when asked to address their meetings or report back on negotiations."

Suspensions about the viability of most parallel unions were confirmed by John Lewsen in his MBA thesis, entitled *Black Trade Unions, their role and potential*. Lewsen found that whereas the independent unions had one paid official per 330 members, the parallel unions had one per 2 300. Most parallel unions, Lewsen showed, were run directly by white general secretaries of the registered unions. He found independent unions to be sceptical of TUCSA's decision to readmit Africans, regarding it as "a mark of expediency during a period of financial weakness".<sup>135</sup>

Scheepers was very upset by the article "parallelism=paternalism" published by the **Financial Mail**. She took exception, sought damages for defamation and won the case!<sup>136</sup>

The registered trade union, the GWU of Scheepers, was very often used as an example of how under the protective umbrella of a white or coloured Workers' Union, and by exploiting the material, personnel and technical means at its disposal, a strong black Workers' Union could be built up. The International Metalworkers' Federation, one of the Western world's most powerful trade union bodies in the 1970s, investigated workers' conditions in the Republic. The IMF suggested the best possibility it saw of overcoming the consequences of apartheid in trade union life and on the shop floor, was to follow the example of the Garment Workers' Union which had successfully organized an African sister union and negotiated on its behalf.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> **Financial Mail**, 19 November 1976.

<sup>135</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>136</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 November 1977.

<sup>137</sup> **Cape Times**, 23 October 1972.

Scheepers was always very proud of the GWU's clear stand on racialism. At a TUCSA conference in 1970 she said: "We have never had an easy time and perhaps that is why our name is known throughout the length and breadth of this country for having rendered a service to all workers, irrespective of race and colour."<sup>138</sup>

In a speech delivered by Scheepers to the Harvard Business School Club of South Africa, on the future of the trade union movement for all races in South Africa, she said that the first obstacle to be overcome by the trade union movement as it was known then - consisting of white, coloured and Asian workers - was the question of racialism. The degree of success in tackling racialism depended on leadership. "Honest, sincere and bold leadership was required if the membership of registered trade unions was to be educated to accept the African worker as a fellow-worker. To be accepted on **merit**, and not on colour, should be the guiding principle," Scheepers said. Much soul searching was done by employers, trade unionists and the government, to find the answer. It had at least been realized that lines of communication between employers and African workers had to be strengthened, Scheepers commented.

Scheepers said that throughout the history of the trade union movement in the earlier days you find that the white trade unionists discriminated against coloured and African workers, because prior to the first Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, trade unions were free to organize white, African and coloured workers. The white trade unionists of those days were predominantly English-speaking. She said that the Afrikaner worker thus was not to be blamed for introducing racialism into trade unions. Scheepers included in her speech two quotes made by John X Merriman, one-time Prime Minister of the Cape. He said in Parliament: "Many people appeared to lose sight of the fact that they were on the edge of a volcano. At the real bottom of the business was the colour bar. We want to abolish it, and unless you do it, you are going to get a serious position in this country." He further said: "If these people out on strike (1913-1914 miners' strikes) would go back to Australia, or where they come from, I feel sure the mines would go on as before. All that would happen would be that there would be fewer people to see that others worked - the real worker is the native."

Scheepers said she just used these two quotes to show how deep the cancer of racialism had grown. She said: "Racialism is a disease which should be out-rooted. There may have been time

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<sup>138</sup>

Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 27 August 1971.

when John X Merriman made his speech in Parliament but there is very little time, if any, left today."<sup>139</sup>

In another speech to a student body at Stellenbosch, Scheepers once again emphasized the urgent need to come to terms with African labour. "The Africans have been a very patient people", she said. "No other racial group in South Africa would have endured so much with so little protest." In an article in the **Sunday Times**, the paper expressed its hope that employers and trade unions would take note of Scheepers' view that they had to play the key roles in improving race relations and that employers and trade unions could do most to meet the needs of African workers - more than the government could do. Scheepers believed that the government was "afraid of going too far too fast". Trade unions, she said, had to educate their members to accept the African as a fellow worker. Employers, for their part, had to encourage the government to accept the inevitability of African unions and start helping to build up responsible African union leaders. "The stability of the country could well depend on their success in these spheres", Scheepers added.<sup>140</sup>

From a collection of press reports it became clear that South Africa did not have so much a 'labour' problem as a 'colour' problem. However, since colour prejudice interfered at almost every level with the evolution of a highly trained, efficient, well-paid, responsibly organized labour force, South Africa had in fact major labour problems - synonymous with its colour prejudice, and the resultant structural defects based on this colour prejudice. It was suggested that the only way out was to keep as a clearly defined target the treatment of all workers as 'labour', irrespective of the colour of the skin.<sup>141</sup> Scheepers continued to bluntly warn white South Africans at Stellenbosch: "I am afraid African workers have reached the end of their tether ... we have little time. It can no longer be measured in years. We will have to act quickly." The immediate needs of African workers and their families, should be satisfied, Scheepers said. Such needs were: education and training; better job opportunities and skilled work on merit at the rate for the job; better housing; better transport facilities and the right to have recognized trade unions with full powers to negotiate.

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<sup>139</sup> PV 414: Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers Papers, File 2/1/2, January 1973-July 1973. Speeches, Statements and Messages. Speech delivered by Scheepers to The Harvard Business School Club of South Africa, July 1973.

<sup>140</sup> **Sunday Times**, 22 February 1973.

<sup>141</sup> Anna Scheepers. Notes for Parliament 1972, Labour No. 1.

Scheepers commented that a different relationship between employees and African workers was inevitable. There was no more time to withhold certain rights from the African workers. They should be given trade union rights like any other workers and should have the right to organize, the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. She referred to the strikes in Durban, on the Witwatersrand and at East London and said these strikes were a warning. Africans were not playing the role of 'labourer' in South African's economy and that they were becoming more aware of the exploitation. "If people have to work for so little in the face of a rising cost of living, no agitation is required. The suffering they have endured has created an explosive position."<sup>142</sup> At a meeting of the Industrial Council held in May 1972, the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association turned down the GWU's request for a cost of living increase with an unconditional no! Scheepers' response on this refusal of the TCMA and an employer's comment that half a loaf of bread is better than no loaf of bread was: "It is worse to work and starve than to starve."<sup>143</sup>

Scheepers said the GWU had a proud record of working for the upliftment of all workers irrespective of race or colour. "Hence the reason that the Black workers who are in the majority in the areas we operate are earning the rate for the job and enjoy the same fringe benefits as our own members. All people, not only one section, should build bridges between the race groups. We can only survive if we do everything possible to co-operate and work for the mutual benefit of all. We are all inter-dependent. Hatred breeds more hatred whereas love and understanding do not only bring happiness to others, but bring inner happiness to those who practise it."<sup>144</sup>

From the inception of the Industrial Conciliation Act, Africans were excluded. The 1924 and 1937 Acts did not refer to "Bantu", "African" or "Native" - it excluded workers who were falling under the Native Pass Laws and Regulations and certain other acts, from the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act. The 1956 Act, however, made provision for the exclusion of "Bantu". The Industrial Conciliation Act imposed job reservation on the clothing industry.

The clothing industry in the Transvaal was the first industry in South Africa to which job reservation was applied. This happened in 1957 when the authorities were concerned over the extent to which African labour was entering the clothing industry. It wanted to reverse the ratio

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<sup>142</sup> **The Star**, 19 July 1973.

<sup>143</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 2 June 1972.

<sup>144</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 26 November 1976.

of white to non-white workers and stop the 'invasion' of the industry by African workers. Thus the Industrial Tribunal determined that 70 per cent of the jobs in the industry should be held by whites only and the remainder by coloured workers. Scheepers, as a member of the Tribunal, submitted a minority report dissociating her from the Tribunal's determination. This edict never worked from the day it was proclaimed. There were simply not enough white and coloured workers available. It threatened to bring the industry to a standstill with the wholesale closure of factories. Employers rushed to the authorities to apply for exemptions to permit the engagement of African workers. The position was so obviously farcical that within a comparatively short time the Tribunal's determination in practice became null and void. Scheepers and members of the GWU and employers looked for some legal means of bringing order back into the activities of the industry. Scheepers said that in "1957 the GWU advised non-Whites not to work on White reserved jobs as they would lay themselves open to prosecution". The industry in Transvaal subsequently came to a standstill. "Scheepers recalled that for three days the industry was paralysed."

She told Jack Sackse of the **Sunday Times**: "The Africans and the Coloureds stayed away. As none of the factories could carry on with the few White workers they had, the Whites found themselves out of work also."<sup>145</sup>

After a coloured union member took the Industrial Tribunal and the Minister of Labour to court, the determination was declared invalid by the Supreme Court. A new watered-down determination was made by the Industrial Tribunal, in May 1960, reserving 25 per cent of the jobs for whites, 37½ per cent for blacks.<sup>146</sup> "The GWU throughout its history always advocated that any person - white, brown or black - had the right to work, provided the rate for the job applied", Scheepers commented.<sup>147</sup>

Clothing manufacturers had a sound theory on the matter of job reservation. "A stitch in time", they argued, could save a lot of money. "And does it really matter whether the stitcher is White, Coloured, Indian or African - as long as the job gets done?" The clothing men pointed out that if they had stuck to the letter of the law, with no mass exemptions being granted by government,

<sup>145</sup> **Sunday Times**, 7 February 1971.

<sup>146</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 December 1976.

<sup>147</sup> **Sunday Times**, 7 February 1971.

most factories would have folded years ago. And as one factory man put it: "What would the Minister of Labour have worn to Parliament then?"<sup>148</sup>

But even the watered-down ratio proved out of line with reality. In 1961 white workers constituted 19,99% of the labour force, though they required to fill 25% of the posts. There were just enough coloureds to fill their own allocation of the prescribed jobs. Scheepers added, "Hard as the employers tried, they just could not fill the number of jobs earmarked for the Whites. But the numbers and percentage of the Whites since then have become less and less." She further explained: "Take the position of the 'choppers out', one of the most responsible work categories. (A chopper out cuts out the pattern on the material.) At the time of the first determination, which reserved the job of the choppers-out for whites only, we had only four white choppers out of 600 who were needed." The authorities were forced to have second thoughts.<sup>149</sup>

In an article in **The Star** of February 1971, it was stated that a white face was a rarity in the clothing industry, but those that were there were smiling ones. They worked with the brown people and laughed with the Indians. A white machine operator remembered when she had been surrounded by white workers only. In 1971 she worked alongside Indians and brown people. "I am pleased this had happened. It teaches one to understand non-White people", she said. Where then did the government theory that integration in labour caused labour friction come in? According to the workers it was evident that it was not true!<sup>150</sup>

Scheepers noted that the GWU never deviated from its policy, because it was trade union policy "to fight for the right of all workers, and because it is short-sighted to restrict work to a specific race group". She continued that when the colour labour force was absorbed, African females started to enter the industry. She added that the legislation which professed to give first the white and then the brown workers 'protection' was artificial and wholly unnecessary. She maintained - and she had the backing of all sections of the clothing industry - that it was a fiction to suggest that whites and brown people were being 'ousted' by African labour. Whites were leaving of their own accord and had been doing so for years. They were attracted away by better conditions

<sup>148</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 December 1976.

<sup>149</sup> **The Star**, 10 February 1971.

<sup>150</sup> **Ibid.**

and better rates of pay in other fields of industry and commerce. The same was happening with brown and Indian workers.<sup>151</sup>

Official figures showed that there had been a tremendous expansion in the industry during the ten years from 1960 to 1970. It grew from childhood, so to speak, into manhood. In 1960 there were 43 927 workers in South Africa, and in 1970 the total was 114 944. The number of white workers increased from 7 240 to 10 577, and coloureds from 20 643 to 52 333. Black workers increased from 9 381 to 29 677. The relative increase was lowest for white workers and highest for Black workers (See Appendix).

Refusing to recognize the African workers as employees, in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1956, was tantamount to ignoring their contribution towards South Africa's economy. Such an attitude created a feeling among Africans that whatever they might have done was of little or no consequence. Scheepers said: "Despite the terrific growth in South Africa ... the workers did not enjoy their full share of the prosperity. We who are in a more privileged position must not think that the non-European will always be the hewers of wood and drawers of water. As long as we adopt a passive attitude we can never achieve our country's full economic potential. Prosperity is indivisible and all must suffer if we do not allow people from all race groups to partake in the wealth brought about by modern technology.<sup>152</sup> Only when there is co-operation can the potential of the industry be developed in a spirit of harmony, which will be to the benefit of all."<sup>153</sup>

Scheepers also stressed that first of all the position and feelings of the white worker had to be considered. "The White worker's mind has been poisoned over the years to consider the Brown and Black as his enemy who is ready to grab his job. That feeling must be broken down. Development has proved that as non-Whites moved into certain jobs, Whites moved into higher positions. There are, of course, the small exceptions, but in the main, thousand of ordinary White workers are in far better positions at present than they had been in before", she commented.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 9 June 1967.

<sup>152</sup> **The Star**, 10 February 1971.

<sup>153</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 January 1969.

<sup>154</sup> Address by senator Anna Scheepers to the Institute of Personnel Management, Holiday Inn, Woodstock, Cape Town, 11 June 1975.

Scheepers believed that the first areas where discrimination could be removed without hurting anyone and establishing goodwill were:

- **Removal of job reservation:** Section 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act had to be removed as it was hardly applied and where applied relaxation had to take place. Even if it just remained on the Statute Books it was a source of irritation and was injurious to the dignity of the non-white workers. She further continued that if ever a provision in an act was damaging to South Africa abroad, it was Section 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act. This could also have a harmful effect, indirectly, on the white worker. Human beings as they are, have weaknesses. Certain white workers could use this section of overprotection to hold the employers and the state to ransom; they need not give of their best to aim at promotion and they need not produce to full capacity as they were safeguarded against any competition. With the shortage of white labour this could contribute substantially to low production. The conscientious and responsible white worker, in her opinion, should have considered Section 77 as an insult to people's craftsmanship, initiative and capability to compete on equal terms. "Overprotection will destroy the very moral fibre which has enabled us to reach the level of advancement on which we find ourselves", she said.
- **The Industrial Conciliation Act** contained the gravest provisions of discrimination, Scheepers continued. Section 1(1) should have been amended to include African workers in the term 'employee'. Whatever works committee might be set up, it would not satisfy the African worker. Like any other worker all over the world they needed trade unions. The Africans were no exception.

Scheepers said, as far as she knew in any other country, works committees were complementary to but not substitutes for trade unions. "Trade union rights are a necessity, not a luxury." If the Minister of Labour was so confident about the works committee system, then she believed the provision dealing with trade unions, employers' associations, conciliation boards and industrial councils could be removed from the Industrial Conciliation Act - the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act could be amended to cover all workers, including whites and coloureds. If there was no discrimination intended the whites and the coloureds could also have the advantage of the facilities of works and liaison committees.

Section 3(6) of the Industrial Conciliation Act should be amended to leave the choice to the workers in any particular industry or trade as to whether they wished to have a separate racial union or a mixed trade union. "Workers are adults and they should make their own choice", she said.

Section 6 had to be deleted so as not to encourage the breakaway of unions and division of assets. Scheepers added that a painful provision to the brown and Indian workers was Section 8(3)(a) of the Industrial Conciliation Act. This provision provided for separate branches of the racial groups in mixed trade unions and the creation of a white executive. Scheepers believed that the trade union movement was born out of the unity of workers and not out of separation. "Provisions like this existed nowhere in the world - it hurts the dignity of the Coloured and Indian workers, and the choice should be that of the workers assembled in the respective trade unions to decide. Division should not be dictated by the Government. If the workers choose to be divided it is their choice and they will consider the consequences. In most cases where the workers work together they have no prejudice to serve on the same committee. If this provision is not removed or relaxed it can have serious consequences for the minority of Whites and certain industries and goodwill will be replaced by ill-will. Section 48(3) of the Act will become redundant if African workers are recognised as employees in terms of the Act. Section 51(12) dealing with the exclusion of Bantu areas should also be removed", she said.

- **The Wage Act:** This Act was free from racial discrimination and the government recognized that representation on the Wage Board should be given to brown people and Indians. Scheepers was, however, not satisfied that the blacks were not given representation on the Wage Board. She said that the Wage Act created one Wage Board. With the expansion of industry the multitude of calls made on the Wage Board could not be dealt with speedily enough. She suggested that new machinery should be created with separate Wage Boards for various sectors of industry, trade and commerce, with a central reviewing body to ensure uniformity. Scheepers continued that the central reviewing body should have the additional power of fixing a national minimum wage applying to all workers covered by the Act.
- **The Unemployment Insurance Act:** This Act discriminated against African workers earning less than R10,50 per week. These persons could not contribute nor receive benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Scheepers maintained that it was a grave injustice

to retain its clause against the poorest and most needy. She stressed that no time should be wasted to do away with these issues of discrimination as detailed above. The two most explosive issues that the government had to deal with were the recognition of Africans as 'employees' in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act to enable them to have registered trade unions and the other was home ownership in the townships. She said that no one could be so naïve as to bluff themselves that black people in white areas were temporary sojourners. She believed that they would be there permanently and, that when blacks were allowed to buy their own homes, it would be a source of pride and stability to them. Pension and provident fund schemes operated by industrial councils had already assisted coloured and Indian workers and Scheepers said these councils could also assist black workers.<sup>155</sup>

In another address by Scheepers to the Institute of Personnel Management in Cape Town on 11 June 1976, she once again stressed the fact that if whites would accept the permanency of the black worker in the white areas, the first hurdle would have been crossed for a joint future. She added to this address that the white worker's mind had been poisoned over the years to consider the brown and black man as his enemy who was ready to grab his/her job. Scheepers explained that this belief was not true. In most cases, with small exceptions it could be proved that thousands of ordinary white workers were in far better positions than they had been before. Development had proved that as blacks moved into certain jobs, whites moved into higher positions in most cases.

Wherever Scheepers addressed people she always tried to inspire them to look beyond colour. Not only in public, but especially in Senate, she used every opportunity she received to fight for all workers, whatever their race or gender. Scheepers' first 'retirement' proved that she had fought to improve labour conditions and relations for all workers.

On 30 October 1972 Scheepers announced her resignation as President of the Garment Worker's Union of South Africa, a position she had held for more than 34 years. In addition to holding the post of president, she had been an active shop steward and committee member for 3½ years prior to her election as president in 1938.

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<sup>155</sup>

PV 414: Anna Scheepers Papers, File 2/1/2, July 1974-August 1975. Speeches, Statements and Messages. Speech delivered in the Senate by senator Anna EP Scheepers, February 1975.

The reaction of people to her decision to resign is noteworthy; from all the tributes paid to her it is clear that she had outstanding qualities of leadership, negotiation, policy making, administration and human and racial relations. One of the first acknowledgements of the contribution made by Scheepers came from **The Star**. It was an enormous feather in her cap when she was elected *The Star Woman of the Year* on 7 December 1972. This campaign, launched by the evening newspaper in Johannesburg, aroused tremendous public interest. A large number of public figures had been selected and members of the public, from all race groups, were asked to nominate their choice. It was an honour to the GWUSA that its president was presented with the *Woman of the Year* award.

Ms T Lemmer, the mayor of Johannesburg, made the announcement and described the reasons for awarding Scheepers this title as follows: "The Woman of the Year:

1. "Scheepers sets about her duties with vigour. She did that with unsurpassed thoroughness throughout her long career.
2. She is generous to the poor. For her it always meant the lowly and the underdog.
3. When she opens her mouth it is to speak wisely and loyalty is the theme of her teaching. Few people were ever more loyal than she was to the cause she stood for, her teachings bore much fruit and she counselled with great wisdom.
4. She is clothed in dignity and power. She always showed much dignity and the power she yielded became ever greater."

These attributes that Scheepers fulfilled as the **Star's** *Woman of the Year* were the characteristics, put in a nutshell, that she possessed that empowered her to lead the GWUSA for almost half a century.

On 23 January 1973 the Garment Worker's Union of SA bestowed the honour of President Emeritus on Anna Scheepers. Ms Johanna Cornelius, General Secretary of the GWUSA, in handing over to her the illuminated scroll, said: "This is a sad day for us in the Garment Worker's Union of SA, having to say farewell to our colleague and President, Anna Scheepers, after 38 years of close fellowship in our daily work in the common purpose of improving the working lives of garment workers." Cornelius continued her tribute by saying that under the capable leadership of Scheepers they could proudly record the following:

- 1) "26 thousand workers in the Transvaal clothing industry enjoyed the shortest work-week of industry in the Republic, it was 40 hours.
- 2) African women machinists, supervisors, etc., in the Transvaal clothing industry and other allied industries were amongst the highest paid African women workers in South Africa.
- 3) The provisions of the five Industrial Council agreements and three private hat workers' agreements, to which the GWUSA was the employee party, equally applied in wages and all working conditions to all races alike, including membership to the medical; sick pay, slack pay and provident funds.
- 4) The GWUSA had assisted in establishing the largest and best functioning independent African trade union in the Republic, the NUCW of SA, with whom there was a close liaison on all matters affecting the working conditions of over 30 thousand White, Brown and African workers.
- 5) The GWUSA was taking a leading part in the policy making of the largest trade union co-ordinating council - TUCSA- of which Scheepers was a Vice-President and Officer where she took an active part in national trade union affairs.
- 6) The GWUSA was on the fore-front of the biggest struggle the workers of South Africa had ever experienced which was to bring pressure upon the Government to amend its legislation to grant African workers recognition to belong to registered trade unions.
- 7) The GWUSA was an active and well-respected member of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation where Scheepers was the first General Council member representing Africa until October 1972."

Johanna Cornelius continued her tribute to Scheepers by saying that she was pleased to state that their farewell to Scheepers had been changed to a '*totsiens*', as Scheepers had agreed on spontaneous appeals from the members and union officials to offer her part-time services for short periods from time to time whenever called upon. Cornelius also announced that the National Executive Committee of the GWUSA had appointed Scheepers as part-time paid advisor and co-negotiator of the union. As such Scheepers continued to serve on the industrial councils, mainly for negotiating purposes and would attend the national yearly conferences of the union's divisional councils whenever she was available.<sup>156</sup>

It is of utmost importance to take notice of what was said about Scheepers at the three functions held respectively by the NUCWSA, the GWUSA and the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Transvaal). Various honours were bestowed on Scheepers that makes one realize what an important role she played in the uplifting of all workers.

In order to understand Scheepers' role that she played so that all workers could have a better life, some extracts of some of the tributes paid both in the speeches as well as through correspondence, will be given below:

- "There is not one who has given to others as Anna Scheepers has done - if all people gave each other in this way then South Africa would become a great country." **Mr JH Thomas, General Secretary, Industrial Council of the Clothing Industry (Tvl).**
- "Anna Scheepers has always stood with the African people. She has been our advisor and she was always prepared to open her heart to us." **Ms E Hlatywayo, former Senior Vice-President of the NUCWSA.**
- "Because of Anna Scheepers and the GWU, the African Shop Stewards know what the rights of workers are in the agreement." **Ms S Chitja, Secretary of the Knitwear Branch.**
- "Your record of active leadership of your union is extremely well-known internationally and I am sure that our colleagues throughout the world will be sorry to learn that the movement will be losing your services." **Mr Charles Ford, General Secretary, International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation.**
- "Anna Scheepers is to be remembered for her sincerity. Although she was primarily concerned with the betterment of all workers she was always aware of the problems of the employers." **Mr Lazarus, Chairman, Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association.**
- "She believed in and stood for the interest of all workers, irrespective of colour and race." **Adv. Festenstein, Chairman, Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Tvl).**
- "The work that Anna Scheepers has done, especially in fighting poverty amongst the workers is an incentive for the future labour movement." **Mr B Kater, Chairman of the Divisional Council of the No. 2 Branches.**
- "Die beginsels en spore wat daar staan is 'n monument vir die vakbondbeweging." **Mr L Scheepers, President, Vakbondraad van Suid-Afrika.**

One of the most memorable moments for Scheepers was when Mary Mogotsi, who for years had served tea and meals to the GWU staff, stepped forward on behalf of all the black workers, and handed over a present and thanked Scheepers with the following touching words: "You are our mother and now you are leaving."<sup>157</sup>

Scheepers, in thanking the organizations and people for their kind words and gifts of appreciation, made a number of pertinent observations. Her messages, that somehow stressed her vision that she had in 1973 for the clothing industry in particular, can be recorded in terms of the following points highlighted by Scheepers:

- "I believe that South Africa is a heritage that belongs to all of us. There is no virtue in colour. There is room in this great country if we preach brotherhood and extend the hand of co-operation.
- I hope that the moves towards the formation of African trade unions are not all talk. It is the duty of registered trade unions to organise all Africans in their separate trade unions and to co-operate with them.
- We must think about people, not race and colour - we must build bridges.
- I believe employers in the Transvaal clothing industry must give another thought to the appeal from the Garment Workers' Union for an increase in wages in order to compensate for the increase in the cost of living."<sup>158</sup>

The significance of the reaction to Scheepers' retirement was that the organizations and people with whom she had worked did not want to relinquish her. Garment workers, employers and trade unions could not conceive of continuing without her. Great relief and joy was therefore openly shown when Johanna Cornelius, General Secretary of the GWU, announced that Scheepers would still be available on a part-time basis when the union and the workers needed her. This decision of Scheepers to be available when required was taken when the members pleaded that she should give up her decision to retire.

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<sup>157</sup>

**Ibid.**

<sup>158</sup>

**Ibid.**

Why were the emotions so strong and why did tears flow so freely at these farewell functions of Scheepers? What was it that they were paying tribute to? They were undoubtedly paying tribute to a woman of great courage, determination and wisdom and above all, to a woman with a desire to serve her fellow men (and women!), be they of any race. And they were fitting tributes to a person who had sacrificed herself completely for the trade union movement and who had forgone her basic fulfilment as a woman. Scheepers fulfilled herself in the principles of the trade union movement and this was what people from all walks of life were paying tribute to - the spirit of trade unionism which found expression in her.

Small wonder that she had to face jealousy, hatred, maliciousness and animosity. These were some of the elements confronting her in her struggle to uphold the principles she had adopted when, as a young girl, she had started to work in a clothing factory. And the people she had served did not want her to go because of a deep concern that the spirit of trade unionism embodied in her would falter and die.

The deep-felt emotions shown by people, both at functions and privately, testified to the fact that all people in South Africa desired that the spirit of trade unionism should flourish and find expression. This was evident from the humblest tribute to the highest when the University of the Witwatersrand bestowed on Scheepers an honorary Doctor of Law degree. People were aware that trade unionism, as expressed through Scheepers, was essential for the salvation of South Africa which belonged to all people and not to a selected, privileged racial group. As Steve Scheepers, President of TUCSA, said: "Her principles and views are the only salvation for the workers of South Africa."<sup>159</sup>

There were of course other trade unionists in South Africa too who gave expression to trade unionism. But the task ahead was immense. A million workers in the manufacturing industry alone were clamouring to be led. The spirit of trade unionism as Scheepers practised it, had to emerge in many people. Scheepers accepted the fact that she was still required and she told African workers in a spontaneous statement that she would come to help them. The emerging forces from the unrepresented people had to be accommodated within the existing trade union and labour relations structure. Both employer organizations and the trade union establishment had to learn to share the decision-making process regarding wages and working conditions

which, up to 1973, they had usurped. They had to share it with the African workers. It was in this process of adjustment, accommodation and reconciliation that Scheepers still had a role to play - a definite role in the development of a labour movement in South Africa in harmony with the spirit of trade unionism she had practised.

In recognition of Scheepers' 38 years' service to the creation of sound labour relations in, and the development of the Transvaal clothing industry, the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Tvl.) conferred on 25 January 1973 the honour of life president on Scheepers. Another honour bestowed on her was by the Medical Benefit Society of the then Transvaal Clothing Industry in recognition of her desire to provide all garment workers with medical care.<sup>160</sup>

On 17 July 1973, a commemorative plaque at the Dental Clinic, West End House, was unveiled to record and acknowledge that this clinic would from then on be known as "The Anna Scheepers Clinic". Mr A Hirsoqwitz, the Chairman of the Medical Benefit Society for the Clothing Industry (Tvl.), said this tribute was paid to Scheepers because of her particular dedication to the Medical Benefit Society. She had been chairperson of the Management Committee since 1965 and had seen the society grow from the 3d or tickey contribution a week when only the services of a doctor and free medicine were in operation. He concluded his remarks by quoting from a letter (which had also been quoted earlier in this thesis) which Scheepers had written when she announced her retirement: "I have fought for many ideas which I hope will not be abandoned. Amongst the most important is the furthering of a better relationship between all peoples of South Africa." Mr Horwitz replied: "Those associated with Anna Scheepers over the past 38 years will certainly agree that the honours heaped upon her were well earned, and our purpose for being here today is to add another honour in naming after her this clinic which was opened in April 1967."<sup>161</sup> After Scheepers had thanked the Medical Benefit Society (MBS) for naming the clinic after her, she made an appeal to the Management of the MBS to consider spending a small percentage of its annual income on health education. She believed in the old saying that it is better to prevent a disease than to have to cure it.<sup>162</sup>

### 1.3.2 Senator Scheepers continues the struggle for all workers.

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<sup>160</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>161</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>162</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 10 August 1973.

Further honour for Scheepers was when in 1974 she was elected as Senator. This was no small achievement because it required the support of two political parties to secure her position. Her standing as a leader in the community and the respect with which she was held by all sections of the South African society was reflected in the decision which led to her appointment.

In the Senate Scheepers said "Ek is 'n VP" (Verenigde Party), when Senator Loock questioned her political philosophy. Loock then responded by saying: "Sy is 'n VP 50/50. Een perd, een haas. Soos die Skotsman wat die vleispasteitjies gemaak het. Hy het gesê: 'Fifty, Fifty. Een perd, een haas'. Sy is die Progressiewe haas en die ander deel van haar is die VP-perd." Scheepers didn't hesitate to respond thus to this remark: "And a winner all the time!"<sup>163</sup>

Within hours of the announcement that Scheepers had been elected as Senator, letters and telegrams started to arrive at the GWU offices. Some of the messages of congratulations were as follows:

Mr Harry Oppenheimer: "There could not have been a better choice. I am so glad that you will be able in this new sphere to carry on your important public work."

Mr M Shein, Dugsons: "I have no doubt that this is an honour that is well deserved, and long overdue, and may your entry into the field of politics be just as successful as it has been in the trade union."

Bobby Phillips, Acme Clothing: "We are sure you will show the same integrity in your new position as you always have done in the Garment Workers' Union. After knowing you for 41 years I can honestly say you have always done your utmost to see justice is carried out."

J Espie, TUCSA (Natal Area Division): "Both I and the Division wish to offer our congratulations and good wishes to you on being adopted as a prospective Senator. To me this is only fitting after your long life of struggle for the underdog and could not be awarded to a better person, knowing as I do the physical and mental efforts you have put in, in the struggle."

"S Ariefdiën, NUCAW President - "It goes without saying that the worker now has a champion in the 'lions' den' and we can now tackle our tasks with renewed hope and vigour."

<sup>163</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat**, 4 October 1974, col. 2568-9.

At this stage (1974) South Africa was entering a new era of labour relations. The Natal strikes and recognition across the negotiation table given to the National Union of Clothing Workers had heralded new vistas for the South African labour movement. Furthermore the attention paid by the International Labour Movement to the plight of the African workers had to result in fundamental changes in the rights of all workers, not only the African. It was therefore appropriate that at such a movement the voice of the workers could be heard in Parliament. All garment workers and the officials of the GWUSA and the NUCWSA were sure that Scheepers' clear decisive thinking, matched with her diplomacy, would undoubtedly assist her in her new responsibility as senator. They all wished her well and offered her strength in her struggle to ensure that justice came to all workers, irrespective of race.<sup>164</sup>

Scheepers, as senator, had selected as expected, the field of labour as her main concern. She said: "My aim is to try to fight for the workers and trade unions. It will be on a different plane to what I stood for and achieved through the Union activities or the TUCSA conferences. I will now bring the principles followed here to this important legislative body of the country." Scheepers also served on a number of parliamentary groups, besides Labour, of the United Party. These were: Pension and Social Welfare, Economic Affairs, Coloured Affairs, Finance and Foreign Affairs.<sup>165</sup>

As a result of the death of Johanna Cornelius, the General Secretary of the GWUSA on 21 June 1974, Scheepers' retirement as President of the GWUSA was of short duration. In order to remain in touch with the trade union movement in its fight for all workers, she could not turn down the plea of the garment workers to stand for President of the GWUSA for another term. "I could not turn down the plea of the committee and other members as I could not see my life's work suffer. The garment workers had the greatest share of my life and I am prepared to share it with them for as long as I can. To me the Union is my home where I have spent hard days, but also fruitful and happy days."<sup>166</sup>

Scheepers, who had always understood what the main issue was in any situation, found that with her determination and conviction, she could very soon extract from the new challenges she faced what was possible, what was right and what was just. She managed to serve on all the

<sup>164</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 14 June 1974.

<sup>165</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 1 August 1974.

<sup>166</sup> **Ibid.**

committees of the clothing and industrial councils besides the continual demand on her time for the United Party activities. In her position as senator she carried on the work on behalf of the workers as she had always done.

From her speeches in the Senate, it is clear that Scheepers really fought for all workers irrespective of colour, for gender equality, dignity and self-determination. "Ek veg vir almal in Suid-Afrika. Vir goeie rasseverhoudinge sal ek veg... En hier wil ek bly en hier wil ek sterf. Daarom wil ek sorg dat hierdie land nie net beveilig word vir Swart werkers nie, maar vir ons almal om hier saam te woon."<sup>167</sup>

Another very striking comment made by Scheepers in the Senate just stresses how determined she was to stick to her belief that "a worker is a worker - irrespective of colour", when she said: "We are very richly in with gold and we know what it means to us, but we also have Brown and Black gold which we do not utilize ... I will continue to speak up for them until such time as they have a voice of their own in this house."<sup>168</sup> With this last comment it is obvious that Scheepers realized that whenever brown and black workers would be accommodated in the structure of South Africa's economy and as economic units, they also had to be accommodated politically.

In 1974 Scheepers called for the establishment of a department of housing. She commented in the Senate on the activities of the Department of Community Development and the shortage of housing. She made a very relevant point that it is only when people can own homes or occupy homes of a high standard that they will develop pride. She pointed out that people who were forced to live in shanties could not be blamed if there was a high crime rate. "We are causing frustration among the non-White people, the Coloured and Indian people, because when they have saved up, they would like to buy a home, but they cannot buy a home ... There are not sufficient townships for them." In her concluding remarks she suggested that the Department of Community Development look into the question of accommodation for unmarried workers. She recalled how before World War II the Vrouefederasie had built hostels for the young Afrikaner girls who came from the countryside to look for employment in the towns. She then asked whether similar hostels could not be built for coloured workers.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat.** (Eerste Sitting – Vierde Senaat). Vol. II, 8 October 1974, col. 2752, 2756.

<sup>168</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat.** (Tweede Sitting – Vierde Senaat). Vol. II, 20 May 1975, col. 3113.

<sup>169</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 6 September 1974.

Scheepers' life and love revolved around the trade union movement and her greatest achievements had hinged on her deep-rooted concern for a healthy labour force reflected in her demand and subsequent success of having all workers registered under one umbrella department, that of the Department of Manpower and Utilisation.<sup>170</sup>

Although housing or the availability of land was a burning issue with all population groups, the Indian and coloured population groups were particularly hard hit. In terms of the Group Areas Act no sufficient land was set aside even for people who could afford to buy a stand and build their own homes. Based on statistics provided by the Minister of Planning in February 1973, on hectares of land allocated to whites, coloureds and Indians, Scheepers said on 12 June 1975 in the Senate that these statistics proved to show the imbalance in land allocation to the different population groups and that the Department of Planning could very easily be accused of discrimination, because she felt that these statistics proved that the blacks did not receive their fair share of land.<sup>171</sup> Another important matter for Scheepers was that Africans who were permanently in white areas had to have home ownership rights in their townships. This she believed would bring pride and stability.<sup>172</sup>

In October 1974 Scheepers tabled a motion in Senate calling for a commission of inquiry. She said: "I would like the honourable Minister of Labour to hear evidence from interested organisations and persons on the desirability of amending the Industrial Conciliation Act to include African in the term 'employee'. Africans are not prepared to accept work committees as a substitute for trade unions." Scheepers supported her motion with a well-reasoned and excellently researched speech. She pointed out that labour relations in South Africa had reached a serious and delicate situation. Furthermore the shortage of skilled workers meant that by 1980 two million skilled persons had to come from coloured and black sectors of the population.

Scheepers also warned that the coloured and Indian people were bitter and frustrated. She added: "They are bitter about their second-class citizenship and as workers their second-class trade union membership. If they happened to be members of a mixed trade union, the Minister had the power to grant exemption from Section 8(3) of the Industrial Conciliation Act for them to serve

<sup>170</sup> **The Argus**, 12 June 1980.

<sup>171</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat**. (Tweede Sitting – Vierde Senaat). Deel II, 12 June 1975, col. 4468.

on the executive committee of their unions. But the Minister has refused such applications so many times." She warned the Minister of Labour that if he was not sympathetic in regard to exemption, the coloured workers might decide to deregister their trade unions and join African workers. This would be detriment to the white workers as they could stand to lose benefits.

In further support of her motion requesting a commission of inquiry, Scheepers said that the Bantu Labour Regulations Act which had been hastily passed in 1973 was a failure. A further 300 strikes would not have occurred if this Act 'worked'. Works committees were sectional and would prove to cause strikes rather than prevent them. "Failure to encourage responsible labour representation meant trouble", she added.<sup>173</sup>

She pointed out that African trade unions existed and continued to grow. She asked that they be brought into the Industrial Conciliation Act so that they had obligations and could have proper control over their finances.

Scheepers also told the Senate about the Transvaal Clothing Industry Training College that faced problems, because education was given on a mixed basis. She warned of the loss to the industry if the college had to close down and asked that the agreements made by the industrial councils be extended to the decentralized areas. She also undertook to ensure that concessions would be made from the laid down rates.

In concluding her long speech Scheepers said: "I asked the Honourable Minister to consider the suggestions that I have made from this side of the House as a serious attempt to assist the economy to bring about better industrial and race relations, and to build a better, happier and secure South Africa for its entire people."<sup>174</sup>

In February 1976 she once again made the same suggestions in the Senate to bring about better industrial and race relations: "*Ons moet brûe bou en nie versperrings nie ... Ons moet die vernedering wat mense ondergaan, probeer verwyder, om 'n regverdige samelewing op te bou en 'n land waarin al die mense hier gelukkig saam kan woon. Ek voel nie ek, en ek meen nie enigeen van ons hier nie, voel dat hy in 'n ander land 'n bestaan kan maak nie. Ek wil nie graag in 'n*

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 29 November 1974.

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Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat**. (Tweede Sitting – Vierde Senaat). Vol. II, 20 May 1975, col. 3108.

*ander land woon nie. Ek meen dit geld ook vir die Nie-Blankes. Ons moet saam bou en saam leef. Laat ons in vrede saamleef en 'n ekonomie en 'n samelewing opbou waarop ons baie trots sal wees. Hierdie is ons tuiste - die tuiste van Blanke, Bruin en Swart Afrikane.*"<sup>175</sup> ("We must build bridges not barricades ... We must aim to remove our people's humiliation, to build a fair society and a country in which all people can live together harmoniously. I do not believe that any of us here feel that we can survive in another country. I do not really want to live in another country. This is also valid for the Non-Whites. We have to build and live together. Let us live together in peace and build an economy as well as a society we can be proud of. This is our home – the home of the White, Brown and Black Africans.")

A few days later she also said in the Senate that one could not allow that hatred, false ideologies, an attitude of racial superiority, prejudice, ignorance; fear and intolerance hamper the economic growth in South Africa.<sup>176</sup>

Scheepers' outspokenness often made her a target in Senate debates. Unperturbed she continued to give her views on job reservation, the recognition of black trade unions and the training of black workers.

On the vital issue of job reservation (Section 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act) Scheepers said that it had brought incalculable harm to South Africa. Not only had it bedevilled race relations internally, but it had been the strongest weapon of the opponents and enemies of South Africa abroad.<sup>177</sup>

From her first to her last day in Senate, Scheepers fought for all workers and the scrapping of all discriminatory laws. The following extract from a speech made by her in Senate is one such an example: "*Onder die kors kook die Swartmense van haat teenoor die Blankes met betrekking tot hierdie soort onreg wat teen hulle gepleeg word. (Thousands of blacks lost their jobs due to the Government application of its discriminatory laws). Die toepassing van hierdie Wet (Section 3 of the Environment Planning Act and Job Reservation) sal 'n nuwe hoogtepunt van frustrasie, bitterheid en haat veroorsaak. Wie sal nie diegene haat en verag wat jou jou lewensbestaan ontnem nie? Daar is geen ander werkers nie, maar net as gevolg van die pigmentasie van jou*

<sup>174</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 October 1974.

<sup>175</sup> Debatte van die Senaat, Republiek van Suid-Afrika, 17 February 1976, Sensuurdebat, col. 66.

<sup>176</sup> **Hansard**, 25 February 1976, col. 402.

*vel kan jy nie daardie werk doen nie ... Hierdie regering dryf die Swartmense in die arms van die kommuniste ... As 'n mens mense hulle werk, hulle lewensbestaan, ontnem, sal Soweto 'n vulkaan word.*"<sup>178</sup>("Beneath the surface the Black people are seething with hatred towards the Whites because of injustices like these committed against them. The practical application of this Legislation (Section 3 of the Environment Planning Act and Job Reservaion) will be a new boiling point for frustration and bitterness. Who would not hate those who take away your right to live freely? Even if there are no workers available for a particular job, it will be denied to you only because of the colour of your skin ... The government is driving the Black people towards Communism ... If someone robs these people of their work and daily life, Soweto will become a volcano.")

The garment industry had been the first victim of the Physical Planning Act. This and the recession had been responsible for the closing down of dozens of small factories which gave employment to thousands of African, coloured and Indian workers. She said the government had rejected the large number of appeals made in the past to scrap the legislation and to leave it to employers to decide in what ratio they wanted to employ their workers. This Act was a bad means of promoting decentralization. It merely transferred employment from one area to another and at worst it depressed employment.<sup>179</sup>

She sounded the warning to government to scrap the Physical Planning Act or face "disastrous economic consequences." Scheepers said that not only was the legislation crippling development in certain industries, but it was adding considerably to black unemployment. The aim of the Act was ideological - to try to force development away from the white areas to border and homeland areas. Scheepers said unemployment was mounting to alarming levels and greater numbers of blacks were coming into the labour market. It was incredible that in such circumstances the government was pursuing a policy that restricted the creation of new jobs. "In a country like South Africa social and political stability is based firmly on enough jobs for all who want to work and the scrapping of all racial earning barriers", she said.<sup>180</sup>

According to Scheepers it was meaningless to open the Nico Malan Theatre to blacks and establish international hotels when most blacks could not afford to go to these places. "What is

<sup>177</sup> SA Financial Gazette. Labour and the babel of voices, 23 September 1977.

<sup>178</sup> Hansard, 11 May 1976, col. 2131; Evening Post, 8 August 1977.

<sup>179</sup> Evening Post, 8 August 1977.

meaningful is that they want to have job opportunities and gain permission to join industries of their choice when they deserve it."<sup>181</sup> Moreover: "I have no objection to decentralisation, particularly if new industries start, but I am bitterly opposed to compulsion, which ignores economic realities and consequently defeat the very objectives that it was intended to achieve," she added.

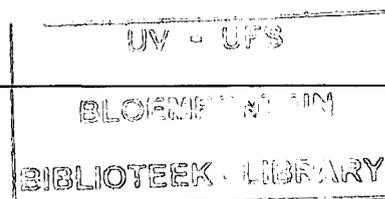
Scheepers also told the senators that it is imperative that the black man/woman must realize that the white man/woman is their friend and not their enemy. She said that whites also had to realize that they were the minority concerning population figures. It was important to her to build "bridges" between black and white. She repeated this view many times in different speeches in the Senate and elsewhere. She also said that she would not make any excuses for trying to find sympathy from the blacks.

Scheepers' frankness also stemmed from a determination to make all black and coloured people realize that there were white people, particularly Afrikaners, who would fight for justice for them. "As long as I am in the position to do so, I will state my views which will be against National Policy unless they change it or allow the Prime Minister to come forward with a new dispensation."<sup>182</sup>

In the following extract from a speech made by her at the Sunnyside Park Hotel on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1975, Scheepers clearly stated her anti-National Party feelings:

"For over thirty years the Nationalist Party pumped racial hatred into our White people, disregarding future consequences in a multi-racial country. We all think today that the HNP is an extreme and reactionary Party. But those of us who had been at the receiving end of this type of policy know for a fact that the HNP is following the policy of the Nationalist Party during and after World War II. This can easily be established if you look up their '*swart gevaar*' leaflets and articles in the press." How they were going to undo the damage they have caused, Scheepers did not know.

180 **Ibid.**  
181 **Natal Mercury**, 24 September 1977.  
182 **Ibid.**



"The editorials of **Rapport, Beeld, Vaderland** and **Transvaler** are read by the counted few; it is still the words uttered from the political platforms of Middelburg and Gesina that are heard by the masses. That is where the voices of moderation must be heard and understood.

"The United Party has always been the party that stood for moderation, but in the violence that has been the scene of Africa for the past two decades, appeals to moderation have fallen on deaf ears. There are people and parties who are working for the demise of the United Party. I do not say we are not guilty of some errors, but who can cast the first stone. But it was this United Party who fought for freedom, which fought to maintain the few rights the Coloured people enjoyed and I am sure if it had been in power we could have faced the future with more confidence. Today there is fear, there is suspicion, and there is even hatred. How can you survive under such circumstances? Without the United Party, South Africa will be poorer. Let us hope the setbacks are something of the past and that we have reached a turning point for the better."<sup>183</sup>

This extract of her speech was quoted here to underline Scheepers' loyalty to the principles she believed in. She had felt the wrath of political opponents, particularly the NP, with whom she had crossed swords long before they came to power in 1948. In the period before World War II the grey-shirted Nazi sympathizers, violently opposed to trade unions, often tried to break up her GWU meetings. They called Scheepers and her GWU organizers communists and 'kaffirboeties' for organizing non-white workers. Her union's battles with the NP continued after it had come into power. An attempt was also made to ban Scheepers from public activity for being a communist, but they couldn't prove that she was a communist.

A feather in Scheepers' cap was the final abolition of Section 3 of the Environmental Planning Act after repeated pleas, pointing out the restriction it had on the black industrial labour force. She led four deputations to ministers, presented memoranda and eventually in March 1979 it was scrapped. "The Government could have caused the biggest upheaval of all in Soweto had they continued with that Section 2 which kept people out of work when work was available for them. In this way a cancer was removed from our legislation, a cancer that caused a lot of harm", Scheepers commented.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>183</sup> PV 414: Anna Scheepers, 2/1/2 (July 1974-August 1975).

<sup>184</sup> **The Star**, 19 June 1980; Republic of South Africa. **Senate Debates**. (Third Session- Sixth Parliament). No.

In an article in the **Sunday Times** in 1980 it was stated that government agents and informers were urged to take special note of union leaders who took part in politics or made statements that criticized or supported the government policy. They were asked to watch "any activity that could have a bearing on State security", for example incitement of planning to strike, attempts to affiliate with unions already suspect, or the propagation of ideas that had a security context, and any visits or speeches by visitors from overseas.<sup>185</sup>

Information was also to be gathered on union personalities whose activities were aimed at 'embarrassing' another trade union or the government, those who planned or made overseas visits and the contacts they made on such visits, and those who showed any 'exceptional' interest in politics.<sup>186</sup>

Scheepers quoted extracts from this article from the **Sunday Times** in the Senate. She said she was intrigued to read about the snooping going on in the Trade Union Council of South Africa. It was reported that the snooping was aimed at certain trade union leaders, but in particular at Arthur Grobbelaar, the General Secretary of TUCSA and herself. She said she presumed that they were being watched because they always spoke so openly. It was reported by this newspaper that TUCSA had come into disfavour with the government ... when it campaigned for official recognition for black trade unions and equal pay for equal work.<sup>187</sup>

She was not in the least afraid if people wanted to spy on her. What she was afraid of, however, was this: "The Government had its informers and, in many cases, paid informers. In order to earn their keep these informers were going to say what their masters wanted them to say. They might make false statements that would lead to her being persecuted and banned without having any access to the courts of law." Scheepers told the senators that she did not want to be spied upon. She was not a traitor but a law-abiding citizen. "If anything, I have made a greater contribution to industrial and racial peace in this country than all the honourable Senators opposite together", she concluded.<sup>188</sup>

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13 (Weekly Edition), 15 June 1979, col. 2620.

<sup>185</sup> **Sunday Times**, 17 February 1980.

<sup>186</sup> **The Citizen**, 25 August 1982.

<sup>187</sup> Republic of South Africa. **Senate Debates**. (Fourth Session – Sixth Parliament). No. 1 (Weekly edition), 5 March 1980, col. 104.

The report compiled after the 'surveillance' accused unions and their leaders of holding potentially dangerous views. Ironically some of these views such as opposition to job reservation and recognition of black unions had in the meantime been taken up in government policy.<sup>189</sup> In an interview with **The Citizen** she admitted to being a conservative, but insisted her views had not altered over the years. "What was radical then is conservative today - I can't see where I've changed my attitudes", she commented.<sup>190</sup>

When the existence of the Senate came to an end in 1980 she said: "I am not a good party politician because I can't build up the same kind of enthusiasm to remain in the run for re-election but even though I realise that life practically depends on politics nowadays I can only be an interested onlooker."<sup>191</sup>

Scheepers' personality and drive as well as her love for her trade/union work and commitment towards all the workers of South Africa ensured that she did not become only an onlooker. She kept on making a stand for workers as a leader of TUCSA and of GWUSA.

In an address to students at the then Rand Afrikaans University on the role of politics in the union movement she said that politics should not play a role in the union movement. Trade union movements could pressure the government for many things like adequate housing for everyone as unions did not represent any political party.<sup>192</sup>

Scheepers suggested several labour policies for the 1980s. These included industrial relations training for unions and management. Although Scheepers' achievements in the Senate read like a grocery checklist, it was on 5 March 1980 that everything that underlined her beliefs came to the fore during the Censure Debate. In it she pointed out that the 31 long years of apartheid in South Africa contributed to the fostering of terrorism, which grows when there is dissatisfaction among the population. She repeatedly stated in Senate that one had to negotiate when one was strong and not when one's position had been weakened. "We must not wait each time until there are riots and bloodshed before we make concessions. Those people who are subjected to a lack of

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**Ibid.**

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**Sunday Times**, 17 February 1980.

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**The Citizen**, 22 April 1984.

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**The Star**, 19 June 1980.

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**The Citizen**, 25 August 1982.

job opportunities, inadequate housing and poor transport services build up grievances and it is among these people that the agitators can go to work", Scheepers added.<sup>193</sup>

Articulation, ardour and alacrity were the three A's for Scheepers' Senate record. For six years, from 1974 to 1980, in an untiring and unruffled manner she brought home the critical need for a strong and satisfied labour force, equal pay for the same job and separate taxation for a married woman and her husband. "It was laborious at the best of times but I think I've changed a couple of views. Mainly because by remaining persistent on issues I felt strongly about, people began seeing things my way. Now looking back I can even detect a noticeable change in the Government's attitude", Scheepers told Liz van den Niewenhof of **The Star** in an interview in Cape Town, on 19 June 1980, after the Senate's 70-year existence had come to an end.

### 1.3.3 Scheepers' reaction to the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions

The Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions and Scheepers' reaction to their recommendations are of importance. It is vital to briefly give some background information on these two commissions because their recommendations were exactly the principles that Scheepers had fought for all her years as leading trade unionist in South Africa.

As a guide to understand the two commissions, perhaps the following is helpful: They are about what Wiehahn did to black labour at work and Riekert did to black labour before and after work.<sup>194</sup> The Wiehahn Commission was seen by many as a blueprint for labour relations in South Africa. It provided grounds for optimism. The Commission investigated 14 acts of Parliament which impinged on the advancement of black workers.<sup>195</sup>

The proposed system was the brainchild of Professors SM Swart, J Piron and W Bendix of the Institute of Labour Relations of the University of South Africa. The Institute had been launched by Professor Nic Wiehahn before he became adviser to the Minister of Labour and Head of Inquiry into labour legislation.

The model provided for:

<sup>193</sup> **The Star**, 19 June 1980.

<sup>194</sup> Sheena Duncan, **South African Labour Bulletin**, 5(4), November 1979, p. 74.

- Explicit anti-discriminatory measures, including the abolition of job reservation.
- Explicit recognition of the basic rights of workers - rights to associate to bargain, to withhold labour, to be protected and to be trained.
- The prohibition of "closed-shop" stipulations (restricting employment to union members) in terms of the right not to associate.
- An integrated social security system, including medical schemes, unemployment insurance, pension funds (not necessarily state schemes) and others.
- Co-ordinated training in industrial relations for all races.
- Anti-victimization measures providing for, say, a full year's wage to a worker dismissed for exercising his right to associate in a committee or trade union.
- Statutory minimum standards on matters such as hours of work.
- The Industrial Conciliation Act and the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act would be pulled together in one 'Labour Relations Act' for all races.
- Workers would be free to have trade unions of their choice - multiracial or otherwise.
- But all trade unions in a particular industry would appoint representatives to an 'industry union' to meet employer organizations on a (national) industrial council for the industry.
- Inter-union negotiations and caucusing would determine how individual unions would be represented on the 'industry union' and what joint tactics they should adopt.
- The industrial councils would formulate minimum wages and conditions of employment.
- All trade unions in an 'industry union' would have to be registered, and minority rights would have to be protected in multiracial unions.
- Unions would not be permitted political affiliations and would be subject to impartial auditing of books.
- At factory level, workers would elect representatives irrespective of race, gender, religion or type of work performed.
- These representatives would form a 'plant committee' with employer representatives in a factory.
- 'Plant committees' would have no official connection with trade unions. They would negotiate wages and working conditions to improve on those negotiated on industrial councils.

- All agreements, at plant or industry level, would have force of law. Non-compliance would be a criminal offence.
- The existence of an industry agreement would not preclude a lawful strike at plant level. But the right to strike would not be unbridled at either industry or plant level.
- A 'federation' of industry unions would join employer and government representatives in a 'National Labour Council' to advise the government and lay down minimum wages for unorganized sectors such as agriculture and domestic service.<sup>196</sup>

As President of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa and New Republic Party (NRP) chief Senate spokesman on Labour, Scheepers welcomed the recommendations as "a major and historic step forward in South Africa's labour relations".<sup>197</sup> In a statement in Cape Town, Scheepers said it was particularly gratifying to one who had worked over the past 40 years for many of these recommendations.

The existing trade union movement, according to her, could provide an invaluable infrastructure and could play an important role in leadership and training of black unions. Scheepers continued by saying that the trade union movement in South Africa had always acted with great responsibility and this would serve to dispel fears of unions going political. She added that if legislation followed the Wiehahn recommendations, it would be of tremendous importance to South Africa's international position. Improved relations with the trade union movement in democratic countries would serve to diminish South Africa's isolation. This would also lead to improved foreign investment and result in increased employment in South Africa itself.<sup>198</sup>

Objectivity had been one of Scheepers' trade marks, enabling her to give praise where it was due, for example with the Wiehahn and Riekert Reports. She said although the report was not one hundred per cent, it was excellent. Although the professor had no direct connection with the labour movement as such, he had a wide knowledge of the work situation and industrial relations. Wiehahn listed South Africa's labour priorities as:

- One labour system without discrimination or paternalism.
- State and employer recognition of trade unions for all workers and a national programme to provide training in trade unionism.

<sup>196</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 29 July 1997.

<sup>197</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 29 November 1978.

<sup>198</sup> The Citizen, 2 May 1979.

- Research in labour relations which should be expanded and co-ordinated to prevent duplication.
- The development of a conflict-handling system with emphasis on measures such as bargaining, consultation and dialogue.

Wiehahn also said that "trade union training is not only no longer unavoidable - it has become essential".<sup>199</sup> Change was vital in the South African labour system, and in his view the appointment of the commission had signified the end of the first century of labour relations in South Africa. Scheepers agreed wholeheartedly that if a black trade union movement was not trained by the existing trade union leadership who had an experience and understanding of South Africa, then 'splinter' movements could easily fall prey to people who did not put the interests of trade unionism first. She also agreed that legal and recognized unions for blacks were long overdue and she was glad that the commission had paid serious attention to this aspect of the labour scene. Furthermore she said that the discrimination which appeared in almost all labour legislation should be repealed immediately, and she added that it was no good arguing there was no discrimination.<sup>200</sup>

Scheepers, as the New Republic Party chief Senate spokesperson on Labour, stated in the Senate: "I think the report of the Wiehahn Commission completely vindicated our views, and the policy we have advocated ... the findings of the Wiehahn Commission were completely in accordance with the policy we have always advocated."<sup>201</sup>

Scheepers recalled how she had told a meeting of shop stewards in the garment industry that the advancement of black workers did not mean the replacement of white, coloured and Asian workers. "We expect the recommendations of the commissions to give greater freedom to Black workers. It would be madness at this critical stage in our economic and political history to reject any recommendations which permit the Black man to make a better use of his potential industrial skills."<sup>202</sup>

<sup>199</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 29 July 1977.

<sup>200</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>201</sup> Republic of South Africa. **Senate Debates**. (Fourth Session – Sixth Parliament). No 1 (Weekly edition), 5 March 1980, col. 104

<sup>202</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 29 November 1978.

She was equally pleased with the appointment of the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry into labour legislation as with the appointment of the one man Commission of Inquiry into legislation affecting the utilisation of manpower, in the person of Dr Piet Riekert, the Prime Minister's economic adviser at the time. She said: "I welcome this development as I was very disappointed when the Wiehahn Commission was not briefed to review all the laws which in fact affect the working lives of our workers." Scheepers also said: "It is an anomaly that a law like the Environmental Planning Act should affect workers' lives yet not fall under the control of the Department of Labour. Now that it is to be reviewed along with other legislation I hope there will be a recommendation to scrap Section 6 which is detrimental to our industry and workers. It is to be hoped that when an economic upswing comes in the economy, our industry should be in a free position to organise with whatever efficient way it desires, with labour available so that it should be able to provide the maximum benefit to the maximum number of people."<sup>203</sup>

The Riekert Commission which dealt mainly with the strictures on the mobility of black labour, reported at the end of September 1978. Of particular importance to the clothing industry were the recommendations made concerning the Environmental Planning Act, the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Employees' In-Service Training Act. The Riekert Commission's recommendations were far reaching. The commission in its recommendations clearly spelt out the need of training for black workers, not as blacks, but first and foremost as workers. Such recommendation was applauded by right-thinking blacks like Lucy Mvubelo and by trade unionists like Scheepers, who noted repeatedly that South Africa was subject to shortages of 'skilled' manpower. Employers, workers and unionist leaders like Scheepers and Mvubelo were relieved that the Environmental Planning Act had been set aside. As the Riekert Commission pointed out, the enforcement of Section 3 of the Act had had a detrimental effect on the clothing industry in the important Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal complex. The section had created artificial unemployment - so much so that the clothing industry had lost over 5 000 workers during the period 1976 to 1978.<sup>204</sup>

Scheepers as the NRP's spokesman of Labour in the Senate, said that where the Riekert Commission had recommended that Section 3 of the Environmental Planning Act had to be repealed, she believed that the whole Act should have been repealed. It was not only the cause of

<sup>203</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 26 August 1977.

<sup>204</sup> To the Point, 6 July 1979.

complete disruption in industry, but also caused the insolvency of employers. Scheepers also believed that the Act was a major cause of the high inflation rate.<sup>205</sup>

She told the reporter of the **Natal Mercury** (press cutting, s.a.) that the government had given the GWU permission to hold mixed executive, general and shop-steward meetings. This led her to believe the government intended to grant full trade union rights to workers of all races.

Scheepers said that "TUCSA was a very loyal organisation which had done and continued to do the Republic tremendous service". She said that many events had shown that she and her colleagues in TUCSA were at least 30 years ahead of government thinking. The Wiehahn and Riekert reports completely supported what TUCSA had been advocating for years. The government had to dismantle all its misdeeds over the years. If the government had listened to TUCSA it would not have to import immigrants to fill jobs and would already be well on the way in creating a black middle-class. Scheepers warned the government that if it did not allow people of all races to advance economically at a sufficient rate they would explode politically. If the government continued with its present policy SA would have riot upon riot and some bloodshed.<sup>206</sup> "Die geskiedenis het al bewys dat vakbonde en werkers die arbeidsveld gebruik as kanaal vir hul politieke energie. Dis ongesond" ("History has proven that trade unions and workers use the labour arena as a channel for political energy. This is unhealthy"), she added.

For a brief period, the report of the Wiehahn Commission raised hopes of real reform in South Africa. The government's white paper soon largely dispelled this illusion and the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill shattered it entirely.

#### **1.3.4 Scheepers' struggle for the recognition of the dignity of labour for all workers to participate in the determination of their conditions of employment**

Scheepers also claimed that she had fought for the recognition of the dignity of labour for all workers and the right of all workers to participate in the determination of their conditions of employment.

<sup>205</sup>

**Volkstem**, 3 July 1979.

<sup>206</sup>

**The Argus**, 6 March 1980.

The **Oxford Advanced Dictionary** defines the dignity of labour as 'quality that earns or deserves respect; true worth.' From what had already been written in this chapter there is no doubt that the claims that Scheepers made can be justified when considering all her achievements as leader of the GWUSA, TUCSA and as senator. She believed it was essential that the dignity of workers as human beings were recognized and this meant giving them a say in matters affecting their working conditions.

Scheepers fought for many years for the recognition that all workers, black, white, coloured and Asian, are human beings with dignity, rights and obligations. All workers, irrespective of colour, had to have a share in the welfare of the country. She always stressed not only the rights but also the responsibilities that all workers have. It is these responsibilities that give workers dignity - the dignity that is inherent in every thinking human being. This dignity gives them rights - not the least to decide on their own actions and own future within the framework of natural law, if not statute law. When dignity is denied, trouble will be experienced.<sup>207</sup>

Scheepers and the GWUSA were concerned that it was not enough to give people work and promote them to more skilled occupations. Blacks, she realized, were not interested in what could be done for them, but were interested in what they could do for themselves and their country. The wage gap between white and African earnings was due to the fact that many of the Labour Acts did not give the African worker elementary negotiating machinery to improve their position. As it had been already discussed in detail earlier, Scheepers pleaded as leader of the GWUSA and TUCSA as well as senator that authorities should bring about change and concede legitimate requests before it was forced through pressure to do so.<sup>208</sup>

The government, employers and trade unionists had to be awakened to the dangers eminent in unemployment and underemployment of the vast majority of the population which in times of economic set-backs could lead to upheavals, strikes and chaos for South Africa. She said a complete change of approach by the white worker towards the black worker was a priority. For the GWUSA this was no difficult task, because since inception, its policy was that all workers irrespective of race should be granted the right to work, the right to belong to a trade union, equal pay and equal opportunities. This was proved by the close liaison with the African Union, and the NUCW. Under the leadership of Scheepers the GWUSA wanted and worked for a free trade

<sup>207</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 March 1977.

<sup>208</sup> **Ibid.**

union unfettered by employer influences. They always believed in the inherent rights of human dignity for all races.<sup>209</sup>

Many of the acts against which Scheepers fought as discussed earlier in this chapter, violated the dignity and individuality of man. Without trade unions and trade union leaders like Scheepers and her contemporaries acting as watchdogs, changes in legislation which covered factories, shops and other places of work could not be brought about. Without trade unions and strong trade union leaders, the dignity of the worker could not be upheld. In an article in the **Garment Worker** Scheepers was quoted to say, "A man without a job is not a man."<sup>210</sup> This might be an unfair statement, but if thought is given to it, the truth will become clear. If individuals do not work, they cannot earn a living. They therefore cannot buy the necessary food and other goods for their families. And on another level, the unemployed cannot express themselves. They cannot experience a sense of achievement. Their self-respect is undermined and they become dependent on the charity of others. People without a sense of purpose are then reduced to a state of dependence in which human rights and dignity are most of the time ignored.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Scheepers fought for the dignity of labour for all workers and the right of all workers to participate in the determination of their conditions of employment. One has to agree to what was earlier said by the mayor of Johannesburg, Ms J Lemmer: "She is clothed in dignity and power. She always showed much dignity and the power she wielded became ever greater."<sup>211</sup> She had self-respect and respected others and everybody with whom she came into contact, respected her. She did not fear to contradict and be contradicted, she feared only the loss of her dignity as a human being and the loss of dignity forced upon others. That is why she fought discriminatory laws so fearlessly.

### 1.3.5 Scheepers' struggle for the equality of women in all spheres.

Another ideal that Scheepers claimed she fought for was complete equality for women in all respects. Considering everything that had been written so far about Scheepers, she certainly sounds like a super career woman and one would expect that she was a feminist and advocate of Women's Liberation. She was nothing of the sort. In an interview with a **Star** reporter she said:

<sup>209</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 30 November 1973.

<sup>210</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 20 October 1972.

<sup>211</sup> **The Star**, 7 December 1972.

"I'm no feminist, but it galls me to see men who consider themselves superior. I advocate equal pay for equal work regardless of gender or colour of skin."<sup>212</sup>

There are many articles to support Scheepers' claim that she fought for complete equality for women in all respects. Scheepers always made a strong plea for the recognition of the permanence of the woman worker in South Africa and the improvement of her status. Speaking at an International Woman's Year Seminar on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1975 at the University of the Witwatersrand, Scheepers attacked the traditional concept of the woman as a housewife. She saw it as an out-of-date fallacy, and went as far as to say: "Our future training and education of a woman must be geared to her development as a worker first and foremost and only secondary for her role as housewife and mother."<sup>213</sup>

Manpower needs of the two World Wars, and the consequent patterns in consumer demand had contributed much to the elimination of the stigma attached to working mothers, until in 1975 well over two and a half million women were economically active in South Africa - out of approximately eight million economically active persons. This indicated that women were permanent workers to be considered.<sup>214</sup>

Scheepers dealt with the male hostility which she said was very evident to her as a trade unionist. She likened it to racial fears where 'rate for the job' also posed an imaginary threat to male workers. She believed that in the same way as job reservation had proved unworkable, so gender-based fears would be economically eliminated. She argued that men need not fear female competition - the demand for workers protected them as did the fact that few women qualified.<sup>215</sup>

But she went even further, arguing that men should be honest about their motives and by eliminating the 'women are inferior' excuse come to support the idea of 'equal pay for equal work' as in fact being in their own interests. Firms which employed female managers tended to be happy with their performance, according to the magazine **Management**. Although the claims of inferiority could be dismissed when assessing work standards, it could unfortunately not be dismissed concerning wage levels. An investigation by the Human Sciences Research Council in

<sup>212</sup> **The Star**, 14 November 1972.

<sup>213</sup> Speech delivered by Scheepers at the International Woman's Year Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 9 August 1975.

<sup>214</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>215</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 15 August 1975.

March 1971 showed median salaries of women in the private sector to be half that of men, and 35% lower in government services. Only in medicine, surgery and pharmacy did women earn approximately the same as men in the government sector, while in librarianship a woman's salary was 45% lower!<sup>216</sup>

Scheepers argued that it was these wage levels which in fact constituted a threat to male employees. Although male hostility and low wages deterred women, the salaries attracted enough women for them to pose a threat to males. She said the time had arrived when South Africa had to follow the example of the leading industrial nations of the world by also introducing legislation that would protect the men against replacement by women at lower wage levels. She added that the United States of America introduced the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and in Britain a similar act was introduced in 1970. Scheepers believed that the introduction of similar legislation in South Africa would motivate women to obtain equal qualifications to men and would equally motivate parents to encourage and finance their daughters to obtain the required qualifications, knowing that they would be equally well remunerated as their sons. She explained that the USA had recognized women to be essential, distinctive and a permanent part of its manpower resources. She quoted the National Manpower Council of New York that stated, "Women constitute not only an essential, but also a distinctive part of our manpower resources. They are essential because without their presence in the labour force we could neither produce and distribute the goods nor provide the educational, health and other social services which characterises our society. They constitute a distinctive manpower resource because the structure and the substance of the lives of most women are fundamentally determined by their functions as wives, mothers and home makers."<sup>217</sup>

Scheepers also saw the women of South Africa as one of the country's greatest resources. She said women's skills and abilities were being used more fully and more creatively - in the home, in the community and on the job, but not enough was being done and South Africa's economic development was being retarded; the legal disabilities under which women had to live was an ascertainable fact and had to be removed. It had to be realized that the growing demand for consumer goods was beyond the income of a single wage earned per family and for this reason full utilization would have to be made not only for female manpower but also of female brain

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<sup>216</sup>

**Management in Garment Worker**, 15 August 1975

<sup>217</sup>

**Ibid.**

power.<sup>218</sup> She told the reporter of **The Star**: "To cope with South Africa's problems we need the best brains. I think women have strong feelings where men are a little bit indifferent ... like the cost of living and social welfare."<sup>219</sup>

According to Scheepers a revolution was taking place as regards the status of women, particularly as a result of family planning and the concept of zero population growth which reduced the burden of motherhood and enabled a very large number of women to re-enter the labour field at a comparatively young age. She stressed that educational facilities had to be provided for women during their motherhood stage to enable them to play their full role in the promotion of welfare of the community. She quoted the late President Lyndon Johnson who described the underutilization of women's skills as "the most tragic and most senseless waste of this century". He went on to say: "It is a waste we can no longer afford. Our economy is crying out for their services." Scheepers said this statement was certainly true of South Africa as well.<sup>220</sup>

In the Senate Scheepers proposed that all discriminatory labour laws had to be repealed, so that South Africa could utilize her full potential concerning her available reserve work force, namely the blacks and women. She told the Senate: "Ek voel dit is tyd dat ons (hierdie) vroue weer moet laat voel dat hul deel is van hierdie land. Hulle moet hulle plig doen soos enige iemand anders. Ek glo ook dat 'n vrou nie gunste moet vra nie. As hulle gelykheid wil hê, moet hulle werklik bereid wees om hulle man te staan waar hulle ook al kan. Die enigste tyd waar daar 'n verskil moet wees is om biologiese redes, maar andersins moet hulle bereid wees om hulle werk te doen waar hulle ook al gevra word om dit te doen."<sup>221</sup> ("I feel that it is time that we let (these) women feel that they are part of this country. I also believe that a women does not have to ask any favours. If it is equality they seek, then they have to be able to stand their ground wherever they can. Only because of biological reasons there may be differentiation, but under any other circumstances they have to be able to do the work that is required of them.")

<sup>218</sup> PV 414: Anna Scheepers, 2/1/2 (July 1974-August 1975). Speech delivered by Scheepers at the International Woman's Year Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 9 August 1975.

<sup>219</sup> **The Star**, 23 April 1974.

<sup>220</sup> PV 414: Anna Scheepers, 2/1/2 (July 1974-August 1975). Speech delivered by Scheepers at the International Woman's Year Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 9 August 1975.

<sup>221</sup> PV414: Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers Papers, File 2/1/1, January 1973-July 1973. Speeches, Statements and Messages. Senator Anna Scheepers UP Senator for Transvaal, 1974-1980.

Scheepers always stressed that one of the most important tasks of management was to assist in the change in attitudes against the employment of women and to set an example by promoting women, where possible, into higher skills and executive positions.<sup>222</sup>

In an address to the Business and Professional Women's Club in Rondebosch, Scheepers gave a strong message: "Women are not given equality of opportunity." She showed how women were denied equality and opportunity in the South African society. Although women workers were required by the economy, they were not given a full share of the jobs available.<sup>223</sup>

To prove her statement she said that:

- Women were denied advancement. A survey revealed that although in some companies 55 per cent of the labour were women workers only 17 per cent of the supervisors were women and a mere 1,5 per cent managers.
- Women were not given training. A survey showed that in house or factory training programmes run by companies only 15 per cent of the people participating were women and the rest men. When it came to training courses outside the company 60 per cent of firms never sent women on seminars but 90 per cent of firms regularly sent men.
- Women were not sent to university. Out of 10 000 students at the University of the Witwatersrand, only 2 500 were women. Furthermore in the dentistry faculty only 10 out of 320 students were women. In architecture 48 out of 440, in law 41 out of 239, in engineering 12 out of 1 400 were women.
- Women were discriminated against in income tax legislation. A married woman earning R7 000 had to pay nearly 25 per cent more in income tax than if she was single. Scheepers reported that she had told the retired Minister of Finance that married women should not be penalised for providing extra services. If the state needed more money, she said, the tax burden had to be spread over all taxpayers.
- Legislation limited the rights of women. Although the Matrimonial Affairs Act improved the situation due to the efforts of Bertha Solomon, there were still limitations of the rights of married women. Some of these limitations were:
  - guardianship of children;

<sup>222</sup> Republic of South Africa. **Senate Debates**. (Second session – Fourth Senate). Vol. II, 18 June 1975, col. 4264.

<sup>223</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 February 1975.

- the law of inheritance as it affected women who were married in community of property;
- numerous problems for those women married in community of property;
- the contractual capacity of women;
- registration of immovable property;
- hire purchase agreements..

Furthermore, the Public Service Act provided that when a woman got married she had to be dismissed and if she continued her job she was not classified as a permanent worker. Scheepers said it was wrong to use the ability of women workers but penalise them just because they got married. She gave interesting evidence to show that the system of full-time work acted against married women. "The working married woman had to be mother to her children, wife to her husband and look after the home while spending at least eight hours a day at work. These dual roles which working women have to perform must result in her at time being away from work." Scheepers continued saying that if a woman could work half the day she could perform both roles of worker and housewife far better.

Scheepers said that many countries were making use of part-time workers in order that the mother could be at home in the afternoon when children come from school. She added that research conducted at a food factory in Britain showed that labour turnover was reduced considerably when women workers worked either the morning or the afternoon. Amongst full time workers the turnover of labour was 49 per cent. But with morning workers the turnover was ten per cent and with afternoon workers it was 17 per cent.

Scheepers also deplored the problems which faced African women. She said: "We as White women suffer discrimination but the African women are in far worse position. They may not live with their husbands in the cities without a permit. Those who are living in the cities and whose children were not born there may not have their children with them. They may not move from one area to another. They may not build a home according to their requirement and their wishes. They must leave their homes should their husbands die."

In conclusion she reminded her audience that the discrimination against women was to some extent their own fault. Women should not accept an inferior position just because of tradition. She said: "We need motivation and encouragement to aspire for positions, but if we don't fight for it we will not get to the top." Scheepers herself had shown what it meant to fight to get to the

top. And this was why she was asked, so often, to address audiences. She was proof that if there was determination, women would get to the top.<sup>224</sup>

From speeches Scheepers made it is clear that she was a very knowledgeable person on the topic of discrimination against women and that she always went out of her way to bring about gender equality. Not only as President of the GWUSA and later TUCSA, but also as senator, she worked very hard for complete equality for women in all aspects.

In her first year in the Senate, in 1974, she said that it was almost impossible to think that any civilized country could even consider legislation that would discriminate against married women. She also referred to the Geyser Commission's recommendation that more use had to be made of the service of women. She told the Senate: "...Ek voel met hierdie groot bevoegdheids (van getroude vrouens) en die nood wat daar bestaan vir arbeid, behoort ons nou op te hou om te diskrimineer teen ons getroude vrouens."<sup>225</sup>(..."I feel with the competency levels ( of married women) and the intense shortage in labour, we should stop discriminating against married women.") She repeatedly attacked the proposed discriminatory legislation against women that government tried to pass, through Senate. "Na my mening is dit regtig 'n skande dat ons Regering voortgaan om die vrou te beledig. Die vrou staan in der waarheid haar plek vol in die ekonomie, op alle gebiede, en na my mening - en ek praat as vrou - sou ek geen pos wou beklee op genade van 'n Minister of enige iemand anders nie. Ek wil my pos op meriete beklee, dit is al, en dit is waarvoor ons vra vir elke vrou wat haar dienste getrou aan die Staat lewer. ... Ek voel dat die getroude vrou nie gestenig behoort te word omdat sy haar dienste aanbied nie, intendeel sy behoort 'n kroon te ontvang, want die getroude vrou offer meer op as enige ander persoon."<sup>226</sup>("In my opinion, it is a truly shameful that our Government continues to insult women. In every possible way women fulfil their role in the economy, and in my opinion – as a woman – I would not like to fill a post at the mercy of a minister or anybody else. I want to do my job on merit, that is all, and this is what we request of every woman who renders her services with loyalty to the state. ... I feel that the married woman should not get prosecuted because she offers her services, instead she should receive praise, because the married woman had more to sacrifice than any other woman.")

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**Ibid.**

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Republiek van Suid-Afrika. **Debatte van die Senaat.** (Eerste Sitting – Vierde Senaat). Vol. II, 8 October 1974, col. 2752, 2756.

Scheepers had moved in the Senate in 1975 that "this calls upon the Government to remove all legal and other forms of discrimination against women, thereby giving them equal status to that of men in all spheres of public and private life and as a first step, to recommend the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the status of women and to formulate a possible programme for the elimination of discrimination." No need to say her motion was defeated.

Scheepers always said that the main reasons why women were not absorbed in the professional and technical fields were that their labour was not valued to the same extent as that of their male counterparts. Then, the same opportunities for promotion did not exist and lastly, but most important, was the fact that women were taxed out of the labour market. She said that the pernicious method of joint taxation of husband and wife is one of the greatest disincentives for highly qualified women to work. Scheepers said that in the interest of South Africa and human dignity, discrimination, whether legal or through prejudice, against women had to be removed. She added: "Women should therefore not always take a back-seat. If they try, they will find that they are not inferior to males. They should enter all types of positions, including public life, if the opportunity arises."<sup>227</sup>

Already in 1967, Scheepers said that she wholeheartedly endorsed the view of the National Union of Distributive Workers that one of the ways to overcome the shortage of workers lay in separate taxation of husband and wife.<sup>228</sup>

In 1977 Scheepers spoke about the legal status of women. She said white and coloured women's legal status improved much since 1927. She was however very concerned about the black women's legal status. She quoted Prof. Monica Wilson to prove to the Senate that the black woman in South Africa's legal status definitely had to be addressed. Wilson said:

"The legal assumption enshrined in Roman law and in the law of most African people was that a woman was a perpetual minor under the guardianship either of her husband, her father or his heir. She never reached legal majority and never became free to act as every man did at some stage though the age of independence was variable. This perpetual minority of woman implied inequality, for a minor is never equal to the guardian.

<sup>226</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika. *Debate van die Senaat*. Vol. 51, 16 October 1974, col. 3014.

<sup>227</sup> *Volkstem*, 31 May 1978.

<sup>228</sup> *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*, 19 May 1967.

Guardianship implies the lawful authority which one person has over another person. It includes custody of the minor's person and control over his/her education and property."

Scheepers also referred to the lobola custom. She said it was a system that she would have hated if she was a black person - just the fact that she could be sold to a man. She asked the government to pay serious attention to this matter. It would not cost the government a cent, but it would free the black woman from her shackles.<sup>229</sup>

Scheepers, as chairperson of the Management Committee of the Medical Benefit Society for the clothing industry, had to be complemented on the stand she took in regard to oppose the discrimination against women in the Medical Schemes Act. The Medical Schemes Act, as originally passed, made it a criminal offence for any person to belong to two medical schemes. This provision was particularly hard on female workers in the clothing industry who, as dependants of their husbands, were compelled to belong to their husbands' medical benefit or medical aid society and were debarred from membership of their own Medical Benefit Society.

Various memoranda were submitted by Scheepers and her Medical Benefit Society that advocated that women should not be reduced to the status of minors, but should be given the option of electing whether or not they wished to belong to their husbands' society or that society catering for the industry in which they were employed. One of the proposed amendments would have given every woman the right to elect to which society she wished to belong.<sup>230</sup>

Scheepers also fought for more crèches and pre-primary and day care centres for young children. She said women could and should in future make an important contribution to the labour force if certain issues were dealt with. The first and most important issues were children's welfare or care.<sup>231</sup>

In 1981, as newly elected president of TUCSA, Scheepers committed herself fully to the Women's Committee of TUCSA. They wanted to make sure all women realized that a law had been passed that ensured equal pay for equal work. She wanted to motivate workers to report

<sup>229</sup> Republic of South Africa. **Senate Debates**. (Fourth Session – Fifth Parliament). No. 13 (Weekly Edition), 8 June 1977, col. 3681

<sup>230</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 28 February 1975.

<sup>231</sup> **"Die werkende vrou, ons ekonomie en kindersorg"**. Address by Senator Anna Scheepers, Golden Jubilee Conference of the South African Council for Child Care, Pretoria, 21-25 October

employers who did not bridge the wage gap within the next three months, thus before the end of 1984. She also motivated women to become more active in the trade unions. Women, she said had all the characteristics to become excellent trade union leaders because they are generally more sympathetic than men. Women would be more willing to help with personal problems.<sup>232</sup>

Another important issue that Scheepers spoke very strongly about was prostitution. She was very concerned about prostitution that escalated tremendously in South Africa. She said: "Prostitusie moet op die een of ander wyse gewettig word. So sal daar ten minste omgesien kan word na die gesondheid van hierdie mense." What precisely had to be done to legalize prostitution, she did not tell the reporter of **Die Vaderland**. She however said that a thorough investigation was necessary concerning this serious social problem.<sup>233</sup> It is important to note at this stage that the only trade union in South Africa which provided a family planning clinic for its workers and regular pap smears was the Garment Workers' Union.<sup>234</sup> Scheepers always was on the forefront of improving working and social conditions for all women workers. Whenever she found evidence of exploitation of women she stepped in and spoke out against it.

Scheepers spoke at a seminar on: "*Die Vrou en Produktiwiteit*" of the Women's Bureau and the NIP (Nasionale Produktiwiteitsinstituut) where she said that because of stereotyping women as inferior to men, many women do not apply for executive posts. "Baie vroue en swartes het hierdie versinsel dat hulle dit nie 'kan maak' nie, omdat hulle vroue of swartes is - aanvaar." She finally told the audience that it was necessary to teach people to dream again - and how to achieve their goals in life.<sup>235</sup> (Many women and blacks have accepted the misconception that they 'cannot make' it, because they are women or blacks.)

One can conclude this chapter with the words of Bertha Solomon: "I had fought merely for what I thought was right: a fair deal for women", and truly make it applicable to the work Anna Scheepers did to fight for the equality of all women of South Africa.<sup>236</sup>

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1974.

<sup>232</sup> **Volkstem**, 30 November 1981.

<sup>233</sup> **Die Vaderland**, 5 Mei 1980.

<sup>234</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 February 1975.

<sup>235</sup> **Beeld**, 10 August 1984.

<sup>236</sup> Solomon, Bertha, **Time Remembered**. Timmins, Cape Town, 1968, p.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHAMPION OF THE WORKERS: LUCY BUYAPHI MVUBELO - FROM TEACHER TO TRADE UNION LEADER

#### 2.1 Historical background of Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo

Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo was born on 20 January 1920 in Spes Bona, Johannesburg. She was the oldest child of a family of four. Her family moved in 1930 to this eastern black township of Johannesburg.<sup>237</sup> Mvubelo's home country was Swaziland. She made annual visits to Swaziland to visit her family and a much loved cow that she had received from her cousin in exchange for an old bedroom suite.<sup>238</sup> Her early education was at the Doornfontein School of the American Board of Missions.

It is true that there was not much indication during Mvubelo's early childhood years that her life would be extraordinary and that she would excel to become the leader of the biggest and most powerful trade union in South Africa. Most of her early years she spent growing up in a backyard in Jeppe where her mother was a domestic worker. Mvubelo's mother believed very strongly in the value of education and this is why she sent her daughter to attend the Inanda Seminar, a private girls' school in Natal. This Seminar was built in 1879 and is the oldest school for black girls in South Africa.<sup>239</sup> Mvubelo attended the Seminar from 1935 to 1937, where she completed standard eight. She could not matriculate, because her younger brother also had to have an opportunity to go to school and her parents being poor could not afford to keep her at school any longer.<sup>240</sup>

In those days teachers could begin teaching with only a primary school certificate. Mvubelo's working life started off as a teacher, but only for a short while when human frailties overtook her ambitious career plans and she gave herself in marriage. She was only 18 when she married McKenzie Mvubelo, also a teacher.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>237</sup> SA Panorama, 29(2), 3 March 1982.

<sup>238</sup> Polonsky L, **The politicians' cookbook: Conversations with 25 South African politicians - 161 of their favourite recipes**, Faircape Books, Cape Town, 1982 p. 92.

<sup>239</sup> SA Panorama, 29(2), 31 March 1982, p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Suid-Afrikaanse Oorsig, 18 April 1980.

Her husband lived in Alexandra township, and so that was where Mvubelo moved to when she married. After she had lived in the township for 27 years, her permit to remain there was suddenly cancelled and so she had to move to Beverly Hills - Beverly Hills Soweto, that is.

Mvubelo had two children, a daughter, Cynthia, and a son, Victor. She was very proud of her offspring and extremely family-orientated. Mvubelo's mother-in-law felt she had to be in a great hurry to produce children so quickly.<sup>242</sup>

After the birth of her son in 1941, and after her children were over the infancy stage, she was lured to take employment in the Transvaal clothing industry where remuneration for ordinary machinists was far above the earnings of an African teacher. "My vriende het my vertel dat fabrieke beter as huiswerk betaal", (My friends informed me that you earn more at factories than as a domestic worker") Mvubelo said.<sup>243</sup>

The story of this woman begins in 1942 when she joined a dress factory called London Model as a dressmaker. Black women then were not allowed to join the male union founded in the 1920s because they were not pass bearers. Mvubelo's father, a labourer, had belonged to this union, the Industrial Commercial Workers' Union, organized by a charismatic leader Clements Kadalie, from what was then Nyasaland. It was the most influential union in the 1920s.<sup>244</sup>

During the war when all the white female workers were recruited to go to factories to produce ammunition and other war materials, there was a vacuum that had to be filled and that was filled by black and brown women. Mvubelo's trade union involvement dates back to 1942. "Die beginpunt van my lewe", she said, "was toe hulle my na die vakbond gestuur het om 'n kaart te kry. Ek het nie eens geweet waar dit was nie.?" Her sympathy with the workers' struggle started on this day when she saw the long rows of workers.<sup>245</sup>

As a machinist in the garment industry she earned R2,25 a week. A dispute with employer management caused a factory lock-out of workers. Mvubelo was initiated into the trade union movement. "That's when I started to realise that with a union you fight an issue together. The

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<sup>241</sup> Blamick, Bonnie (ed.), *Lucy Mvubelo: Munger Africana Library Notes*, January 1980, p. 3.

<sup>242</sup> *Sunday Express*, 22 April 1984.

<sup>243</sup> *SA Oorsig*, 18 April 1980.

<sup>244</sup> *Sowetan*, 17 March 1992.

<sup>245</sup> *Suid-Afrikaanse Oorsig*, 18 April 1980.

essence is to organise all workers into one big movement to speak with one strong voice when they make demands."<sup>246</sup>

When Mvubelo joined the industry there were only ten black women but most unfortunately they could not even join the existing African union for men under the leadership of Ganna Makabeni. Neither could they become members of the GWUSA. But the GWU happened to look through the Industrial Conciliation Act and saw a flaw in the act and they took the matter to the Supreme Court. The Union won and for the first time black women could become members of the GWU. They even received a back pay from the employers of the clothing industry because as non-members they did not qualify for a minimum wage.<sup>247</sup> This brought great joy to the African women garment workers and job opportunities for the African women of South Africa.

Fortunately in 1945 under the leadership of Solly Sacks it was accepted that black women had to be represented in the management committee of the GWU. In 1945 Mvubelo was one of the first five black women who were elected to serve on the management committee of the GWU, a position which she held every year until 1953 when the law was amended to exclude black workers from unions.

The Garment Workers' Union of SA immediately assisted the black women to organize a separate union. On June the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1953 the Garment Workers' Union of African Women was formed and Mvubelo was chosen as the leader. She said she had a lot to learn. "First and foremost one had to learn to accept all people. You had to learn that when you have to organise your people you must also educate them to accept other people because they were not responsible for the Law." She said she meant that the workers in the industry were not responsible for bringing the people the law of separation, they just had to adhere to the Law because it was the law of the country.<sup>248</sup>

As soon as the Native Labour Settlement of Disputes Act became law, some unscrupulous employers cut the wages of black women workers. Mvubelo's new Garment Workers' Union of

<sup>246</sup> **Financial Mail**, 14 December 1979.

<sup>247</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU Trade Union: NUCW Correspondence and Papers. Address by Ms Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary of the NUCW(SA). Delivered to the convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Hotel Fountainbleau, Miami Beach, Florida, 9-14 May 1971, p. 2.

<sup>248</sup> Conference: "Trade Unionism in South Africa: Revolution or Peace?" Speech delivered by Lucy Mvubelo at the annual conference of the Centre for the Investigation into Revolutionary Activities, October 1 1984: Aspirations of trade unions in South Africa, p. 20.

African Women took the matter to court and won back pay for the women who had been affected.<sup>249</sup> "We fought the reduction of our wages, which followed as a result of our exclusion from the non-racial union. We also fought the case of black men who earned less than women and did not enjoy medical aid and provident fund benefits, and that they be unionised and included in the Industrial Council Agreement. We won both cases," she said. Her union was to continue fighting and winning many other court battles and opening doors where the government had closed them. In 1954, for instance, they established a welfare fund for unemployed blacks to be able to draw pensions. By this time in her life Mvubelo was inducted as a strong trade unionist and began her crusade of organizing workers and fighting for their rights.<sup>250</sup>

In 1955 four members of the National Council of the Garment Workers' Union walked out of a meeting of this council. They protested against a black woman's presence at the council meeting, because they said that Mvubelo was not a member of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa. Scheepers, as chairperson of the meeting, put Mvubelo's presence at the meeting to a vote. Only the four members of the East Rand Branch of the GWUSA voted that she had to leave. All the other delegates, 14 brown delegates and 16 whites voted for Mvubelo to stay. After the four people, Carel Meyer, Jannie Bosch, Mike van den Berg and Sophie Kruger had left, the people who stayed behind clapped their hands whilst shouting: "Nou sal die vergadering glad verloop!" At this meeting a unification of the Natal, Cape and Transvaal branches was discussed in order to have one Garment Worker's Union for South Africa. Another request was made to members to support their leaders in "die stryd teen die Regering om die berowing van ons fondse en bates te verhoed".<sup>251</sup> This would not be the only time for Mvubelo to be treated like an outcast at a meeting. At this occasion it was the right-wing supporters of the government's apartheid ideology who staged the walk-out. At many other occasions, such as at international conferences, delegates would not even listen to her speeches, because they saw her as a supporter of the South African government.

In 1956, while he was distributing leaflets for the Transport Workers Union (Transvaal), McKenzie Mvubelo, husband of Lucy Mvubelo, was viciously attacked. This obvious act of

<sup>249</sup> **The Star**, 5 November 1979.

<sup>250</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 March 1992.

<sup>251</sup> **Die Transvaler**, 26 Februarie 1955.

political vengeance left McKenzie for the next 22 years of his life in a sanatorium. This meant that Lucy Mvubelo had to raise her two children alone.<sup>252</sup>

She was, however, very determined that both her children had to have the best education possible. It is important to note that Mvubelo's son graduated from the then University of Zululand and her daughter became a qualified nurse with three diplomas.<sup>253</sup> Mvubelo believed that the Africans' desire for the education of their families was growing with the awareness that job opportunities were becoming more abundant for the educated.<sup>254</sup> She said that community leaders had to motivate children to go to school. She asked: "What is the worth of freedom without education?"<sup>255</sup>

The African National Congress Women's League had for many years been organizing women for the national liberation struggle. These women also performed a more traditional function, that of providing food and accommodation for ANC conferences and meetings.<sup>256</sup> Mvubelo also took an active part in the defiance campaign organized by the ANC.<sup>257</sup> In the urban areas, a strong alliance was forged between racially oppressed groups and sympathetic whites. As a united front against apartheid, the non-racial Congress Alliance, formed in 1953 from previously organized racially-based and worker groups, defied unjust laws and conducted campaigns against forced removals under the Group Areas Act and against inferior "bantu" education for African townships.<sup>258</sup> Perhaps the most significant congress campaign was the campaign against the pass laws, and in particular, the extension of reference books to African women.

The pass laws were described as the 'African worker's handcuffs'.<sup>259</sup> By controlling the movement of the African labour force, the NP government prevented them from selling their labour freely. All Africans over the age of sixteen were forced to carry these 'passes' which proved that they were employed, that they had a permit to live in the city where they worked and

<sup>252</sup> Organize or Starve p. 6 of 47. <http://www.liberation.org.za/orgs/sactu/organsta06.php>.

<sup>253</sup> **SA Panorama**, 31 March 1982.

<sup>254</sup> Cba 1.4.3.4 AH 1092, GWU Trade Union: NUCW Correspondence and Papers, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 February 1986.

<sup>256</sup> 9 Women play a leading role. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organsta09.html>, p. 3 of 21.

<sup>257</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 19 January 1981.

<sup>258</sup> Schmidt, Elizabeth S, **African Women's Resistance to the Pass Laws in South Africa 1950-1960**. Now you have touched the women. From "Notes and Documents", p. 1.

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/misc/schmi123.html>.

<sup>259</sup> **Workers Unity**, May 1977.

that they had permits to seek work. Failure to produce these on demand rendered the African workers liable to arrest and conviction.<sup>260</sup>

Passes for women were not introduced until the mid-1950s. When the announcement was made South African women launched a massive campaign against passes. Mvubelo told a reporter of the **Financial Mail**: "We want the same documents as whites - the Book of Life. I hate carrying a reference book. It makes me feel as if I'm very small in this country."<sup>261</sup>

It was not until 17 April 1954, when the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) was born, that women of all races united to carry on the struggle against racial and gender discrimination. At the founding conference, 146 women delegates representing 230 500 women from all over South Africa, gathered in Johannesburg "to discuss how to win freedom for all the people of South Africa."<sup>262</sup> Mvubelo was one of the key organizers of the FSAW conference in Johannesburg. The ANC Women's League President at that time, Ida Mtwana, said: "Gone are the days when the place of women was in the kitchen and looking after the children. Today they are marching side by side with men in the road to freedom."<sup>263</sup> The congress adopted a Women's Charter and set up aims for the new organization.

In September 1955 the potent issue of passes burst to the fore again with the announcement that government intended to start issuing women with reference books from January 1956.<sup>264</sup> Demonstrations flared up again and the women from the then Transvaal planned a demonstration in Pretoria.

For several weeks the demonstrations, deputations and meetings organized in protest were front page news in **The Guardian**: "We will not carry any Passes: African women indignant"; "African women up in arms, mounting opposition to Passes for women"; "Campaign against Passes for women gathers force." The protest spanned the country.

<sup>260</sup> 9 Women play a leading role. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organsta09.html>, p.6.

<sup>261</sup> **The Financial Mail**, 14 December 1979.

<sup>262</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 3.

<sup>263</sup> **ANC Women's League 50 years of struggle**. <http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/50years.html>. p. 4.

<sup>264</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 April 1975.

On 9 August 1956 women poured into Pretoria and Johannesburg. On this day some 2 000 women marched to the Union Building to present their protest to the Prime Minister, JG Strijdom.

Despite the tremendous opposition, passes for women were introduced and as predicted brought increased suffering. However, this did not mean an end to women's protests as they continued to organize against the pass laws throughout South Africa.<sup>265</sup>

For African workers in particular, the emergence of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in March 1955 represented a new thrust in the history of workers' struggles in South Africa. As one African trade unionist described it: "In the factory, the birth of SACTU was like rays of sunshine piercing through the dark."

At the inaugural conference of SACTU, Mvubelo was selected as one of the two vice-presidents of the Executive Committee of SACTU. By clearly recognizing the link between the struggle for economic gains and the general political struggle, the founders of SACTU were calling upon the workers of South Africa to fulfil their historic role - to become the spearhead in the struggle for national liberation.<sup>266</sup>

Throughout the years, SACTU consistently recognized that women, and particularly African women, suffer an additional form of oppression and therefore had a distinct role to play in the political and trade union struggles in South Africa and to make a commitment to build a South Africa free from oppression on the basis of race, class or gender.<sup>267</sup>

SACTU declared that the interests of all workers were alike, whatever their race or creed. They resolved that SACTU as a co-ordinating body of trade unions would strive to unite all workers in its ranks, without discrimination, and without prejudice. They resolved that this body would determinedly seek to further and protect the interests of all workers.

The SA Trade Union Council (later TUCSA), on the other hand, accepted the government's apartheid division and embarked on a programme of excluding African trade unions from its

<sup>265</sup> Women play a leading role, p. 4 of 21.

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organsta09.html>.

<sup>266</sup> SACTU appears on the scene, p. 4 of 6. <http://www.liberation.org.za/org.sactu/organsta03.php>.

ranks.<sup>268</sup> Anna Scheepers, the President of the GWUSA and one of the leading figures in TUCSA, fought this excluding of African trade unions from TUCSA, but without success.

In November 1958 SACTU (Mvubelo's organization where she served as Vice-President) appealed to SATUC (Scheepers' organization) to join SACTU in a deputation to the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and the Federated Chambers of Industry, stating that the issue of passes to women was a violation of their rights as workers for freedom of movement and association, and of their right to sell their labour freely. SACTU received no reply from TUCSA<sup>269</sup> and SACTU believed that TUCSA had betrayed the workers.<sup>270</sup>

Rejecting the slogan of 'no politics in the trade union movement' (as TUCSA believed), SACTU leaders refused to divorce the struggle for political rights and power from the day-to-day struggle for higher wages and improved working conditions.<sup>271</sup>

Mvubelo, however, always stated that she was totally against mixing trade union work with politics. She said that as trade unionist she concentrated on bread-and-butter issues, whilst politicians can give attention to national issues.<sup>272</sup> This view of hers was in sharp contrast with that of SATUC. If one reads the following extract from the address of the Chairman of SATUC at the inaugural conference, the contrasting views of Mvubelo and SATUC will be clear: "You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter, or their freedom to move to and from places where they can find the best employment or the houses they live in, or the type of education their children get. These things are of vital concern to the workers. The trade unions would therefore be neglecting the interests of their members if they failed to struggle for their members on all matters which affect them. The trade unions must be as active in the political field as they are in the economic sphere because the two hang together and cannot be isolated from each other."<sup>273</sup>

<sup>267</sup> **SACTU appears on the scene**, p. 3 of 6. <http://www.liberation.org.za/org.sactu/organsta03.php>.

<sup>268</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>269</sup> The Trade Union Council of South Africa was formed in 1954. Originally, membership was limited to registered trade unions. This policy was changed at the congress in 1962, where it was decided to affiliate "properly constituted black trade unions".

<sup>270</sup> Women play a leading role p. 7 of 21.

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organsta09.html>.

<sup>271</sup> **SACTU appears on the scene**, p. 4 of 6. <http://www.liberation.org.za/orgs/sactu/organsta03.php>.

<sup>272</sup> **SA Panorama**, 31 March 1982.

<sup>273</sup> Olsson OA, Minutes of the Inaugural Conference of SACTU, Trades Hall, Johannesburg, 5-6 March 1955. Address of the Chairperson at the Inaugural Conference.

Even in its first year of existence, SACTU firmly allied itself with the other congresses and participated in the Congress of the People held in Kliptown, in June 1955, where the Freedom Charter was adopted. This marked the beginning of a close relationship between SACTU and the liberation movement of the workers in South Africa.<sup>274</sup>

Shortly after the inaugural conference, the issue of international affiliation was raised at the Second Management Committee meeting held on 13 April 1955. A motion was proposed by Lucy Mvubelo, and seconded by Cleopas Sibande (A-TWIU) "that the South African Congress of Trade Unions should affiliate to the World Federation of Trade Unions, and that the Secretary should enquire about the affiliation fees". The motion was passed and then referred to the first NEC meeting held in Johannesburg on 27 June 1955. The motion to affiliate to the WFTU was passed unanimously. For reasons of political security, the WFTU never regarded its association with SACTU as that of an official affiliation, and SACTU never actually paid affiliation fees.<sup>275</sup>

Although Mvubelo was the person who initially moved the affiliation to the WFTU in April 1955, she was the only SACTU executive member to break from SACTU and the congress alliance to join the reformist camp of SATUC-FOFATUSA (Federation of Free African Trade Unions). Mvubelo's break from SATUC did not surprise them. They viewed her as opportunistic and saw what she had done as a sell-out of the workers' struggle for total liberation. They believed that perhaps it was the lure of a privileged position, or the knowledge that she was not capable of enduring the wrath of the regime's inevitable repression of SACTU that caused her to break with SACTU. Whatever reason, only a short time passed before Mvubelo was exempted from the Minister of Labour's prohibition on African trade unionists travelling abroad to international conferences.<sup>276</sup>

In 1958 Mvubelo and her union, the GWU-AW (Garment Workers' Union of African Women) and 18 other unions withdrew from SACTU. "It (SACTU) became the ally of the ANC", Mvubelo said. "We didn't want to become involved in politics."<sup>277</sup> These conflicts left the African workers in the industry hopelessly divided. Much criticism against Mvubelo centred around her association with TUCSA, an organization which in the 1950s, according to one

<sup>274</sup> SACTU appears on the scene, p. 5 of 6. <http://www.liberation.org.za/orgs/sactu/organsta03.php>.

<sup>275</sup> SACTU on the international front, p. 5 of 19. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organsta11.html>.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 of 19.

<sup>277</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 January 1981.

veteran trade unionist, supported influx control because, they argued, it gave the workers who were already in industry more protection.<sup>278</sup>

In October 1959 nine African unions established FOFATUSA (Federation of Free African Trade Unions (SA)), because SACTU was not expressing their economic views and they did not want to become involved in party politics. FOFATUSA was free to express its opinion anywhere, because it accepted all workers irrespective of colour, creed or political affiliations.<sup>279</sup>

Both the ANC and PAC were committed to anti-pass campaigns in 1960, reflecting the mounting anger on this issue among the African people. FOFATUSA had its ups and downs and received a set-back owing to the emergency declared after the Sharpeville massacre.<sup>280</sup>

FOFATUSA, during its brief existence, not only catered for the members of its affiliated unions but also assisted unorganised workers, the majority of whom were unskilled workers and labourers, to obtain improved working conditions. FOFATUSA submitted memoranda to the Wage Board and gave oral evidence at the public sittings. Representations were also made to the Wage Board when investigating industrial councils were in existence but failed to legislate for the under-privileged African workers.<sup>281</sup>

FOFATUSA was the only co-ordinating body in the Republic which became affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The latter also made it possible for representatives of FOFATUSA to attend the annual conferences of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the triennial congress of the ICFTU. Mvubelo, as President of FOFATUSA and General Secretary of the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA), was present at these international conferences on two occasions and also served on the panel of consultants on problems of women workers of the ICTFU. Though the possibilities for trade union action on the part of African workers were severely restricted in South Africa a certain amount could nonetheless be achieved. The ICFTU contributed towards the Treason Trials Defence fund, and it contributed to the South African Defence and Aid Fund in a fairly

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**Ibid.**

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AH 1092, GWU/NUCW. Correspondence and Papers. Extracts from Report of Secretariat submitted to the Seventh World Congress—International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Berlin, 1962, p. 7.

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 March 1966.

281

**Ibid.**

substantial manner, a fund which was looking after the needs of the victims of oppressive measures, including trade unionists.<sup>282</sup>

Mvubelo said that FOFATUSA's relations with the South African Trade Union Council (SATUC) remained cordial. On the other hand the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was showing an increased attitude of hostility towards ICFTU and spread completely false accusations about the ICFTU and its activities. SACTU also appeared to maintain ever closer relations with the WFTU. Mvubelo added that on several occasions of blatantly repressive measures against its officers, SACTU appealed for ICFTU's help. Whenever the case merited it, ICFTU protested against such measures.<sup>283</sup> SACTU desired (at first) to co-operate with both international federations (CFTU and WFTU) in creating united action against apartheid.

"Because of the confused political situation in South Africa a trade union movement was always aligned with any political move that was embarked upon by outright political parties - hence our difficulty in expressing our views as trade unionists", Mvubelo said. She continued by saying: "Our stand must be of an independent nature, free from party politics, free to criticise and express the views of the international working class at all times. Of late we have noticed blocs and powers in Africa trying to force their place into labour councils, and because of the uncommitted line pursued by the ICFTU and its affiliates we have remained aloof and succeeded in influencing either parties to listen to our advice and warnings without prejudice. ... Let us therefore strive to achieve our goal to fight for the betterment of all workers irrespective of colour, race or creed."<sup>284</sup>

Mvubelo explained that FOFATUSA was formed after the SA government had decided to divide workers according to its programme of separate development. Faced with this dilemma, the African workers immediately decided to close the loophole so as to be in conformity with the law. "Not that we appreciated the division but because we felt the need to keep outcasts fully intact; the other registered groups continued to enjoy statutory rights, but in close co-operation with us", Mvubelo replied.<sup>285</sup> She said legislation prevented whites and blacks (workers) from

<sup>282</sup> AH 1092, GWU/NUCW Correspondence and Papers. Extracts from the report of the International Secretariat submitted to the Seventh World Congress ICFTU, Berlin, 1962.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

working together harmoniously although morally their claims, demands and grievances were one.

SACTU attacked FOFATUSA's alignment with the ICFTU and accused Mvubelo of being pro-government. Mvubelo responded that SACTU failed to understand that "we are not a political organisation and our membership is open to all groups irrespective of political affiliations".<sup>286</sup> She explained that the ICFTU was the only organization that expressed their (FOFATUSA's) point of view and aspiration. FOFATUSA could not lose sight of its goal by supporting a foreign undemocratic society, namely the communist bloc. According to the last WFTU congress, it had become evident that "the workers of the world will be swept into a state of confusion by the well planned strategy set up by the WFTU". She added that in South Africa the confusion had become noticeably evident.<sup>287</sup>

Moreover: "Economically the right of all workers had to be safeguarded - hence workers' and workers' unions' views had to be openly stated whether such views hurt or please the governments of the day. Everywhere, there exists a working class organisation to protect the interests of the workers at all costs. Naturally opponents will hold a trade union organisation to be political if it expresses its views on a particular situation but forgetting that the people engaged in such a struggle are workers and a workers' organisation should and must protect and protest against any injustice meted out to the said society. We therefore sympathise with those who have continually fought for their rights economically and encourage individual members to embark on any constitutional means deemed fit and necessary to lead them to a better life with their families."<sup>288</sup>

At the seventh congress of the ICFTU Mvubelo made some suggestions and requests with regard to labour activities and programmes:

1. Abolition of labour books. She told the president of the ICFTU that in South Africa Africans had to carry pass books or reference books as they were termed, and in these passbooks were clauses which limited a worker so that a worker could not move freely and live and work where they chose. It was due to the Colour Bar Law in the past that an African

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<sup>286</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 5.

<sup>287</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>288</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 6.

had to carry a passbook. Mvubelo requested the ICFTU to assist them (black workers) to fight the Colour Bar Law and the passes for African people.

2. She also asked the ICFTU's assistance to form close bonds with other internationals that adhered to their democratic way of approach.
3. She further requested the ICFTU to help her union to develop dynamic programmes to emancipate the underprivileged worker;
4. and to send lecturers of international repute to rotate in various centres, particularly in Southern Africa;
5. and that the ICFTU had to make compulsory donations to the ISFC annually, monthly or whatever the case might be; and
6. that ICFTU had to help workers to make propoganda against the forces of totalitarianism.
7. Finally she requested constant consultation between different governments and the ICFTU.<sup>289</sup>

SACTU had always clashed with TUC (after 1962 TUCSA), FOFATUSA and the ICFTU. When TUCSA, in 1962, for the first time since its creation in 1954 dropped its official colour bar and offered equality in affiliation status to African trade unions, no one could deny the progressive nature of this move, although again the motivation behind it was questioned by observers at the time.<sup>290</sup>

Although African trade unions failed to rush to TUCSA's 'open door', the non-racial constitution once again forced SACTU to come to terms with TUCSA's role in the trade union movement. SACTU recounted the 'imperialist connections' of TUCSA (referring to its ICFTU ties) and strongly argued against unity with TUCSA at any cost. "We wanted the unity of workers on realistic terms - not on terms which would reduce the workers to impotency as had been done with workers in unions affiliated to TUC." There was also no evidence that TUCSA had modified its anti-SATUC stance.<sup>291</sup> TUCSA's hostility to SATUC came from two sources, firstly the average TUCSA white rank-and-file workers who chose to cling to the relative privilege they

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<sup>289</sup>

**Ibid.**

<sup>290</sup>

Ruling class response p. 26 of 31. <http://www.liberation.org.za/org/sactu/organsta04.php>. The SATUC's exclusion of African trade unions was beginning to be an embarrassment internationally. Lacking even the façade of liberalism, the TUC regarded FOFATUSA as its 'official liaison' with African trade unions. It was this pressure from abroad, more so than a serious commitment to African workers, that led the TUC to drop its 'colour bar' in the early 1960s. The name of the body changed at that time to the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA).

<sup>291</sup>

**Ibid.**, p. 26 of 31.

received under apartheid rather than promote solidarity of labour. Secondly, the TUCSA leadership strongly objected to the political trade unionism that SACTU promoted.

It was said that the TUC (SATUC) approached African unions like Mvubelo's NUCW (SA) and paternalistically offered to use its resources and energies to assist those unions to gain strength and efficiency. No wonder that Mvubelo was seen by SACTU as a renegade African unionist because she had broken with SACTU in 1957.<sup>292</sup> By being able to claim African 'membership' would improve TUC's international image. SACTU saw this as the underlying reason why TUC wanted FOFATUSA to join its ranks.<sup>293</sup> FOFATUSA was seen by SACTU as "not indigenous but rather an artificial transplant, alien to black working class solidarity". In January 1966, at a well-attended general meeting of FOFATUSA, Mvubelo and a small number of delegates, representing the thirteen affiliated unions, unanimously decided to dissolve FOFATUSA.<sup>294</sup>

FOFATUSA decided to recommend to its unions to link up with TUCSA. In an official statement, Mvubelo of FOFATUSA said it was not connected to any political organization, and devoted its efforts exclusively to the betterment of African workers. It stated specifically that FOFATUSA had no connection with the banned PAC, ANC or with SACTU. FOFATUSA said it co-operated with RUCSA, "numerically the strongest and most representative trade union federation in SA ... a non-racial body embracing workers of all races".<sup>295</sup>

It is important to note at this stage that after the 1960 demonstrations against the pass system and the bloodshed in both Sharpeville and Langa, the PAC and the ANC were declared "unlawful organisations, a serious threat to public safety".<sup>296</sup> Since that time, blacks have not been allowed membership in any openly national political organizations in South Africa. Since SACTU worked very closely with the ANC, SACTU leaders were frequently prohibited from travelling to international conferences, All-African People's Conferences, International Labour Organization Conferences, ICFTU Conferences and WFTU Conferences. Leslie Massina, the first general secretary of SACTU, however escaped these early banning orders and managed to attend international trade union meetings in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Rumania. Back in South Africa, he said, "South Africa has the iron curtain. We restrict entry and declare

<sup>292</sup> Ruling class response. <http://www.liberation.org.za/orgs/sactu/organsta04.php>. p. 23 of 31.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25 of 31.

<sup>294</sup> *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*, 18 March 1966.

<sup>295</sup> *The Star*, undated, ca. 1960.

<sup>296</sup> Blamick, p. 8.

individuals prohibited immigrants". Two years later, Massina was to be among the first SACTU-NEC (executive) members to be banned from trade union activity.<sup>297</sup>

SACTU's primary goal between 1955 and 1963 was to object to the total exclusion of African trade unions (and co-ordinating bodies) from representation on South African delegations to ILO conferences. Successive apartheid regimes refused to even consider the selection of a SACTU representative to the ILO. In other words, the majority of the South African working class could never present its case directly to the ILO. As Moses Mabhida pointed out, "(t)he White trade unionists make the world believe that an African is a bit of an imbecile, and as such, not capable of representing the opinions of his people or the African working class. This had to be proven wrong, and South Africa exposed for what she was."<sup>298</sup>

In 1959 Mvubelo was appointed through the support of the 53 million strong ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), to represent South African women on a consultative panel of labour experts on the problems of working women and young girls.<sup>299</sup> Government officials in Pretoria were against her leaving the country. They considered it 'bad' for South Africa to have a black trade unionist at this world forum in Geneva.<sup>300</sup>

The Minister of Labour, BJ Schoeman, attempted to articulate the 'logic' of apartheid on the question of the prevention of travelling freely to international conferences abroad: "I think it is unfair to the Non-European himself to allow him to go overseas, especially in a country where there is no colour bar and no discrimination, to attend a conference there and then have him come back to our conditions here ... While there is a Nationalist Government, I don't think that will be permitted."<sup>301</sup>

The SA Nationalist Government, however, relented because South Africa was a member of the International Labour Organization. Labour officials stated that blacks should not be bared from attending conferences in Geneva. The Department of the Interior, which had always controlled

<sup>297</sup> SACTU on the International Front, p. 6 of 19. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organstal1.html>.

<sup>298</sup> **Ibid.** Wilton Mkwayi and Moses Mabhida were SACTU's overseas representatives following their escape from South Africa during the State of Emergency in 1960. Mkwayi re-entered South Africa at a later date and was imprisoned to serve a life sentence on Robben Island.

<sup>299</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 10 October 1959.

<sup>300</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>301</sup> SACTU on the International Front, p. 6 of 19. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/organstal1.html>.

the movement outside of the Union, was forced to give Mvubelo a passport. Although she had formally applied to the department for a passport in May 1959, more than six months before she needed it to go to Geneva, it was only granted four days before she was due to leave. This was the first time South Africa was represented by a black official at an international labour conference.<sup>302</sup> Mvubelo said that it was a memorable occasion. "I represented all the working women of South Africa."<sup>303</sup> The fact that Mvubelo received a passport whilst other union leaders were refused passports, made many people think that she was pro-government. No wonder that Mvubelo was a sell-out to some and a saviour to others, a trade union moderate to certain people but a government stooge and Auntie Tom to others.<sup>304</sup>

In a letter from Johanna Cornelius, the General Secretary of the GWUSA, to Mvubelo in Geneva, Switzerland, it is quite clear that Cornelius was very proud of Mvubelo and happy for her sake that she had been chosen to represent the workers of Africa in Geneva. Cornelius told her to use every opportunity to learn as much as possible about the trade union movement and to gather particular information in regard to automation, piecework, bonus schemes and out-work. She also warned Mvubelo not to use overseas platforms to make propaganda either for or against South Africa. Cornelius told her to make sure that everything she said was factual and verifiable because South Africans were often reported incorrectly which could hamper their chances of going overseas at a later date. Cornelius stated that she gave this advice as a friend who wanted to help and not criticize.<sup>305</sup>

Cornelius also warned Mvubelo about a Mr Oliver Tamsen who tried to work up a government feeling against her.<sup>306</sup> From Cornelius' letter quoted above, several assumptions could be made. From the rest of the letter, not quoted here, it is obvious to the reader that there had to be a good relationship between Mvubelo and Cornelius. Cornelius also told Mvubelo that everybody in the office was looking keenly forward to every letter she wrote from Switzerland. There was clearly transparency and trust between Cornelius and Mvubelo, because Cornelius said that she realized that Mvubelo could not write to each of the people at the office of the GWU) individually, therefore she had arranged to allow everybody to read each other's letters.

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**Ibid.**

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**Suid-Afrikaanse Oorsig**, 18 April 1980.

304

**Sunday Express**, 22 April 1984.

305

AH 1092, Cba 1.4.1, GWU organization in the clothing industry. NUCW 1953-1962. CWU of African Women. Letter from Johanna Cornelius (General Secretary of GWUSA)—Lucy Mvubelo at International Conference in Geneva, 14 October 1959.

306

**Rand Daily Mail**, 10 October 1959.

## 2.2 Contributions Mvubelo made to improve labour conditions and relations.

If one analyses the speeches that Mvubelo made during her visits overseas, it is evident that she always stated that "trade unionism does not involve politics but only bread and butter issues".<sup>307</sup> Cornelius' letter indirectly warned her not to talk about politics, but to stick to trade union matters. Mvubelo always believed that national politics should be left to politicians and trade unionism to workers. Very often in her life Mvubelo came in for tongue-lashings of this view. Mpetha, President of the United Democratic Front and veteran activist, told more than 500 students at the fourth annual congress of the Azanian Students' Organization (AZASO): "I hate Lucy (Mvubelo) and I want all of you here including the Press to tell her that". Mpeta said union leaders were telling the workers they were not ready to revolt against apartheid. "They make workers docile and subservient", she said.<sup>308</sup>

At the Congress in Geneva, Mvubelo said that she was being questioned on why there were three unions in one industry (garment industry), one for men, one for women and one multiracial union.<sup>309</sup> Mvubelo played an instrumental role in negotiating the unification of the black men's union, the SA Clothing Workers Union (SACWU) and the Garment Workers' Union of African Women (GWU-AW).

A joint committee meeting of SACWU and the GWU-AW on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1960 was held to discuss the amalgamation between these two African unions. The importance of unity, if these two unions should amalgamate to form one union, was emphasized at this meeting. One African union for garment workers, they stressed, would lay a foundation for the coming generation and since both sections of members of the union were pass bearers, they should join hands and fight issues confronting African workers. An old idiom: "United we stand, divided we fall", was quoted. Mvubelo added that they (both the SACWU and GWU-AW) learned quite a great deal during the late Mr G Makhabeni's secretaryship. If they had thought of this idea, they could have amalgamated at that time, but it was never too late to make amends.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>307</sup> City Press, 8 July 1984.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Sentrum vir die Ondersoek na Rewolusionêre Bedrywigehede, Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit. Konferensie oor Vakbondwese in Suid-Afrika: Rewolusie of Vrede? 1 Oktober 1984, p. 20.

<sup>310</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.1, GWU Organisation in the clothing industry. NUCW 1953-1962, CWU of African Women Minutes of a joint Executive Committee Meeting of the GWU of AW and the SA Clothing Workers' Union, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1960, Johannesburg.

She further hoped that the matter would receive immediate attention since the majority of her committee members were present. She pointed out that the uncontrolled areas had a large membership which should be organized including the rank and file members.<sup>311</sup>

Sarah Chitja of the GWU-AW informed the members of this committee that in 1953 when the Native Settlement of Disputes Act had been introduced, the African Union had to form their own separate union - thus the Garment Workers' Union of African women was formed. (The formation of the GWU-AW had already been discussed in this research.) She further informed the committee that the GWU-AW was keen to amalgamate with the SACWU. The South African Clothing Workers' Union was established in 1930.<sup>312</sup> It was one of the first surviving African Trade Unions which had outlived, up till then, the struggles and obstacles confronting African workers in South Africa. The GWU-AW had to be given time, however, to discuss the matter with their own committee members. She also said that there were many workers at their factory of whom she did not know whether they belonged to any union, as she had not seen any union visiting the workers.<sup>313</sup>

After this Joint Executive Committee meeting to discuss the merging of the two unions it was decided that as the government was introducing more and more laws to bleed the African unions to death, the merging had to take place as soon as possible. "Let us unite and speak for male and female workers, fight the workers' issues and present their cases as one union, and fight for uniformity of wages", Makoa, member of SACWU, declared.<sup>314</sup>

On 17 August 1961 the first meeting of the Interim Committee for merging the GWU of African women and the SACWU was held. It was now the task of this committee to implement the decision on the merging of the two unions. This had been a very serious task and the success of the merging largely depended upon the unity of this Interim Committee. The secretaries of the

<sup>311</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>312</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker** 4 December 1964. A concise history to explain who Makabeni was and the origin of SACWU. Garner Makabeni planned and formed the SA Clothing Workers' Union (SACWU) in 1930. In 1953 the Native Labour Settlement of Disputes Act prohibited African female workers from belonging to the registered GWU of SA. In 1961 the black male workers and female workers amalgamated to form one union for blacks, the NUCW(SA). The Garment Workers' Union was not to be deterred in its aims and once again assisted the African women to form a strong trade union. In this task, the officials assisted Mrs Lucy Mvubelo.

<sup>313</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.1, GWU Organisation in the clothing industry 1953-1962, CWU of African Women. Minutes of a joint Executive Committee Meeting of the GWU of AW and the SACWU, 30 May 1960, p. 3.

<sup>314</sup> **Ibid.**

two unions, Ms V Hashe and Ms Mvubelo had to draft a resolution on the amalgamation of the unions. This resolution had to be considered by the shop stewards at their joint meeting, that was scheduled to be held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1961. Mvubelo also suggested that an article had to be placed in the **Garment Worker/Saamtrek** on the improvement of the conditions of employment which the garment workers of South Africa could achieve by closer unity. It was also suggested that Hashe and Mvubelo draft a constitution for the new amalgamated union, based on the constitution of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa.<sup>315</sup>

Mvubelo suggested that Anna Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius should be permitted to hold the positions of general secretary and president in the African union. It was explained that these two women held these honorary positions in the GWU-AW and that they received no payment for the work they had done for the GWU-AW.<sup>316</sup>

Despite their different conceptions of the objectives of African trade unionism, the two African unions agreed to merge. The African clothing unions merged and formed the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA) on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1962. The sole purpose of this merging was to organize workers into one 'kraal' which could eliminate the differences of opinion of previous unions. By agreement each disaffiliated from its co-ordinating body for a period of one year. In 1963, members of the NUCW (National Union of Clothing Workers) were called on to vote for re-affiliation to either SACTU or FOFATUSA. The old conflicts re-emerged as the ballot gave the workers the confusing choice of joining SACTU or FOFATUSA-TUCSA, the latter being a non-existent body. Although Mvubelo's FOFATUSA won the greater number of votes, pro-SACTU workers objected and continued to constitute a solid faction within the NUCW.<sup>317</sup>

During October to November 1965, officials of the NUCW of SA had to attend to hundreds of workers expressing their gratitude for higher wages and who came to seek information about the improvements gained in the amended Transvaal clothing agreement which came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1965. This agreement was yet another chapter in the history of the Transvaal clothing industry, said Mvubelo.<sup>318</sup>

<sup>315</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 5-6.

<sup>316</sup> AH 1092, Dbc 2.2, GWU Individual Unions-Labour Economy Special Topics - Border Areas 1918-1972. Report on Hammersdale organisational work by L Mvubelo and G Monare, p. 1.

<sup>317</sup> Organize or Starve p. 28 of 47. <http://www.liberation-org.za/orgs/sactu/organsta06.php>.

<sup>318</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 26 November 1965.

In 1962 Mvubelo attended an International Congress of the ICFTU in Berlin, Germany. She said she felt very honoured to be in a position to attend this conference, and was grateful that she was one of the fortunate few who had obtained a passport. "The South African government had been reasonable this time to accord to me a passport in order to attend this historic conference of representatives of the international working class", she said. She explained that if people wondered how a delegate from South Africa possibly managed to be at the conference, it was because her organization featured personally instead of figuratively as in the past in its representation. She attended the conference as an executive of FOFATUSA.<sup>319</sup>

The following quote from her speech at the conference clearly shows that Mvubelo was a true trade unionist. The dignity of the workers of all races was important to her.

"Remember then, be you black, white or yellow, one thing is in common: we are all workers with one common interest, that is, higher wages, a better life and to enjoy the best that life offers us. The delegates to this Conference are therefore charged to uphold human dignity and above all to save the workers and humanity from artificial distinction."<sup>320</sup>

Mvubelo said that when she went up the rostrum to tell them about the problems workers had in South Africa, she found it very difficult to say that she was a true South African because she was born and brought up in the urban area but could not call herself a citizen of South Africa. One other problem that she had was to explain to the congress why black unions were not recognized by the law.

Mvubelo explained that even though black unions were not recognized by the law, they were not outlawed. They could still form black unions and could still talk to the employers. She also told the delegates that blacks could still negotiate (they used to have informal negotiations) and agreements arrived at were taken to the full committee of the Industrial Council and such agreements then applied to all the workers in a particular industry. The only thing that one

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<sup>319</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU Trade Unions National Union of Clothing Workers. Correspondence and Papers. Address by Lucy Mvubelo. Extracts from Report of International Secretariat submitted to the Seventh World Congress—International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Berlin, 1962 ... vide pp. 373-7 Report of Congress.

<sup>320</sup> **Ibid.**

needed in South Africa, she told them, was to use some tactics. "If one wanted to be successful, one had to be tactical; otherwise one would be a loser."<sup>321</sup>

The shop stewards' decision to impose a ban on overtime and bonus work until such time as a satisfactory agreement could be reached, was effective and of educational value to those workers who had never before realized the necessity of a union. They then appreciated that the benefits which they enjoyed were not gained by standing on platforms and making their voices heard but by putting forward constructive arguments based on facts and figures to convince the clothing employers.

According to Mvubelo the African workers in the clothing industry were the most fortunate in that they enjoyed, without discrimination, the same rights, benefits and facilities as workers of any other race. The majority of workers belonging to the NUCW (SA) were grateful for the improvements in their wages and working conditions. This was undoubtedly proved by the workers streaming to the union's offices to thank them. Mvubelo added that being grateful was not enough. Members had to assist in organizing and educating fellow workers about the need for a strong trade union organization to combat poverty.<sup>322</sup>

By being active, Mvubelo added, and helping the union to organize efficiently, it might be possible to obtain recognition for the African unions and to gain respect of government authorities if proved that the African unions could administer their affairs as responsibly as unions of other races.<sup>323</sup>

During her entire trade union career Mvubelo fought for the dignity of all workers. Like Scheepers, the President of the GWUSA, she was always trying to ensure jobs for her workers at a fair wage. Mvubelo said that an article published in the **Garment Worker/Klerewerker** of 10 March 1967, entitled "America's 38 million workers on higher wage scales", drew her attention to the Wage Board Investigation into the Clothing Industry Certain Areas, which took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1967 in Durban. Mvubelo wondered whether the board would consider and accept proposals which had been submitted by the militant Garment Workers' Union Consultative Committee (SA), which was a body of three large registered unions, i.e. Garment

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<sup>321</sup> Vakbondwese in SA. Rewolusie of Vrede? 1 October 1984, p. 21.

<sup>322</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>323</sup> **Ibid.**

Workers' Union of the Western Province, Garment Workers' Industrial Union (Natal) and the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa.<sup>324</sup>

Mvubelo believed that the decentralization of secondary industry had surely brought about relief in the African areas. The clothing industry, which was an attraction to African women in these areas, called for much comment. African families looked upon the mother, although a minor in the eyes of the law, to be the head of the home, as far as setting an example to her family and the community at all times. In areas where these factories had been established, it was found that mothers would rather earn a lower wage in nearby factories than work so far away from their homes.<sup>325</sup>

Mvubelo added that these mothers had sacrificed their homes to be able to pay for the education of their children. Education had been a 'craving' for the majority of them, because otherwise they had to work on farms, ploughing and harvesting for a mere 15 cents per day, working from dawn to dusk. The minimal wage which was paid in 1967 according to the Wage Determination Act No. 221 dated six years back without once being reviewed during this period. Mvubelo believed that it would have been futile to compare the wages paid in South Africa with those paid in America or European countries. However, it was a disgrace to allow some employers to pay a shameful wage to their employees when the goods produced were sold on the same market as those of employers paying a decent wage.<sup>326</sup>

This, in itself, was unfair competition between employers let alone the depressed worker. Despite the low wages paid in these areas, workers had to take goods in place of some of their weekly wages, just to be able to keep their jobs. Trade union organizations and employers in the controlled areas looked upon the Wage Board to safeguard them from this unfair practice. Workers were waiting hopefully for the Wage Board to consider their efforts in having qualified themselves to produce at the same level as workers in other centres and not prejudice them just because of their environment.

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<sup>324</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 21 April 1967.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

The purchasing of foodstuffs and supplies had doubled the cost of living, and thus the wages at that stage were quite insufficient. The proposed wage was still too low. Mvubelo asked: "Why not follow the example set by America?"<sup>327</sup>

At the annual conference of the Trade Union Council of South Africa in May 1966, Mr LCM Scheepers, in his presidential address spoke about the Wage Board that could not cope. The result was that some workers got no upward revision of their pay for six to seven years or longer. This was morally wrong and could not be tolerated, he added.<sup>328</sup>

However, since government pay increases were given, living costs had risen further and it was doubtful whether the workers had, in fact, benefited very much. Scheepers finally said that unless all workers, irrespective of race or colour, stood together to insist on fair wages and working conditions, the various groups would be played off one against the other until all were open to exploitation.<sup>329</sup>

In reports on investigations made by Mvubelo concerning wages and working conditions in rural areas, the conclusion was made that there seemed to be a lot of unhappiness and problems experienced by the workers in the rural areas. She wrote that conditions of employment were not at all satisfactory and wages seemed to lag behind the wages prescribed by the Wage Board.

She also found that workers in the rural areas did not receive any sick benefits, female workers did not receive any confinement allowances, workers who led work stoppages were kept in custody for periods ranging from three days to three weeks, some workers were only released after interrogations and the main reason for all the workers' grievances was that they wanted the increase in wages as promised to them. Mvubelo recommended that the registered garment trade unions had to make efforts to set up union offices which could assist workers concerning their grievances such as the forfeiture of benefits in the past through ignorance.<sup>330</sup>

On 29 January 1966, the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa (FOFATUSA) officially ceased to exist. Mvubelo called a special meeting of its 12 affiliates to

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 13 May 1966.

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**Ibid.**

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AH 1092. Dbc 2.2, GWU Individual Unions—Labour Economy Special Topics—Border Areas 1918-1972. Report on investigations made at factories in the rural areas from Wednesday 15 March 1967 to Friday 17

make the decision. They were the only remaining unions of the 20 which had originally formed FOFATUSA after its inception in 1959. In 1966 it had 13 000 affiliate members left of the 36 000 when the organization was at its peak. Mvubelo, President of the Federation, said that it had been decided to disband because of the numerous difficulties encountered in trying to organize the African workers. "We are an unrecognised section of labour", she said. "It will be a sad day for me when FOFATUSA goes. I haven't slept for many nights for thinking about it."<sup>331</sup>

"The unions which no longer belonged to FOFATUSA had become disorganised," she said. In many industries, African labour was not organized at all. She advised the remaining unions to join the Trade Union Council of South Africa. TUCSA, at this stage, already had African affiliate members, most of them dual members of TUCSA and FOFATUSA. Mvubelo said her federation (FOFATUSA) had been successful in organizing a few industries, but its strength had weakened ever since TUCSA had opened its doors to African affiliated unions in 1962.<sup>332</sup>

The foundation members of FOFATUSA were the African members of the Garment Workers' Union of African Women. These members did not agree with SACTU policy that trade unionism could be kept outside politics. The formation of FOFATUSA was already discussed earlier in this research. Mvubelo said that although FOFATUSA at that stage still had sympathizers in many parts of the world, it felt it could "no longer continue to survive and work properly for the benefit of its members."<sup>333</sup>

A memorable day was that of the First Conference of the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA), which was held at the Trades Hall on 19 June 1967. This young union of Mvubelo had to be nursed to its adult stage, but resolutions submitted by workers from all centres were mature and well debated, as though the workers had been in the field for a long time. Johanna Cornelius, General Secretary of the GWU (SA) presided at this momentous conference. Her inspiring speech of encouragement and advice to Mvubelo as president of the NUCW (SA) and all its members was met with loud applause.

The conference was also honoured by the presence of Mr L Dowes Dekker, Acting General Secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa, and in his address to the conference he

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March 1967, submitted by Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary, 29 March 1967.

<sup>331</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 29 January 1966.

<sup>332</sup> **Ibid.**

said: "Your Union is run and organised like any other registered trade union, although it faces particular hardships because you have no stop-order facilities, not all you members are covered by Unemployment Insurance Fund, you are also faced with the big task of educating your members about trade union principles."<sup>334</sup>

Mr Dowes Dekker drove the point home when he made these remarks. The NUCW (SA) faced many problems and obstacles which nobody could overcome except by organizing workers who had the privilege of enjoying full recognition by other trade unionists and workers of other industries.

Anna Scheepers, President of the GWU (SA), in her greetings made a very important remark in saying that in "South Africa, being a multi-racial country, workers of all racial groups was dependent on one another for employment and therefore close co-operation was essential and would benefit all". She added that it went without any challenge that African workers, even though not yet enjoying the rights embodied in the Industrial Conciliation Act, played a role in the industrial field which was highly appreciated.

Some important resolutions were made at this conference. Following are some of the resolutions which were the highlights of the Conference: Recognition of African Trade Unions.

The Conference requested TUCSA to apply pressure to the authorities with regard to the recognition of African trade unions which were its affiliates. This would promote the economy, and would also make better use of the potential labour force of South Africa.

Another important resolution was the organizing of unorganized workers. The majority of workers in industries were not, and by virtue of law could not be accepted as members in registered trade unions. This setup caused a lot of discontent by African workers and workers of other races, and also opened the opportunity of unfair competition on the labour market. Conference requested TUCSA to use whatever influence their affiliates had to assist in their respective industries and workshops to organize African workers.

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 28 July 1967.**

Influx Control was another important issue about which a resolution was taken at the conference. Workers viewed with much concern the conditions in which they were placed in regard to employment in areas other than their own. Influx control had brought about severe hardships to workers and had caused a high rate of crime and delinquency. The Conference therefore urged the Trade Union Council of South Africa to recommend to the authorities to zone the Witwatersrand and Vereeniging as one area, and this they believed would ease the situation of workers and their families.<sup>335</sup>

For TUCSA, however, a difficult road lay ahead. The government policy of not wanting to recognize black trade unions and all the legislation to ensure apartheid in South Africa made it very difficult to fulfil the task of a co-ordinating trade union body.

At a convention of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations, held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Apollo II astronaut Col Edwin E Aldrin (Jnr), the guest speaker, concluded his speech by saying: "It may be easier to reach the moon than to solve some of the difficult problems here on earth." One of these problems definitely seemed to be government policy in South Africa concerning black workers!<sup>336</sup> Scheepers, President of the GWUSA, also attended this convention.

TUCSA had a total membership of about 200 000 in 1966, but less than half were whites. The Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) was the biggest single union under the TUCSA umbrella. In 1966 the AEU decided to withdraw from TUCSA. They had consistently fought for withdrawal from the co-ordinating body because TUCSA allowed African trade unions to affiliate. The AEU had, however, untiringly battled for the recognition of African trade unions and the repeal of the job reservation laws.<sup>337</sup>

The withdrawal of the AEU was seen as the greatest blow to the ideal of worker unity since the introduction of the Industrial Conciliation Act. The AEU's break with TUCSA meant that TUCSA lost more than 25 per cent of its white membership.<sup>338</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 24 October 1967.

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**Rand Daily Mail**, 28 April 1966.

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**Ibid.**

After investigations on the question of TUCSA's policy of organizing African trade unions, it was clear that there were three main viewpoints. One section believed strongly and outspokenly that African trade unions should not be affiliated to white unions in the council. Others agreed with TUCSA's policy but said that before TUCSA would be weakened by the disaffiliation of strong and influential trade unions, separate co-ordinating councils for African workers had to be formed. Trade unionists supporting the third viewpoint said that they believed strongly that there had to be no compromise with principles and that all workers should be organized together.<sup>339</sup>

At a special conference of TUCSA held on 12 December 1967, TUCSA's multiracial policy was discussed. A delegate to this conference said: "Either we decide that TUCSA must no longer organise African unions and allow them to affiliate, or we continue with the same policy we have had in the past and to hell with the consequences." It was then decided by TUCSA to recommend that the African unions had to be excluded from membership of the council.

The decision was seen in labour circles as a major triumph for the Government and the Minister of Labour, Mr Viljoen, in particular. But the General Secretary of TUCSA, Mr JA Grobbelaar, said after the conference that the decision had been taken not for the sake of the Minister but "for the sake of TUCSA". "In order that the Trade Union Council of South Africa may continue to remain the effective force it has been to date, and in an effort to maintain and increase its present affiliated strength, conference recommends to its affiliates that membership of the TUCSA be confined to registered trade unions."<sup>340</sup> Six of the twelve African unions affiliated to TUCSA then resigned or offered to resign in a last-minute bid to prevent the disintegration and possible collapse of South Africa's largest labour organisation.<sup>341</sup>

The two African unions which threatened to resign were the National Union of Clothing Workers and the African Tobacco Workers Union. Mvubelo was asked to present a statement at the special conference of TUCSA, held on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 1967 on behalf of her own union, the NUCWSA and the ATWU. Mvubelo said that as they were of the opinion that trade unions for African workers had to be recognized one day, it became essential for the growing number of blacks entering the garment industry to have the type of negotiating machinery which the free western world had accepted as the best means to govern workers' conditions.

<sup>339</sup> **Sunday Times**, 12 November 1967.

<sup>340</sup> **Daily Mail**, 13 December 1967.

<sup>341</sup> **Daily Mail**, 12 December 1967.

Mvubelo stated that they regretted the SA government's policy of non-recognition of African workers because the blacks had become a permanent part of the South African labour force. She said African Garment Worker leaders would never play any part in introducing political ideologies into workers' organizations and that they totally opposed boycotts of SA because it would harm workers and SA.

The SA government's endeavours to develop African Homelands and border industries to provide work for blacks were welcomed provided that it did not undermine the established standards of all workers in SA. Mvubelo commented that they were anxious to enter industry and become more skilled but not if it undermined wage structures of white and brown people. This would only lead to a general lowering of standards for all SA workers.

Mvubelo said they appreciated that registered unions could negotiate on behalf of African workers and hoped this situation would continue because it contributed towards industrial peace in SA. She said, although they (NUCW of SA) decided to disaffiliate from TUCSA, the NUCWE (SA) would continue to exist simply for the purpose of trade unionism and that they had been able to fight political elements, and in this respect rendered a service to SA.<sup>342</sup>

Mvubelo believed that the decision to disaffiliate was the correct thing to do in order to save the council any further embarrassment through their continued association as unregistered trade unions with the registered trade unions of whites, brown people and Indians.<sup>343</sup>

They believed that TUCSA's continued existence as an influential body was only possible through the NUCW (SA)'s disaffiliation, and that they would have acted contrary to the spirit of trade unionism if they did not do everything in their power to keep the council going on the course it had set for itself.

Mvubelo believed that as the only trade union co-ordinating body in South Africa which was dedicated to the democratic ideals of true trade unionism, it was essential that TUCSA continued to prosper. Unity in the workers' movement was, they believed, of paramount importance, and

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<sup>342</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.5. Organisation of the Clothing Workers. NUCW 1965-1977. Correspondence Statement submitted by Ms L Mvubelo of the NUCW(SA) at the Special Conference of the Trade Union Council of South Africa, pp. 1-2.

they could not be a party to anything which would destroy this unity. TUCSA had to continue to act as the voice of the workers in South Africa irrespective of its composition. Mvubelo was sure that it would continue to do so.<sup>344</sup>

The NUCW (SA) called upon the rest of the trade unions that remained outside the ranks of TUCSA, and who had given as their excuse the inclusion of African unions within TUCSA's ranks, called to show that they were genuinely attempting to further the cause of trade unionism in South Africa by affiliating to TUCSA. If they did not, it would be evident that they were not trade unions such as was known throughout the democratic world.

Mvubelo also thanked TUCSA and its affiliated unions for their assistance to the NUCW (SA) in the past. They were looking forward to the day when they could return to the national co-ordinating body. Mvubelo concluded by saying: "When this day arrives we will play our part in building a unified and effective labour movement founded upon the true principles of workers' solidarity and democratic trade unionism."<sup>345</sup>

To save the trade union movement from fragmentation in a realistic manner, Mvubelo, by making her union's view known in a responsible statement, raised sympathy even amongst unions who advocated the exclusion of African unions from TUCSA.<sup>346</sup>

Mvubelo explained that the leaders of TUCSA did not reject them (blacks) but its members did and that was why black unions started to reject TUCSA. At a conference of the Centre for Investigation into Revolutionary Activities, Mvubelo reaffirmed why TUCSA was rejected by black workers, by saying the following to them: "In 1969 the climax was so high that many white unions, brown unions and Indian unions were actually disaffiliated from TUCSA. We realised then that there was something wrong with us, probably our skin colour which made us unacceptable. Even the brown workers in the trade union movement did not accept us. So we decided that we should withdraw from TUCSA so that TUCSA could survive and speak with one voice. Since the NUCW (SA)'s affiliation to TUCSA in 1962 they found that they had been rejected by their own colleagues."<sup>347</sup>

343

**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**, p. 3.

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 26 January 1968.

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Konferensie oor Vakbondwese in SA. Rewolusie of Vrede? 1 October 1984, p. 21.

TUCSA formed two subcommittees: one was concerned with organizing workers not belonging to a trade union and the other was handling African affairs. Mvubelo served on both these subcommittees. She said that TUCSA had done much for the black workers. TUCSA's policy, she continued, had always been threatened by the law in South Africa, but it kept its head high. TUCSA, she concluded, was persistent in its policies and its principles were purely based on trade unionism.<sup>348</sup>

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1968, Mvubelo received a letter from L Doves Dekker, Assistant General Secretary of the Committee for Unorganized Workers. He told Mvubelo that this committee was fully aware of the reasons for her Union's decision to disaffiliate from TUCSA and that they respected the wisdom of this decision.

The opinion was expressed that TUCSA's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference would decide what the policy towards African unions would be. Doves Dekker said that should TUCSA decide not to change its policy, it was sincerely hoped that her union would again affiliate to the Council (TUCSA), and that she would again be appointed to serve on this committee.<sup>349</sup>

In 1968 the South African garment trade unions received the good news that they had been given a seat on the General Council of the International Textile and Garment Workers' Federation. Mvubelo wrote a letter in compliance to the ITGWF's circular on the nomination of a representative for the General Council and Executive Committee of this Federation. She said it was a pleasure to inform the ITGWF that her union, the NUCW(SA) had nominated Ms Anna Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA, to serve on the General Council and Executive Committee of the ITGWF.

Mvubelo stated that Scheepers had served the African workers in the clothing industry and she had been instrumental in the inclusion of all workers in the Industrial Council Agreement of the garment industry. In her motivation she further pointed out that in addition to Scheepers' career of service in the clothing industry, she had served with her in the subcommittee of the organizing of the unorganized workers, of which Scheepers was the chairperson. She was also one of TUCSA's vice-presidents and she rendered yeoman services on behalf of unorganized workers.

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition she assisted other sections of African workers in drafting memoranda, representing African workers at Wage Board sittings and giving evidence on their behalf.

"For the past thirty years", Mvubelo said: "Miss Scheepers has been on the forefront of fighting for the economic upliftment of tens and thousands of workers of all races." Mvubelo explained that in clothing negotiations in 1968, Scheepers was the chief negotiator when R1 000 000 was achieved for the workers. Over 56 per cent of the workers who would have shared in this were African workers.

Mvubelo concluded her motivation by writing: "My union will be honoured if she would be accepted in the committees already mentioned."<sup>350</sup>

As already discussed in Chapter 1 of this research, history was made as Scheepers was the first and only representative from the African continent and the first and only woman who served at that stage, in 1968, on this international governing body. The appointment of Scheepers enjoyed the united support of the South African affiliated unions, which had a membership in excess of 75 000 workers.<sup>351</sup>

Mvubelo's letter to motivate the choice of Scheepers as candidate for the ITGWF, just proved once again the trust and respects the garment workers had for Scheepers. There are many examples to prove the good working relationship that existed between Scheepers and Mvubelo. They sometimes differed on issues, but in general they got along very well. Issues like the administration of the finances of the NUCW (SA) sometimes caused differences. Scheepers, however, was always there to help Mvubelo where help was needed. A good example of a simple administrative problem that Mvubelo was assisted with by the GWU (SA), was the question of how to plan annual leave.<sup>352</sup>

In a letter to the GWU (SA), Mvubelo expressed gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the NUCW (SA) for successful negotiations conducted for workers employed in the sections not previously covered by the GWU SA's main agreement. Over 30 years had been spent in trying to

<sup>350</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.5. Organisation of the Clothing Workers NUCW 1965-1977. Correspondence. Nomination of Representative, General Council and Executive Committee 20<sup>th</sup> June 1968. Letter Mvubelo-J Greenhalgh (General Secretary ITGWF), s.a.

<sup>351</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 22 November 1968.

<sup>352</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4 GWU/NUCW Correspondence and Papers. Letter from J Cornelius (General

get these members covered. She said that due to the vast experience of Scheepers and her belief that the standards of workers had to improve, Scheepers and the GWU SA eventually succeeded.<sup>353</sup>

It is clear that a good relationship existed between Scheepers as President of the GWUSA and the NUCW (SA) of Mvubelo.

In February 1969 TUCSA finally made the decision to exclude African trade unions from membership. The delegates at the conference adopted the decision placed before them by the National Executive Committee to limit the membership to registered trade unions.<sup>354</sup> Mvubelo said this decision of TUCSA to amend its constitution to exclude African trade union affiliation, served to ripen the fear of the African worker that his/her future job and income security had an aura of doubt about it. There was a feeling that this decision was the crystal ball of his/her fate, and it did not prognosticate anything too desirable.<sup>355</sup>

Mvubelo, as General Secretary of the NUCW, pointed out that members believed the NUCW had to be dissolved, and that they should discontinue their subscriptions to the union. "The dissemination of this belief would be detrimental to our organisation",<sup>356</sup> Mvubelo stated.

"Garment workers in the clothing industry should be very clear that their present working conditions are the fruits of 50 years of activity. They are as a result of negotiations by employers and the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa, who have the right to bargain for the working standards of all workers. African employees in the clothing industry have been granted the same benefits as the industry's white and brown labour force, and the prescribed wages have no racial classification."<sup>357</sup>

Mvubelo further believed that "(i)t is essential for workers to know what a trade union stands for, what its activities are and why it is that workers should be organised into a union. The union is a bridge between workers and employers and is the only force which could prevent the

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Secretary, GWUSA)—Mvubelo. Insufficient staff to cope with the duties.

<sup>353</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.5 Organisation of the clothing workers. NUCW (1965-1977) Correspondence. Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary, NUCW(SA)—the General Secretary of the GWUSA, 14 April 1969.

<sup>354</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 February 1969.

<sup>355</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 14 March 1969.

<sup>356</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>357</sup> **Ibid.**

exploitation by the employer of his labour: the union, which acts as the mouth-piece of its members, takes up the cudgels for all of them."<sup>358</sup> It does this, she said, because as much as the employer requires the employee's labour, so does the employee require recognition of his needs.

Furthermore she explained clearly what a co-ordinating body is. "A co-ordinating body of trade unions is an organisation that embraces several unions, large or small, irrespective of industry. It is concerned with the labour movement on a national level. By its strength it enjoys the recognition of the state and is invited to send delegates from its affiliates to serve on various bodies - such as those set up by the Department of Labour which pertain to workers' interests: These include employment funds, sick benefit funds, pension funds and the like."

According to her the workers of the NUCW (SA) were fortunate to have a co-operative relationship with the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa, which was one of the most powerful and progressive trade unions in the Republic. She also told her union's workers that the GWUSA had been responsible for the organization of workers in a number of other related and unrelated industries and has led to the existence of the Cigarette and Tobacco Workers' Union; Sweet Workers' Union; Broom and Brush Workers' Union; Hotel Bar and Catering Union; Biscuit Making Union; and later the Textile Workers' Union and the Radio, Television. Electronic and Allied Workers' Union. It has further helped to establish several others.<sup>359</sup>

Mvubelo finally urged on her union's workers as follows: "In view of the refuge given the NUCW (SA) by the Garment Workers' Union of SA, in the face of your exclusion from TUCSA stand unitedly and preserve your membership of your union."<sup>360</sup>

African trade unions, including the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA), were confused about conflicting statements in the daily press in respect of African workers in industry. African workers had great hopes when it was stated that registered trade unions had the duty of negotiating on behalf of African workers employed in their respective industries and that employers could not refuse to negotiate with the registered trade unions, claiming that it was the function of the Bantu Labour Board to negotiate on behalf of the African workers.

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

The African workers felt that if registered trade unions negotiated on their behalf and the rate for the job became applicable, not only would they enjoy proper protection by law, but employers would not be able to use them to undercut wages of their colleagues in other racial groups. Large numbers of them were earning wages below the poverty datum line, and they were looking forward to being covered by industrial agreements negotiated by trade unions which understood their industries, their job descriptions and the wages which were commensurate to the job performed. The statement published in the **World**, Tuesday October, 28<sup>th</sup> 1969, entitled 'government still says no for ' was a great concern.<sup>361</sup>

### **2.2.1 Mvubelo determined to fight for equal union rights, wages and recognition of all workers. (1970-1974)**

Mvubelo believed trade unionism and collective bargaining should be the right of all workers and not confined to certain racial groups. She said that South Africa had become the most industrialized country on the African continent and formed the bulk of the work force due to economic demands and requirements. She added: "Restriction laws rather than laws which meet the requirements of the time have been introduced, but just as the government makes laws, so it can change them to meet the requirements of industry and commerce in order to provide more work for the people to ensure the prosperity of the country."<sup>362</sup>

Mvubelo and her union also admired the numerous changes made by the government such as the establishment of industries in the homelands, which would enable the people in these areas to make a living, but this should not be detrimental to the workers in those areas where the machinery of industrial councils and agreements existed, they added.

Mvubelo was concerned about the government's statement on the question of suspension of industrial agreements and wage determinations for homelands. She felt very strongly that labour affairs lie within the scope of the Department of Labour. If agreements and determinations were suspended, what protection was left for the worker in the homeland and what protection would the urban workers enjoy? She believed that such a step would jeopardise the prospects of

<sup>361</sup> **World**, 28 October 1969.

<sup>362</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 December 1969.

workers in the cities in obtaining higher wages and better conditions of employment, and furthermore there would be no job security for them.<sup>363</sup>

In a statement to the Minister of Labour by the NUCW (SA), Mvubelo stated that "workers have only one means of making their livelihood, that is selling their labour power and once they are deprived of this they are at their wits ends". She said that there were various reasons why workers in the garment industry had lost their employment but she was convinced that the unfair competition of the employers in controlled areas against the uncontrolled areas was the primary reason. "We are not against decentralisation of the clothing industry and establishment of clothing factories in the rural areas but we feel that employers in the rural areas should not be allowed a free and uncontrolled manipulation of their labour force as these results in very low wages and horrible labour conditions."<sup>364</sup>

Mvubelo emphasized that the situation was not as it was reported in the daily press, namely that African workers were replacing European workers. This was entirely false and misleading as many black workers had been retrenched as well. The root of the whole problem, Mvubelo stressed, was the unfair competition coming from the rural areas against the controlled areas and thereby depriving the latter of a great volume of their business, and thus necessitating the lessening of their workers.<sup>365</sup>

She further stated that as a trade union movement the NUCW (SA) had never stood for sectional interests of the workers. They appreciated the fact that all workers had to earn their livelihood by selling their labour. To prevent any further deterioration of the labour conditions resulting in unemployment in controlled areas, factories in rural areas had to be compelled by legislation to pay living wages and not a mere pittance as they had been doing.

She reiterated that the NUCW (SA) was not against the establishment of clothing factories in rural areas but against the starvation wages they were paying. She asked the Minister to remedy this anomaly by forcing these factories to pay their workers a living wage.<sup>366</sup> In the 1970s,

<sup>363</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 December 1969.

<sup>364</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.1, GWU Organisation in the Clothing Industry. NUCW 1953-1962. GWU of African Women. Statement prepared by the GWU of African Women and the SACWU Trade Unions catering for the interests of African female and African male workers in the consideration of the Minister of Labour on the recent retrenchment of workers at Germiston Clothing Factory, Germiston, p. 2.

<sup>365</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 3.

<sup>366</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 4.

however, African workers through a series of strikes and other forms of work stoppages demonstrated that their power on the factory floor would force a political transformation.

Early in 1970, the General Secretary of the GWU (SA), Hester Cornelius requested the commissioner of Bantu Affairs to issue a passport to the General Secretary of the NUCW (SA), Mvubelo, to attend the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference in Geneva in June 1970, as an observer. Cornelius wrote that Mvubelo had been a law abiding citizen at all times who opposed any communistic inspired movements and who led her union on true trade union principles. She opposed any politics in trade unions. She would be a true ambassador for South Africa at the ILO Conference, where vicious anti-South African attacks would be launched.

Finally, Cornelius argued that it would improve South Africa's image if a person like Mvubelo would be able to put forward South Africa's case at the ILO. Her views would surely be more valuable than that of any other white South African that would attend the conference. She was well known in government circles for her pro-South African views and should be assisted by government so that she could continue with her good work.<sup>367</sup>

The fact that Mvubelo was granted permission by the South African government to travel across the world, caused many black trade unions to see Mvubelo as supporting apartheid and being a 'sell-out' of the black trade unions.

In 1971 Mvubelo went on a 45-day study tour to America. As the general secretary of the 17 000-member national Union of Clothing Workers (SA) she stressed the need for more American industrial investment in South Africa. Such industry was necessary to tap the huge labour reservoir in South Africa. Mvubelo reported, "I met many government officials and people in the labour movement and others in the United States who expressed great concern about the people in South Africa. I told them that it is very advantageous for us, the Africans, as well as our country, for industries to come to South Africa."<sup>368</sup>

She said that people in the USA who opposed industries coming to South Africa and advocated economic sanctions and boycotts against South Africa, had formed the wrong concept. "They

<sup>367</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU Trade Unions NUCW Correspondence and Papers. 25 May 1970. Hester Cornelius, General Secretary of the GWUSA-Commissioner of Bantu Affairs.

<sup>368</sup> *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*, 25 June 1971.

would only be hurting the people who are making their living from those industries", she continued. "I believe such investments will be beneficial to all in our country, that the whole economy will be helped."

Mvubelo added that, if the industries were there, "(i)t will not be long before people are educated and able to produce. Although most Africans are not trained, if certain opportunities are opened up to them, they will prove their worth and ability."

She said she would have liked to see similar training programmes along with apprenticeship programmes in South Africa. "If such avenues could be opened, I think it would be very advantageous for the country to progress in its economic growth."

Mvubelo said she was impressed by the number of African Americans who were not only enrolled in vocational training programmes but who were studying for professional liberal arts and scientific and religious careers.

"More vocation/training programmes such as those offered in educational institutions throughout the US could lead to economic betterment for Africans in South Africa," Mvubelo stated in Los Angeles.<sup>369</sup>

She concluded her address by saying that the subcontinent needed capital, technical skills and modern organization. In fact it needed the best of western industrial achievements, words were not enough. Every new factory built, every additional kilometre of railway, every bale of clothing made, brought the races closer together in South Africa, and helped to take a small step away from the prison of poverty, and assisted the races to be less frightened of change. Her appeal was not for less criticism, but rather for greater material and cultural involvement in the development of this exciting area of the world, South Africa.

In Miami, Florida, Mvubelo attended the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Convention, the highlight of her trip to the USA. She addressed the meeting and received a standing ovation. She said she could learn a great deal from the Americans because they, like the South Africans, had been faced and were still facing problems of a multicultural country.

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<sup>369</sup>

Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 25 June 1971.

She continued by saying that the South Africans had not overcome either their legal or other disabilities, but the future looked promising in that the value of the contribution made by the African worker was being realized.<sup>370</sup>

Mvubelo explained that the prohibition of strike action in South Africa naturally weakened any negotiations which might have been undertaken. When negotiations took place the workers and leaders of the NUCW (SA) were consulted, they received regular reports and the GWU (SA) would not have concluded an agreement without the approval of the African Union. African workers, like all other workers, received the rate for the job in the agreement negotiated by the GWU (SA), enjoyed the same holidays, hours of work, i.e. 40 a week, and all fringe benefits. Mvubelo said African workers in many other industries were not so fortunate.<sup>371</sup>

She continued her address by saying that developments at that stage were definitely in favour of the African worker being trained for higher skilled jobs and being remunerated accordingly. She concluded her speech by saying: "I am convinced that the value of economic considerations will in the near future supersede negative ideological considerations. The day, I am sure, will dawn in the next decade that people will be judged on merit and not on the colour of their skin."<sup>372</sup>

Later in Atlanta, Georgia, she visited the offices of an African American-circulated newspaper, the **Atlanta Daily World**. Mvubelo was granted the freedom of the City of Cleveland. As the leader of the only viable African trade union in South Africa, she had shown what could be achieved with determination and by working within the limits of the South African situation.

During her hectic but fruitful overseas tour, Mvubelo delivered numerous lectures and held discussions with scores of dignitaries, civic leaders and trade unionists. On occasion she declared that "(t)here is no law in South Africa which prevents a group of African workers from signing a private contract."<sup>373</sup>

The wisdom of her approach was recalled on her return to South Africa. The Coca Cola Corporation in the USA had asked for her advice regarding to what must be done for African

<sup>370</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU Trade Union NUCW Correspondence and Papers. Address by Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary of the NUCW(SA) delivered to the Convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Hotel Fountainbleau, Miami Beach, Florida, 8 to 14 May 1971, p. 1.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

workers. The company was obviously concerned about the pressure being brought to bear on American companies who made profits in South Africa, and had wisely requested guidance from a top African leader. This event marked an important historical occasion for African workers.<sup>374</sup>

Change was very slowly taking place in South Africa and part of that process was an increased awareness on the part of the Europeans and Americans that they could not do it alone and that they required the advice and guidance of the African, brown and Indian leaders in solving their problems. It was for this reason that Mvubelo advised American companies on their labour policies.

Before her return to South Africa, Mvubelo also went to Europe and visited the ILO where she held discussions with the Director General, and called on the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers in Britain.

Mvubelo said that the people of Great Britain were greatly interested in the South African people's attempt to come to grips and resolve what was (and still is!) a great world problem, namely race relations. She added that in this complex world, and certainly when it came to race relations, it was fashionable to be a pessimist, to be a prophet of doom, or to say that we had to leave it to work itself out. "Undoubtedly, there are great problems of race relations in South Africa, and we in the Garment Industry do not under-estimate this, but equally we would be betraying our social responsibility, we would be betraying ourselves as human beings, if we did not constantly pursue programmes and solutions and look for and find hope in the future."

She continued her speech by saying, "Miss Anna Scheepers, my colleague, a world known figure from the GWU of South Africa, is one of the great South African champions of the workers of all races. I mention her because it is true to say that in most parts of the world, the garment workers are in the vanguard for the protection of the worker, but also because she expresses this determination to resolve the problems and our hope in the future."<sup>375</sup>

From what Mvubelo said in her address about race relations in South Africa, it is clear that she was optimistic that in future a solution for the problem would be found. The following quote

373

**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 6 August 1971.

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**Ibid.**

from her address further supports her optimism: "We in the Garment Industry in South Africa find hope in the future, for we see great changes taking place in South Africa today. These changes arise from the changing in the thinking of white South Africans as the forces of urbanisation, one of the greatest transformers of thinking, makes its influence on the attitudes of people."

Mvubelo said that the changes in the tone and tempo of urban white thinking would have a great influence on the future economic and social conditions of the black workers of South Africa, for while these great sociological changes within the white thinking in the cities were not at that stage extensively reflected in the policies and utterances of the political leaders, the politics in South Africa soon had to catch up with the attitudes of the white public, and when that happened the blacks would have a new deal and experience the removal of some of the barriers to economic equality.<sup>376</sup>

She stressed the important fact that South Africa was facing a tremendous development problem. South Africa's development responsibilities did not stop at its borders, but extended over the entire subcontinent, for the "welfare of the people of Southern Africa is inter-dependent, and progress in South Africa will determine the prosperity and happiness of the entire region".

Mvubelo said the rest of the world had a role to play in the Southern African drama, "for the future of nations of the world are interdependent, and what happens in Southern Africa, just as what happens in South Vietnam, has repercussions throughout the world."

Back home from her overseas tour Mvubelo told the reporter of the **Garment Worker/Klerewerker** that "South Africans, irrespective of the colour of their skin, love their country. Most of those who have had the opportunity to travel abroad have found it necessary to rectify misconceptions of conditions in the country, and wherever possible, have created a better image."<sup>377</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 3 December 1971.

Mvubelo declared that economic sanctions and boycotts against South Africa were wrong. It would only harm the black people they aimed to help the most. It was only capital investments in South Africa that would help the blacks, Mvubelo believed.<sup>378</sup>

The information that could be found on Mvubelo's 1971 overseas visits for this research clearly proves that Mvubelo had always been a good ambassador for South Africa. She tried to paint South Africa's image as bright and positive as possible. To her the task of her union, the NUCW (SA), was to look after the welfare of its members and not of becoming involved in politics.

Mvubelo, like Scheepers of the GWUSA, warned the NUCW (SA) members not to become tools of political elements, but to rely on the union to solve their problems. She told the workers that it was the GWUSA and not political elements who had obtained the rate for the job and provident, medical and slack pay benefits for them.<sup>379</sup>

In 1971 the NUCW (SA) once again proved the saying, "united we stand, divided we fall", to be true. The NUCW (SA) went through a terrible crisis. Disrupters of the union tried their utmost to smash the NUCW (SA) which had been built on a solid foundation by the leaders of the GWU of SA, Anna Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius, President and General Secretary respectively. Mvubelo stated that these persons were stalwart leaders of trade unionism in South Africa. They had sacrificed their leisure and pleasure to uplift the black workers. During the struggle between the disrupters and the NUCW (SA), Scheepers and Cornelius took a firm stand and prevented those who tried to topple the union from the foundation on which it had been built.

They cherished the past achievements of the GWUSA and the NUCW (SA) and not only held the vision of, but worked for the birth of a new era in which the black worker would be recognized as a worker in terms of labour legislation.<sup>380</sup>

In a letter from Scheepers to Mvubelo, the former stated that it had always been a pleasure to serve the African workers, the same as if they had been members of the GWUSA. Scheepers wrote, "It is only the legal position that separates us, but I am pleased that in spirit we are one." She continued her letter by saying that as workers they always had to be united. "If we allow

<sup>378</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 June 1971.

<sup>379</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU Trade Union NUCW(SA) Correspondence and Papers. Letter to Garment Workers in the clothing industry, 4 March 1971.

certain people or organisations to divide us, all workers will suffer, as the employers will exploit such a division, pay lower wages and lengthen working hours."<sup>381</sup>

Scheepers wanted the NUCW (SA) to be strengthened as they all wanted to prove that African unions could be as strong industrial organizations as other trade unions. She wanted the NUCW (SA) to serve as a symbol and an example which other African workers would follow. Scheepers concluded her letter to Mvubelo by saying that the GWUSA's officials had suffered a great deal of persecution because of their fight on behalf of the African workers and that Mvubelo had to ensure that these sacrifices were not in vain. "Be united and loyal and you will assist in protecting all workers including yourself," she said.<sup>382</sup>

In an article in the **Financial Mail** of 17 March 1972, it was stated that the NUCW (SA) under the leadership of Mvubelo, had probably become as effective as it was possible for an African union to be within the setup at that time. The tough stance adopted by the GWUSA, the officially recognized union that negotiated on behalf of Africans in the clothing industry, was probably the main reason for the NUCW (SA)'s success. Mvubelo stated that black unions had to accept the guidance of recognized unions. She also argued that there would then be less danger of African unions becoming political organizations. The **Financial Mail** said that the NUCW (SA) was a shining example of what could be done. They also asked whether Mvubelo was a trendsetter. Her union had made a special effort to educate its members about industrial legislation. It had also helped to bring some stability to their lives by providing a system of group insurance. The **Financial Mail** stated that sooner or later, the government would have to face up to the need for more effective machinery for representing the growing voiceless black labour force in the urban areas. And when it did it could not have a better model to copy than the clothing industry. Research on the life of Mvubelo proved that she was indeed a trendsetter in many ways. She led, with the assistance of Scheepers and the GWUSA, her union to be the strongest black trade union in South Africa.<sup>383</sup>

In a Dutch newspaper, **Jan Zorgdrager**, a reporter, wrote the following about Anna Scheepers and Mvubelo, "Ook Anna Scheepers gelooft niet in Apartheid. Daarom heft ook zij gesorgd voor

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<sup>380</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 3 December 1971.

<sup>381</sup> GWU NUCW(SA), Cba 1.4.3.4, AH 1092, Correspondence and Papers. Letter from Anna Scheepers—General Secretary and Executive Committee, NUCW(SA), 30 August 1972.

<sup>382</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>383</sup> **Financial Mail**, 17 March 1972.

gelijke arbeidsvoorwaarden in haar bedrijfstakken. Daarom loop zij zich het vuur uit de sloffen voor een gelijk waardige gezondheidszorg en opleiding voor haar zwarte pupillen. In hetzelfde gebouw als haar bond zetelt de bond van Lucy Mvubelo, de bond van Bantoe-werknemers in de textile- en kledingsindustrie. Lucy mag niet onderhandelen; dat doet Anna. Maar in haar bond worden geen beslissingen genomen zonder dat Lucy en haar medebestuurders daarin volledig hebben meegespeeld."<sup>384</sup> According to this Dutch reporter Scheepers did everything possible to promote the black trade union of Mvubelo and guided and supported the latter to build a trade union for all workers, irrespective of race, to be proud of.

At the annual conference of TUCSA held in August 1972, it was once again realized that white workers could not protect themselves in industry forever unless the black worker was also protected. TUCSA decided in favour of admitting South Africa's 5,5 million African workers to the fold of registered trade unionism. With this decision the Trade Union Council of South Africa - that comprised at this stage of 68 affiliated unions representing 194 000 brown, white and Indian workers in industry - stood committed to the idea of sharing all trade union rights with the bulk of the country's workers, the Africans.<sup>385</sup>

It became clear at this conference that it regarded its decision as the only one possible in terms of the realities of the labour-economic-industrial structure in South Africa. The hard facts spoke for themselves. In 1961 there were 30 per cent blacks in the manufacturing industry. By 1967 the picture had changed to 25 per cent white and 75 per cent black and in 1971 the figure stood at 23 per cent white and 77 per cent black. The writing was on the wall.<sup>386</sup>

TUCSA, it seemed, was partly motivated by the old South African reality - fear. A fear of being swamped by millions of blacks keen to move up the economic ladder. This fear was ever more real than that, in practice, all the devices of apartheid such as job reservation and influx control were being eroded by the inexorable laws of supply and demand.

But in TUCSA the fear was tempered by realism. Instead of choosing the dictum 'divide and rule', which no longer worked in industry anyway, TUCSA had chosen the philosophy of 'unite and survive'. Not that TUCSA's decision was purely one of self-interest. It was concerned, and

<sup>384</sup> Zorgdrager Jan, Tweemaal Scheepers. Opmerkelijke figuren in Zuidafrikaanse vakbeweging, 18 October 1972, p. 5.

<sup>385</sup> **Cape Times**, 28 August 1972.

this showed up admirably at the conference, about the under-paid, over-worked, exploited African worker. TUCSA hoped that there would be many crafts in South Africa that would be prepared to throw the doors open to the black man. Provided the same levels of training were maintained, it saw the rate for the job as a sufficient safeguard against any threat to the white worker from entry both into skilled jobs and into unions.

An 'unofficial plan' for certain trade union rights for African workers, put forward by Dr Piet van der Merwe, economics professor and member of the Bantu Affairs Commission, which obviously had government backing, had also been announced. This so-called blueprint for African trade unionism was put forward at TUCSA's annual conference. TUCSA found the proposals unacceptable.<sup>387</sup>

Mvubelo was not present at this TUCSA conference. As already discussed earlier, her union, the NUCW (SA), was affiliated to TUCSA at one stage but when the body changed its constitution to exclude African trade unions, it withdrew. Mvubelo said that Van der Merwe's so-called blueprint was significant both for what it said and what it left out. Van der Merwe indicated that his plan had been tested "in the highest government quarters and found acceptable". The proposed blueprint, therefore, indicated that the government at last recognized that Africans had to be given some form of trade union rights. "I do not believe" said Mvubelo, "that the urban Africans can be denied trade union rights forever."<sup>388</sup> However, she said that as an intermediate stage, there was some merit in examining Van der Merwe's plan.

For Mvubelo it appeared that the homeland labour diplomats ('indigenous trade unions', ethnic worker associations based in each homeland and speaking for each industry's workers) and the bilateral agreement (conditions of employment would take place not between representatives of employers and employees, but between SA and the homeland government) which formed part of Van der Merwe's plan, could result in the establishment of a national minimum wage and also in national minimum working conditions. If this was what was envisaged, Mvubelo said that she could with certain reservations see merit in the plan. She also believed that the labour diplomats

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**Ibid.**

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**Financial Mail**, 1 September 1972.

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 1 September 1972.

at no time could be a substitute for direct workers' representation through a trade union for a particular industry like her own, or an established African works committee.<sup>389</sup>

Mvubelo said: "The rights for workers in a particular industry or large company to improve on the national minimum wage laid down in the bilateral agreements between homeland governments and the South African government can never be taken away."<sup>390</sup> In fact, she added that employers had to conclude productivity agreements and hence had to deal directly with worker representatives and could not negotiate such an agreement with a labour diplomat. The labour diplomats could not be expected to know all there was to know about a particular industry and the production process of that industry. It was in this respect that Mvubelo found it significant that there was no mention made of the role of industrial councils in Van der Merwe's plans.

Thinking about the Industrial Council for the clothing industry (Tvl) and the benefit funds it administered from Medical Benefit to Provident Fund and Training College, it was clear that industrial councils had to be allowed to continue to operate. This meant covering the more than 500 000 Africans at that stage under the jurisdiction of industrial councils. Mvubelo said her union, the NUCW (SA) and its officials had a very satisfactory relationship with the Industrial Council and assisted the council in solving disputes of any nature in the clothing industry. The labour diplomats could not be expected to go to a factory at short notice to solve a particular problem or misunderstanding between employers and workers.

Mvubelo concluded her comment on Van der Merwe's blueprint by saying: "By all means, let there be acceptable minimum wage scales for all workers, but the government must not expect, in terms of Van der Merwe's plan, that there can be any substitute for African trade unions in the urban areas for a particular industry or a works committee in a large company."<sup>391</sup>

Delegates at TUCSA's annual conference wasted no time in condemning the plan. It did not pass the test of creating genuine democratic trade unions, they said. Furthermore, it bristled with

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389 **Ibid.**

390 **Ibid.**

391 **Ibid.**

practical difficulties. Not only TUCSA found the proposals unacceptable. "This plan will also create unexpected consequences", Mvubelo said.<sup>392</sup>

During the course of 1972, the first full-scale election by national ballot of union leaders and executive committees of the National Union of Clothing Workers (SA) took place. It was the first election of this kind that was held since the amalgamation in 1962 of the men's and women's unions. Mvubelo was re-elected as General Secretary of NUCW (SA) by an overwhelming majority of members. Unfortunately the momentous task of conducting the election was made even more difficult by a dissenting group of members who tried to delay the completion of the elections as long as possible.<sup>393</sup>

During 1972 NUCW (SA) experienced some terrifying events. Thug methods were employed in an effort to capture the unions. Numerous summonses were issued against NUCW (SA) members. Even Mvubelo was charged with theft of union funds, but was acquitted by the court.<sup>394</sup> Delivery of union subscriptions was deviated and the subscriptions were delivered through unauthorised channels. Daily demonstrations and storming of the union offices by misled groups of members were organized. These members demanded, on the spot, huge sums of money as loans from the Loan Fund, ignoring the usual rules of procedure.

Members were pressurised not to participate in the elections. False rumours were spread and scurrilous pamphlets distributed against officials of NUCW (SA), as well as against those of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa. "However, all these un-trade union-like activities have failed, thanks to the loyalty and devotion of the members and my colleagues in furthering the principles which our workers' movement stands for," Mvubelo remarked.<sup>395</sup> According to information found on the administration of the NUCW (SA), it is very clear that Mvubelo and her union's officials were swamped with work. She once said: "I am not here to tell you that you have to employ an organiser, but you have to bear this in mind that there are so many factories to be visited we sometimes wish that there were more than seven days a week." It is interesting to note here that already in 1954 NUCW (SA) had requested that an organizer should be appointed

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 August 1972.

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**The World**, 23 June 1972; AH 1092, GWU NUCW Correspondence and Papers. Letter Mvubelo—Mr M Zimmerman (Legal Advisor of the GWUSA). Acquittal from theft charge brought by Mr J Mathe against Ms L Mvubelo.

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 August 1972.

to help Mvubelo in her work.<sup>396</sup> The request put forward to the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the GWUSA was denied. It was felt at this stage that Mvubelo's union with only 2 000 members was not in a position to have an additional official. The advice from the GWUSA was that they were sure that Mvubelo was capable of coping with her duties. The CEC of the GWUSA said that "Lucy is very active and she is not neglecting her work".<sup>397</sup>

In a letter titled "Living in Fear" some of the office bearers of NUCW (SA) however, sketched a total different picture of Mvubelo's administration of their union. They said that the point at issue they were fighting for was the maladministration in their office. They stated that there were numerous discrepancies in the handling of the union's funds, and that it had become clear that Mvubelo's union office kept no records of any value. They also stated that the NUCW's minutes of meetings were about 20 meetings behind. They finally added that the quarterly financial report of the General Secretary, Mvubelo, had never been submitted since 1962, despite their persistent demands. These statements made by the NUCW's office bearers clearly prove that the administration of the NUCW (SA) experienced serious problems.<sup>398</sup>

After a court action which was instituted by the state against two employees of the NUCW (SA) in connection with a R311 subscription fee which was allegedly not paid into the NUCW's coffers, Mvubelo testified that she had not kept a personal record of the monies received on behalf of the union. She said it was impossible for a general secretary of any large trade union, particularly one with 14 000 members, to keep a personal record of each contribution received, hence the employment of a cashier, responsible for the safekeeping of the union's finances until deposited in the bank.<sup>399</sup>

Mvubelo said that on discovery by the auditors that there appeared to be a shortfall in the funds of the union, the matter was referred to the appropriate authorities, and the Garment Workers' Union of SA was approached for advice. This union undertook to open a separate account for monies of the National Union, paid in on the written authority of individual members. Mvubelo advised members of her union to give their mandate to the GWUSA which administered their

<sup>396</sup> AH 1092, WU Organisation in the Clothing Industry NUCW, 1953-1962. GWU OF African Women, 1 March 1962. Minutes of the Special Joint Meeting of the SACWU and the GWUAW, Johannesburg, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1962..

<sup>397</sup> AH 1092, GWU, Cba 1.4.1. Organisation in the Clothing Industry. NUCW (1955-1961) GWU OF African Women. Letter from H Cornelius (National Organisation GWUSA)-Lucy Mvubelo, 19 October 1954.

<sup>398</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4 GWU Trade Union NUCW. Correspondence and Papers. Letter from NUCW Office Bearers (not dated) to their fellow workers, s.a.

subscriptions with great care, until the handling of finances of the NUCW (SA) could be re-organized.<sup>400</sup> Whilst doing research on Mvubelo, it was evident from documentation found that the administration of the NUCW (SA) was not in order.

In the midst of the administrative problems of the NUCW (SA) the GUWSA requested a meeting of the Industrial Council to consider a wage rise for 24 000 workers, 17 000 of whom were Africans. The workers were becoming impatient as the prices of goods were increasing daily and many of them were taking the position in their own hands and were pressurizing their employers for wage increases. Mvubelo said they had no fear of any work stoppages in any of the industries for which the two unions, the GWUSA and NUCW (SA), aimed to obtain wage increases. She continued by saying that "any set of employers who were unduly difficult, would only do themselves harm because unhappy, worried and hungry workers have little stamina to produce".<sup>401</sup>

In February 1973, 50 000 workers went on strike in Natal. Mvubelo, in a paper presented in March 1973 at a conference held by the Institute of Personnel Management on the question: "Will there be another strike?" said: "Unless a more effective manner of approach is adopted by industrialists, we can surely expect further unrest. This means that the workers must at least earn a wage that will enable them to live above the poverty datum line."<sup>402</sup>

Mvubelo further stated that the government and employers had to make provisions for recognition of their African workers as an integral part of the employee labour force rather than dividing the workers into racial groups. Some industries regarded the appointment of personnel officers as a sufficient channel of communication and believed that these officers were the mouth-piece of their workers. "This is fallacious", Mvubelo stated. The officers were invariably regarded by workers as the employers' 'Boss Boys' who, being in the employment of the employer, preferred to remain in his good books rather than to express the workers' grievances and aspirations effectively.<sup>403</sup>

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399 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 March 1971.

400 **Ibid.**

401 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 2 March 1973.

402 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 23 March 1973.

403 **Ibid.**

She believed direct communication between management and the workers' own elected leaders who were not in the employ of the employer would have formed the basis of a better relationship between employer and employee. She did not believe that direct communication between workers and management through personnel departments was satisfactory because the workers were at a disadvantage in expressing opposite views to those of his employer. They feared repercussions, intimidations and victimisation. "Only unrestricted trade union organisation without discrimination based on the colour of the skin of members is the way to better understanding between workers and management. In fact there is no effective substitute for trade union organisation", Mvubelo commented.<sup>404</sup>

She continued her address by stating that in spite of many obstacles confronting black workers through not having direct representations to their management, blacks had been successful in negotiations, but only where they had brought pressure to bear upon their employers. The achievements of the Central Labour Board which in the past had permitted the low wages under which the black workers were labouring were unacceptable. "Therefore, African workers prefer to be represented by their union", Mvubelo added.<sup>405</sup>

Black attitudes towards improvement of productivity were proved by the increased production where incentive bonus schemes had been introduced. As with all other groups of workers a shorter workweek, extra paid holidays, longer paid annual leave, promotion, good relations and fringe benefits would have a marked effect on job satisfaction. However, Mvubelo said that these benefits would not stop wage demands, particularly from workers who were living on earnings which kept them perpetually in poverty. They had to earn enough to set aside for times of illness, slackness and unemployment. Black workers should also be given a right to serve on committees dealing with fringe benefits.<sup>406</sup>

In the then Transvaal, where hundreds of thousands of black workers were employed, hardly any went on strike. The reason for this was that wages in general were higher. Many earned extra by continuous overtime, more persons in the family were working and they had only one home. In Natal the African worker had to provide for himself in the city and for his wife and children in the homeland. In the clothing industry in Transvaal, Africans were covered by the Industrial

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<sup>404</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>405</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>406</sup> **Ibid.**

Council agreements that provided yearly increases. The African workers belonged to the NUCW (SA) which had direct access to the Industrial Council, whose agents took up each complaint. Mvubelo said it was an almost weekly occurrence for these officials, one from her Industrial Council, to turn up at a factory to discuss grievances of the workers with the firm or vice versa. The same tripartite structure also existed in negotiating agreements, Mvubelo added.

She said the doors of her union were always open to the registered union, the GWUSA, and vice versa. "We consult each other before submitting wage and other demands. We consult the shop stewards of both unions and where necessary the general membership, before agreements are concluded", Mvubelo said.<sup>407</sup> She concluded her speech by saying that members of the NUCW (SA) knew when wage increases were due and they knew that if negotiations for wage increase broke down, a meeting of shop steward would be held to decide what action should be taken within the legal framework.

In April 1973, Mvubelo addressed students of the University of the Witwatersrand on the question "No white officials or African trade unions represent African workers?" In a devastating attack on the operation of the Bantu Labour (Settlements of Disputes) Act Mvubelo said that until then, African workers had heard nothing from the Regional Bantu Labour Committee. She said they were certainly not representing the African workers in the clothing industry. They were just stopping progress for African workers.<sup>408</sup>

In terms of the Bantu Labour (Settlements of Disputes) Act, the members of the regional labour boards would sit on industrial councils, while the African unions were kept out. Another amendment proposed changes to the works committees which would allow them to have up to 20 members and meet their employers regularly.

These were the proposals, Mvubelo said, the government hoped would make African workers believe in the act and not in trade unions. But she added that when they looked at what was proposed they realized that there were no real changes. The workers were being kept away from the bargaining table.<sup>409</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 27 April 1973.

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**Ibid.**

Mvubelo quoted a former Minister of Labour, Mr Ben Schoeman, who said in 1953: "If the machinery of the act is effective and successful, the natives will have no interest in trade unions and trade unions will probably die a natural death."<sup>410</sup> But instead of dying a natural death there were more trade unions being established and their numbers were growing, she said. The works committees which the government wanted were totally ineffective Mvubelo told the students, because:

- They could not negotiate with management on an industry-wide basis.
- They did not meet regularly.
- The top management did not come to the meetings.
- The members of works committees were often victimized.
- There was no established procedure for workers to hear what their representatives had decided at the meetings.
- There was no opportunity for education of the workers' representatives.

If evidence was needed to prove that Africans did not want works committees, even under the best employers, it could be found in the fact that in the 18 years after the act had been passed, there were only 28 works committees, and in 20 years there were only 18 in operation. Employers were deluding themselves if they thought that African workers wanted anything but trade unions, she concluded.<sup>411</sup>

As a result of the Natal strikes of some 65 000 black workers early in February 1973, the then Minister of Labour, Marais Viljoen, announced that he had instructed the Wage Board to investigate and make new recommendations for five unskilled wage determinations. The Trade Union Council of SA set up an ad hoc committee to submit evidence to the Wage Board. The Committee, under chairmanship of Professor SP Cilliers, Professor of Sociology, included businessmen and academics as well as trade unionists. Mvubelo was amongst the 13 persons on the committee.

The committee submitted an important written memorandum which challenged some of the assumptions in terms of which the Wage Board had, in the past, made recommendations. The Wage Board asked that besides written memoranda, oral evidence had to be given. Evidence was

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**Ibid.**

also given by the ad hoc committee of TUCSA, of which Mvubelo was a member. She stated that Africans needed high wages to increase their standard of living. Wages she said should not be kept low because their standard of living was low. She finally said: "Africans want to consume the goods they produce."<sup>412</sup>

Mr Tindale, Chairman of the Wage Board, had to be congratulated, Mvubelo said, on having allowed all interested parties to have a say. The presence of more than 200 African workers coming from a factory manufacturing salt and also abattoir workers, was unusual. It was only right that at public hearings where evidence was given regarding wages and working conditions, the workers concerned should have an opportunity to state their case. Criticism was levied against the students' commission for having advised Africans on their rights, but despite the criticism it was a victory for democracy and anti-racist groups that all interested parties had a say, no matter what the colour of their skins was.<sup>413</sup>

Another important decision that had to be taken by Mvubelo and her unions was whether medical benefits had to be extended to children and other dependants of garment workers. If benefits were to be extended then contributions would have to be increased.<sup>414</sup> This decision could therefore not be taken lightly. The question at that stage was whether garment workers could afford more deductions from their pay packets. Even this decision depended on whether a living wage would be paid in future or not.

Fortunately Mvubelo received some good news that as from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1973, the NUCW (SA) would receive increased death benefits from their funeral scheme, the Home Trust Life Group Family Funeral Scheme without paying higher premiums. She said that this once again proved that union is strength. Because so many members had joined this funeral scheme and still more were planning to join, the members were then in a position to get double the benefits for the same price they had paid in 1970.<sup>415</sup>

But an increase in the cost of living affected other needs of workers' benefit funds. The amount of sick pay, for example, a worker received had not increased for ten years (1963-1973). The

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411 **Ibid.**

412 **Ibid.**

413 **Ibid.**

414 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 9 June 1972.

415 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 October 1973.

employers had gained at the expense of the workers. Since 1965, wages had gone up but contributions to the various benefit funds - medical, benefit, sick pay, slack pay and provident funds had hardly gone up by a few cents.<sup>416</sup> What had in fact happened was that the hard-won benefits had become less and less meaningful. Therefore, in reality, unless trade unions could obtain considerable concessions for wages and benefits funds, they would be losing the battle.

Unless an escalation clause to increase wages automatically as the cost of living rose was written into agreements, workers would find it hard to achieve an increase in their standard of living. Unless the contributions to the various benefit funds were made a percentage of earnings, the quality of life of workers would deteriorate. As long as these two goals were not part of agreements, trade unions could only fight to maintain the situation instead of improving matters for their members.<sup>417</sup>

GWUSA and NUCW (SA) were determined to tackle these issues for the 1974 agreement. Trade unionism was not only concerned with wage rates but also with fringe benefits and most important, training facilities. All these benefits were required by the Africans. It was the lack of trade union rights which had resulted in the wage gap in South Africa, and the frightening number of Africans living below the poverty datum line. Mvubelo, General Secretary of the 18 000 strong NUCW (SA), said her union would never have been able to operate if it had not brought in all the workers and if certain low-skilled categories were excluded from membership. If certain workers did not understand trade unionism, then the task of the union was to educate them on the importance of the union.<sup>418</sup>

In June 1973 GWUSA and NUCW (SA) and employer organizations were trying to make sure their voice would be heard at the International Labour Organization (ILO), which took place in Geneva, Switzerland. At this conference particular attention was paid to labour in South Africa. Interest in South Africa centred around the report of the Director General on apartheid in labour. A two-day conference was held during the middle of the conference to discuss action which could be taken against apartheid.<sup>419</sup> South Africa had withdrawn from the ILO in 1964. Usually TUCSA had an observer at the ILO conferences and employers retained their membership of the ILO of Employers, which was the official employer group at the ILO. But in 1973, both

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<sup>416</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 3 August 1973.

<sup>417</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>418</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 27 July 1973.

employers and trade unions were making a special effort to have the maximum representation possible.<sup>420</sup>

It is important to note at this point some interesting facts found in a letter from Mvubelo to Scheepers of the GFWUSA when she (Mvubelo) was in Geneva attending the ILO Conference. Mvubelo wrote to Scheepers that the SACTU group at this conference had indirectly, by using the Tanzanians (who had been Mvubelo's supporters), tried to pressurize her to go against her own statement already made with regard to sanctions and boycotts against South African goods. Mvubelo told SACTU that the mandate from her union still stood as before: "No to boycotts and sanctions!"

SACTU also wanted Mvubelo to make a statement that she supported SACTU and its ideologies. They wanted her to denounce TUCSA as it was responsible to the 'white regime'. Mvubelo told Scheepers that she was only informing her about all the problems that she was experiencing at this conference and that she would never agree to their requests. Mvubelo also thanked Scheepers for her advice and suggestions before she attended the conference.<sup>421</sup>

Mvubelo was asked by the ILO officials to stand down after South African trade unionists had won her the right to speak at the ILO's workers conference. Later the conference passed a unanimous resolution calling on governments to sever political, cultural, commercial and diplomatic relations with South Africa, and to stop public and private investments. The resolution called on all trade union organizations:

- To oppose emigration of skilled labour to South Africa.
- To bring pressure on economic and financial groups which collaborate with South Africa.
- To boycott the loading and unloading of goods from South Africa and/or Namibia and South African ships and planes.

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<sup>419</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 15 June 1973.

<sup>420</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 22 June 1973.

<sup>421</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU SACWU 1972-1975. Letter Mvubelo-Scheepers, October 1973.

Denouncing apartheid as 'inhuman', the resolution requested the UN to make sanctions against South Africa mandatory. It said that South Africa denied African workers the most basic human rights.<sup>422</sup>

Mvubelo was the 48<sup>th</sup> speaker at the congress. She was called to address the meeting on the boycott resolution against South Africa. However, early that morning, before the congress resumed, she had been interviewed by the Presidium and told that if she was permitted to make a speech, the resolution would be wrecked and the African delegates would walk out as soon as she rose to her feet.

The immediate reaction of the South African workers' delegation was to make copies of her speech and to distribute them among each of the 420 workers' delegates and the press.

This action was more effective than if Mvubelo would be one of over 50 speakers. The British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast this refusal by the trade union parliament to hear Mvubelo, a black woman worker living in South Africa four times on the Monday morning in the World News Program. Newspapers in the Free Western World splashed on their front pages this unheard-of, undemocratic action by the trade unions of refusing persons the right to express their views. This also resounded in the South African press of all political opinions.

What Mvubelo actually wanted to say was contained in her written statement, which partly appears hereunder:

"My purpose of coming before you is to correct the record and to make the truth known to all as interested working class. I am a trade unionist and a worker who knows what the ordinary African worker suffers under the discriminatory and harmful effects of apartheid in South Africa, because I am a practising union leader in South Africa."

Mvubelo stated that it was unfortunate that clothing workers in the border areas or homelands could not be organized in terms of legislation. The SA Government claimed that they looked after these workers' conditions and wages by wage determinations, but these determinations were usually the lowest of wages payable in the industry.

Furthermore: "I have to contend daily with the problems of workers under the apartheid system. I am not fortunate enough to look at these problems from outside South Africa or from a position of safety and distance. This is why I can speak with sincerity, feeling and authority, because I am

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Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 29 June 1973.

there and not somewhere else. For years, I have heard all the arguments, the proposals and suggestions for removing the 'apartheid' system and I must express my doubts as to whether what has until now been suggested, is either desirable or effective for me or my fellow African workers in South Africa.

She said that any programme and action for the elimination of 'apartheid' and the improvement of the black workers' condition of life had to be jointly planned by active South African trade unionists and resident South African workers. These would be the only effective ways for bringing change and to eliminate the apartheid system. She begged the international world not to isolate South Africa.

Mvubelo further stated that black, white, brown and Asian workers proved to the world that they needed trade union rights, and also that the economy of the country depended on their labour - there were over 400 000 African workers who were ready to be unionized. What they needed was leadership.

"Investments from foreign countries have created job opportunities for thousands of African workers who would otherwise have been unemployed. Thanks to the pressure of trade unions in these foreign countries, black workers employed in these foreign companies had gained large wage increases, much larger than the wage increase obtained by black workers employed by South African companies. Workers were also given educational bursaries for their children for elementary and high schools and universities."

She continued by saying : "I appeal to our trade union colleagues not to make the task of the black people of South Africa more difficult by asking for withdrawal of these companies from South Africa, or boycotting South African goods. We are against apartheid, but do not make the life of black workers, brown people and Indians unbearable by throwing them out of work. Knowing the conditions and the South African policy, may I make use of an old adage that governments come and go, and that the policies of governments change, but the policy of the trade union movement shall always be one of unity among all workers. This will lead to better understanding, not only for South Africa, but all other countries who suffer at the hands of segregation and apartheid."

She invited the ILO Workers' Committee to visit South Africa and to form a dialogue with non-racist SA trade union bodies.

It was not clear at that stage whether the workers' group would accept the invitation or whether the South African government would agree to such a visit which was bound to include black trade unionists. It is clear however, that TUCSA did not want the world to assess the situation in South Africa on hearsay, but to gain first hand knowledge of what was really going on on South Africa's labour scene.

As already stated in this research, trade unions and their co-ordinating bodies constantly clashed with the government of South Africa and the Minister of Labour because of South Africa's policy of separate development and the legislation that hampered equality within trade unions. The leaders of TUCSA, elected to the Officers' Committee and National Executive Committee for the year 1973-1974, had an important task in policy formation.

In a strongly-worded resolution by the NEC, they expressed their lack of confidence in the Minister for his failure to provide adequate legislation in regard to the rights of African workers.<sup>423</sup>

Examination of Wage Board Determinations also showed TUCSA that the Minister was approving of wage rates which were completely inadequate. The Wage Board Determination made in 1972 for the clothing industry was a further indication of the failure of the Minister to cope with the labour situation.

The NEC of TUCSA also moved a resolution on the unionisation of Africans. This resolution called upon individual affiliates of TUCSA to take steps to examine practical ways of establishing parallel union organizations for African workers. Mvubelo's NUCW (SA) was held as an example of such a parallel union of GWUSA. The purpose of unionisation of African workers was to ensure that at some future date recognition would be given to these existing (de facto) working examples of practical and responsible labour organizations.<sup>424</sup>

Harriet Bolton, member of the NEC of TUCSA said that something had to be done for the seven million African workers not organized into trade unions. But, she said, "Africans must not simply be organized into trade unions to create a façade for the world to see. What was done had

<sup>423</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 31 August 1973.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

to be done seriously and properly. This resolution was unanimously adopted by TUCSA. TUCSA was not in favour of separating the races, but something had to be done as the government was in favour of separating the races."<sup>425</sup>

It is no wonder that Mvubelo remained a TUCSA supporter. She really believed that only trade union rights, as she received as a member of the parallel union of the GWUSA, and better wages would help the worker and not boycotts and sanctions against South Africa as preached by SACTU. TUCSA's policy as laid down in its constitution and reaffirmed time and again was "to strive for a better life for all the people of South Africa, as also the people everywhere".<sup>426</sup>

In a letter to Mvubelo from Johanna Cornelius, the General Secretary of the GWUSA, the following quote clearly proves the close working relationship that existed between Mvubelo's NUCW (SA) and the GWUSA and how important her presence had been, even if it was not allowed! "Next week (14 December 1973) we (the GWUSA) are going to have discussions with TUCSA leadership, when we intend fetching you, invalid or not, as your presence will be of greater importance than anybody else."

It was not only internationally, but also in South Africa that Mvubelo spoke out for the workers. In an address delivered on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1973, at the inaugural meeting of the 'Verligte Aksie' in Cape Town, Mvubelo said: "We are all South Africans and we all want our place in the sun. Together we can achieve it because this is the way that we have achieved improvement in the trade union movement; whites, brown people, Asiatics and Africans working together with the common purpose namely: - Improvement in working conditions for all."<sup>427</sup>

Mvubelo said she welcomed the birth of the 'Verligte Aksie' which recognised the need for change in South Africa, especially in respect of the unfavourable economic and political conditions and structures applicable to African workers. She said that if they could come together jointly, they could discuss their problems and their desires to find a solution for the South African dilemma.

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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AH 1426, Ab 4.2. 1969-1971. TUCSA (National Organisation Correspondence with individual unions. Affiliation and unions). An address delivered by Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary of the NUCW(SA), Inaugural Meeting, Verligte Aksie, Western Cape Area, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1973, Cape Town, p. 1.

Mvubelo continued her address by saying that the African workers wanted to have what their white fellow workers already had. They wanted to be able to gain education to acquire skills so that they could achieve promotions according to their ability and to earn a living wage. They wanted the opportunity to work at the more skilled and better jobs - not just to do unskilled manual labour with no hope of improvement. They wanted a decent home for their families and to be recognized as human beings, persons of dignity that could walk upright. They merely wanted to get forward in a fair way, with the support of their white South African fellow citizens. But time was running out as Africans who had suffered so long were becoming intolerant. They were running out of patience. They, however, wanted to work with the whites to achieve a better South Africa for all, but improvement had to come speedily or else they would not be able to keep specifically their young people from rejecting the idea of 'doing it together'. They will do it alone, and that way will be a tragedy for everyone.

Mvubelo finally said that she had often thought that South Africa's National Emblem should be a zebra instead of the springbok. The zebra consists of black and white stripes in equal number and if you tear off either the black or white stripes, the zebra will die. In conclusion she said that South Africa as an affluent country, compared well with the zebra. She added that she was not suggesting that people in South Africa should always act like the zebra which after all is only a horse with a nice coat, but she did not think they could afford to act like a mule any longer, kicking his way through. The desires of the African worker were not unreasonable - "after all we are also God's children and we do not want to be treated as the step brothers and sisters".<sup>428</sup>

In September 1973, the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa held its No. 1 and No. 2 branches' divisional council meetings. Representatives from all the branches were present and took part in the discussions, which dealt with important matters concerning the economic standard of its thousands of members and workers included in the clothing industry. Anna Scheepers attended as a guest at these meetings.

Mvubelo of the NUCW (SA) was invited as guest speaker. She spoke to a packed hall, consisting mostly of a European audience. Her message for them was that the time had come for black people to be recognized as much as white people. Mvubelo further said that it was not necessary to appeal to the garment workers as they had always shown goodwill. "We are the pioneers of

communication and co-operation between all races ... I express thanks to our leaders, the people who have advocated this policy in multi-racial South Africa. This policy must be spread to other industries," she concluded.<sup>429</sup>

After twelve miners had been killed in a riot because of a dispute about a new wage structure that was introduced at the Western Deep Levels mine in Carletonville, Mvubelo made an important comment when told of the tragedy. She said trade unions were the answer. These unions could negotiate with employers on behalf of the workers so that riots and bloodshed could be prevented. "As a black trade unionist I have always advocated that Africans be recognised so that such incidents could be avoided. The present economic and political structure as it affects the African workers is indefensible. It has brought little benefit to them. We are the underprivileged, the ones who suffer from poverty, frustration and despair in the country of our birth", she said.<sup>430</sup>

At the multiracial banquet held in Johannesburg in 1974, 25 outstanding women of all races in South Africa were honoured by bestowing on them honorary life presidency of the Federation of Business and Professional Women. Mvubelo was the only trade unionist to receive the honour.<sup>431</sup> This honour was well deserved. She received the title in recognition of her trade union activities. This was a milestone in the career of a woman who started as a sewing machinist in a Johannesburg clothing factory and who in 1973 was the General Secretary of a strong African trade union with some 18 000 members, of whom 6 000 were men.<sup>432</sup>

Mvubelo's outstanding service rendered in 1973 was her courageous stand at the ILO conference in Geneva, Switzerland in June 1973 which brought her great public acclaim as an ambassador for South Africa.

Her only ambition in life was to serve her fellow workers, to see that their lives would be improved to the best standards according to their work, irrespective of their race, and to see that they had the right to freedom of association and recognition as ordinary human beings. This, she believed, was the task of the people of South Africa. She hoped that all people would work towards a change for better relations between white, brown and black South Africans and justice for all.

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<sup>429</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 September 1973.

<sup>430</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>431</sup> **Ibid.**

The year 1974 was a difficult and sad year for all garment workers in South Africa, marked particularly by the tragic loss of Johanna Cornelius, who was the General Secretary of the GWUSA.<sup>433</sup>

In a letter extending her sympathy and condolences for the passing of Cornelius, Mvubelo inter alia wrote: "She nursed us through our most difficult and unendurable days, when one expected the black union to go to shackles. Johanna Cornelius stood for what is right and not for who is right."<sup>434</sup>

In the correspondence between Mvubelo and Cornelius it is evident that a very close relationship existed between these two women. Mvubelo was guided by Cornelius and advised on how to handle crises in the NUCW (SA). Cornelius as well as Scheepers (President of GWUSA) played important roles in 'grooming' Mvubelo's trade union leadership.

Because of the wonderful, open working relationship that existed between Mvubelo and Scheepers, Scheepers sued the **Financial Mail** for publishing an article "Parallelism or paternalism?"<sup>435</sup> Scheepers acted as a leader and not a boss of Mvubelo. She was very upset about being insulted for paternalism or puppeting the parallel union, the NUCW (SA) of Mvubelo. Mvubelo was guided by Cornelius and Scheepers through their knowledge and experience as trade union leaders. These two women sometimes differed from Mvubelo and did have their quarrels, but in general they supported Mvubelo where they could. They were also very proud of her achievements internationally as ambassador for the workers of South Africa and were glad that she also received recognition in South Africa for what she had achieved for workers.

According to newspaper reports 11 strikes involving workers from different types of industries took place from 1 January to 19 February 1974. One of the strikes involved 10 000 textile workers at ten factories in Natal. The lack of an adequate relationship between employers and workers forced these workers to use the strike weapon in order to show their dissatisfaction with the poverty wages they were receiving.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 12 October 1973.

<sup>433</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 July 1974.

<sup>434</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>435</sup> **Financial Mail**, 19 November 1977

<sup>436</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 1 March 1974.

The National Union of Clothing Workers of SA under the leadership of Mvubelo was held up as an example of African workers effectively operating their union. Part of the success was due to the fact that employers recognized the union and deals with the shop stewards, the elected leaders of the workers of the factory. This, of course, placed a responsibility on the garment workers and their shop stewards to consult the union about misunderstandings and disputes. These disputes had to be solved at the negotiation table. The crux of the matter was the relationship employers were prepared to establish with the union and their leaders.

A new agreement for African workers at Dorian Hats was concluded without the workers having to resort to strike action. The peaceful and speedily concluded agreement was as a result of the reiterated policy, dating back to 1964, of the directors, Mr A Negra and Mr KL Steinbrucker, in accepting their African employees' union, i.e. the NUCW (SA), as one of the participant trade unions in negotiations. The African Union representatives, Mvubelo and Sarah Chitja, Branch Secretary of the NUCW (SA), freely took part in the negotiations, equally with the negotiators from the GWUSA.<sup>437</sup>

In July 1974 Mvubelo addressed the Institute for Study of Man in Africa - on 'Trade unionism in South Africa', in Johannesburg. She said thousands of black workers had taken strike action even though the right to do so was denied to them. Furthermore, "Starvation knows no legislation; this has been the best way of showing their dissatisfaction with the meagre wages to them."<sup>438</sup>

She continued her address by saying that the NUCW (SA)'s survival was solely the responsibility of the registered GWUSA, and other industries should follow the pattern of this union. Mvubelo added that Africans had emerged from the master-servant stage and adapted themselves to the Western civilisation type of living and that was why they started clamouring for opportunities available to other racial groups. Mvubelo then said that the African clothing workers were more than ready to be legally unionised.

A leading trade unionist said after the Durban strikes in 1973, that a new consensus had resulted among urban whites that on average the African was paid too little, that the industrial machinery

<sup>437</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 22 February 1974.

<sup>438</sup> AH 1092, GWU NUCW(SA) 1972-1975 Correspondence and Paper. Address by Lucy Mvubelo, Institute for Study of Man in Africa - "Trade unionism in South Africa", Johannesburg, 16 July 1974.

for them was inadequate, and that a respect for the African workers and their grievances had resulted. Mvubelo said that if this was a general reaction and agreement among whites, then a constructive step forward had been taken and the prospects for black workers would be brighter.

She added that she believed that one could choose what course to take, and that it was essential for the welfare of all to take the road towards economic partnership. Africans had learned from their white counterparts that only an independent body could serve the interests of workers. The onus was on the white electorate who could bring about changes to the setup of South Africa

She told the audience that the main reason for the hostility of all the overseas and African labour circles was the absence of registered African trade unions. This hostility was naturally directed against the white trade unions in South Africa, who they thought had not made sufficient efforts in bringing about the recognition of African trade unions. GWUSA however tried every possible way to obtain recognition for their parallel union, NUCW (SA).

To conclude her address on "Trade unionism in South Africa", Mvubelo quoted from a report by Mr Pongault, representative of the African Committee for Trade Union Co-ordination and Action against Apartheid, at the ILO who said: "It would be a dangerous illusion to believe that economic factors will in themselves bring about the elimination of apartheid and the denial of trade union rights to the African workers in the long run." Finally Mvubelo said that white unions would not be losing their status if they accepted black workers as their colleagues - after all they rubbed shoulders with each other daily at their places of employment. The time was ripe for African workers to be given the right of registration for they had learnt that there was no other body that could substitute a trade union.<sup>439</sup>

In an article in the **Garment Worker** of 29 November 1974, Mvubelo said that many changes were taking place both in the political and industrial life of South Africa. "We hear that conditions are changing dramatically, that given time things will take their natural course, and the needs of various racial groups will be satisfied."

Black diplomats were given the social freedom of South Africa; white cabinet ministers attended cocktail parties along with South African blacks. At industrial level some white trade unionists

rejected job reservation as a means to ensure harmony between workers of different races, and some firms announced their intention of raising wages to the poverty datum line. South African society was said to be in a state of flux, and even some of the most hardened opponents of apartheid acknowledged that important changes were taking place.

Mvubelo said that "(i)n this atmosphere it would seem most unpatriotic to sound out the warnings and to spell out the hard facts, but it is a job which has to be done. A certain change has been achieved by the GWUSA in conjunction with its sister union the NUCW, in that for the first time since the inception of the NUCW, 21 years ago, the NUCW held informal negotiations with employers' representatives to amend the Industrial Council Agreement."<sup>440</sup>

According to her it was an indisputable fact that workers in the garment industry received higher increases than at previous negotiations. The negotiating team from the two unions faced considerable difficulties in the bargaining process. After a number of preliminary meetings, the representatives of the workers and employers met eight times before agreement was reached.

The GWUSA, when submitting its proposals in January 1974, stated it was the desire that the NUCW (SA) representatives, who were representing 80% of the work force in the industry, should participate in informal negotiations. The principle that blacks could even attend Industrial Council meetings was accepted.

It was important that Africans should learn how to conduct negotiations in a responsible manner in order to reach amicable settlements around the negotiation table without resorting to strike action. Fortunately the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers Association had no objections. In every negotiation there were times when informal meetings were held to allow the parties to reach some understanding on what points they could meet each other. Hence the representatives of the NUCW (SA) were able to attend the more crucial meetings in the process of give and take.<sup>441</sup>

For South Africa this working together of whites and blacks around the negotiating table was a unique situation. Mvubelo said it should have been possible for industrialists to carbon copy the achievements of the GWUSA and the NUCW (SA). This was a change which should have been

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<sup>440</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 31 May 1974.

<sup>441</sup> **Ibid.**

accepted by the government and the people who had the right to vote. She said that the world was in an era of change. Changes took place in Mozambique, Angola and Portugal and South Africa was not to be excluded in this sphere.

Mvubelo repeated once again what she had told the audience in her speech on "Trade unionism in South Africa", namely the fact that franchise for all citizens was denied was viewed with concern by citizens in South Africa and the outside world as a denial of human rights. Above all she stressed that the non-recognition of African Trade Unions was a cause of great concern.<sup>442</sup> She asked questions to conclude her article in the **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**. "Will South Africa close its ears to the voice of all those underprivileged people of South Africa? Will it close its eyes to the rest of the world and not change its policy?" She once again appealed to the government to change their unjust laws, thereby making the world a happier place to live in.<sup>443</sup>

Anna Scheepers, who was re-elected President of the GWUSA in 1974 after a short retirement, also looked upon 1974 as a year of change. Like Mvubelo, Scheepers also saw change as the answer to sound industrial relations. Scheepers, like Mvubelo, welcomed the changes that had already started to take place in South Africa, but also saw the government policy and legislation as hampering factors towards improving the situation of all the workers in South Africa.

She continued by saying that one need not be afraid of change. The history of the world showed that change was going on since the world had begun. Daily experiences became built into our lives; they shaped our ideals and our attitudes. "Every South African, whether white, brown or black will have to make his/her contribution to peaceful change. The white people who have enjoyed a privileged position will have to make the greatest adjustments." She said that the clothing industry workers had proved that workers of all racial groups could work together in complete harmony, without friction and conflict. Workers showed mutual respect for one another and it was because of this that the garment industry had been retained, particularly in the then Transvaal, where great changes in the pattern of the labour force had taken place.

Dr Reynders, Director of the South African Federated Chambers of Industries, was the guest speaker at a graduation ceremony of the University of the North, in May 1974. The message he

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 29 November 1974.

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**Ibid.**

gave the students was that the black people held the key to the future economic growth and stability of South Africa.

Among the guests at this graduation ceremony was Mvubelo, General Secretary of the NUCW (SA). She welcomed the statement of Reynders that industrialists recognized the fact that black workers were the backbone of the South African economy. She said that it was significant that they accepted that because of this important role of the black workers, their trade unions should be recognized. She further commented that trade unions not only ensured that the standard of living of workers was uplifted but they also brought about industrial peace which was so essential for economic growth.<sup>444</sup>

In 1974 the annual conference of TUCSA also witnessed important changes. TUCSA had changed its constitution to allow African unions or federations to affiliate to it.

Mvubelo attended the annual TUCSA conference at UNISA in 1974 as an observer and she asked TUCSA: "Why did you not consult us?" Her cry from the heart was far more than constitutional amendment but a genuine willingness to recognize African trade unions for what they are. She pointed out that African unions were operating, they had a sound administrative system, they had experienced officials, therefore their voice had to be heard and their views recognized.<sup>445</sup>

When the delegates at the TUCSA conference realized that the mere changing of a constitution was not enough, steps were taken to demonstrate the good faith of the TUCSA unions by suggesting that positive action be taken. A policy statement was put to conference, and unanimously adopted, wherein it was agreed that TUCSA would hold discussions with the African trade unions. The purpose of these discussions would be to establish exactly what the views and aspirations of known and existing bona fide African unions were. These discussions would also explore new areas of co-operation. Mvubelo was pleased that this policy statement had been made by TUCSA and she said she would welcome such discussions.<sup>446</sup>

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444 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 31 May 1974.

445 **Ibid.**

446 **Ibid.**

The TUCSA undoubtedly played a vital and significant role in the affairs of South Africa. Not only was it the voice of the workers in South Africa, but it was the spokesperson for the trade union movement in the rest of the world. They persistently attended every conference of the ILO since South Africa had withdrawn as an observer in 1964. These yearly visits, paid for by the registered trade union members, placed TUCSA on the world map.

When the delegates of the Workers' Committee of the ILO in 1974 refused to consider giving Mvubelo an opportunity to address the meeting, the delegates representing the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) on the working committee of the ILO supported her request to address the meeting. They said that the delegates who had denied Mvubelo to speak were also denying the principles of trade unionism. The reason for their refusal was that Mvubelo had not been officially credited as an observer by the then Organization of African Unity.

Mvubelo's union contributed money to enable her to attend the ILO conference so that she could establish contacts and seek the co-operation of workers in other countries. As was stated earlier, she caught the attention of the international world with her written statement, which was copied and published across the world. She definitely established contact and found workers in other countries that wanted to work with her.

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) wanted to help build an African labour movement in South Africa. TUC's plan was aimed at helping South African workers and they did not want to include involvement in politics.<sup>447</sup> The plan involved collecting a large sum of money from trade unions in European countries and giving it to organizations in South Africa involved in helping African workers establish trade unions. Mvubelo and Jane Bades, General Secretary of the 14 000 strong Engineering and Allied Workers' Union, also attended the conference of the International Metal Workers Federation in Stockholm. Bades attended the weeklong conference as a delegate, whereas Mvubelo had been invited to attend as an observer.<sup>448</sup> By attending all these international conferences Mvubelo really acted as an ambassador for South Africa and she succeeded in building international bridges.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 19 July 1974.

<sup>448</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>449</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 31 August 1973.

At the ILO conference in 1974, TUCSA had taken an important step with regard to winning over the workers' committee of the ILO. TUCSA invited this committee to visit South Africa.

In 1974 the international world's view of South Africa was very negative. When the GWU of SA was invited to attend the ITGLWF (International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation) it was regarded as an inspiration for all workers of South Africa and a big breakthrough in the labour field. Unfortunately for the South Africans, because of campaigns of organizations engaged in the struggle to bring about a change in the policy of separate development (apartheid) practised in South Africa, delegates were refused permits to enter Nigeria and all hopes of representation from South Africa were shattered.<sup>450</sup>

Thus, the time of action had arrived. But action was not only dependent on an enlightened and informed membership, but also on a responsible leadership. Evidence of this was the memorandum the NUCW (SA) forwarded to the Minister of Labour, requesting full registration of African trade unions in line with the rights and privileges enjoyed by white and brown unions.

The 23 000-member NUCW (SA) under the leadership of Mvubelo challenged the minister to say why he could not register NUCW (SA) in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. In an 11-page memorandum that Mvubelo and her union submitted to the government, she said there were only 900 white workers but 19 427 African workers in the Transvaal clothing industry. In 1973, NUCW (SA) had 97 per cent membership in the Transvaal clothing industry, 100 per cent membership in the Northern Cape and the Free State clothing industry, and 88 per cent in the knitting industry.

Amongst the most important facts Mvubelo pointed out in the memorandum was that:

- Legal registration (in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act) would enable the union to negotiate directly with employers and empower it to discipline its members like registered unions could.
- Elected union leaders were in a better position to represent the workers than government officials because they enjoyed the confidence of their members and could persuade them to accept a compromise statement.

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Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 29 November 1974.

- International opposition to South Africa would be countered if black unions were given official recognition.
- "The crux of the matter", Mvubelo and NUCW(SA) said, "is that we are recognised in the majority of areas where a union can be recognised, but not in terms of equal representation with employers on the industrial councils."<sup>451</sup>

Meanwhile the **Garment Worker**, official organ of the Garment Workers' Union, asked whether strikes and chaos were the alternatives to the registration of African trade unions. The registered Garment Workers' Union of SA welcomed the determination of its sister union, NUCW(SA), to pressurize the government to change the labour legislation to register African bodies and to extend the term 'employee' in the Industrial Conciliation Act to cover all workers irrespective of race or colour.

The issues facing South Africa in 1974 were no longer that change had to come. Changes in many spheres had already been brought about. The challenge then facing South Africa and in particular the trade union movement was how to control and direct the changes and channel the expectations of the people.

For too long the urban Africans had been left out of the decision-making process affecting their lives. This was why African workers, through leaders like Mvubelo, could no longer be left out of the industrial council system, or be prevented to form joint bodies with employers where none existed. In 1974, 110 000 African workers, who were not covered by either a wage board or an Industrial Council agreement, were covered by wage orders through the initiative of the employer.<sup>452</sup> It was necessary that the leaders of these workers would ensure that what had been decided was acceptable to the workers.

In a letter in response to the memorandum Mvubelo and her union NUCW (SA) had given to the Minister of Labour in October 1974, he wrote, "I have direction to inform you that the government has repeatedly announced that it is not prepared to amend the Industrial Conciliation Act to permit the recognition of black trade unions. I am satisfied that, if put to its full and proper use, the existing machinery for the regulation of labour relations between black workers and their

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

employers is, under prevailing circumstances, best suited to the needs of the black workers. In the circumstances I find myself unable to accede to your union's request."<sup>453</sup>

Although Mvubelo and her union's request for legal recognition had once again been declined by the government, NUCW (SA) and GWUSA were even more determined to fight for equal union rights, wages and recognition for all workers.

All the garment unions belonged to the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. With the advent of multinational companies it became essential that the trade union movement should also operate on a worldwide level. It was also essential that these multinational companies should adopt similar employment practices in the different countries in which they operated. Furthermore, joint action could be taken to prevent a multinational from making use of low wages in one country and shifting production processes there. Surely if these companies were allowed to operate freely between countries, the trade union movement could have this same right.

It is no wonder that Mvubelo and the representatives of GWU of SA were highly perturbed about the Affected Organizations Bill. This bill was aimed at organizations which not only received money from organizations in other countries, but also moral support or any other kind of assistance from abroad. This was a bad blow for NUCW (SA). Not only was there exchange of information through the international federation but also support for the struggles of sister unions who had to defend their right to speak on behalf of workers against discrimination and other malpractices of employers. Furthermore, and this was very important, the contact with South African trade unionists at the regular conferences brought understanding of South Africa's problems. This bill harmed the relationship between trade unions like NUCW (SA) and their international trade secretaries. It was introduced at a time when many international bodies expelled South African organizations from membership.<sup>454</sup>

In a response to a letter from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU) asking for more information as to the best means in which ICTFU could assist the African workers in South Africa, Mvubelo responded as follows: "It remains my opinion that the best

<sup>453</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4. NUCW(SA) 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Letter Private Secretary of the Minister Marais Viljoen-Mvubelo (General Secretary of the NUCW(SA)), 30 December 1974.

<sup>454</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 8 March 1974.

form of assistance that ICFTU, or any other organisation for that matter which wants to assist us here, would be that of helping in educating the workers in trade unionism, and in educating them to become efficient trade unionists."

She said that it had always surprised her that ICFTU wanted to isolate the trade union movement in South Africa and other organizations that were trying to do something for the African workers.

ICFTU, Mvubelo added, should rather encourage them and help them to do the job in South Africa for the African workers, because it could not be done from the outside. She also repeated what she had often said in the past, that "calls for withdrawal of capital and encouraging people not to invest in South Africa, do not assist the - they harm them, and ICTFU should concentrate on encouraging industrial development in South Africa, because this not only provides the Africans with bread, it will break down apartheid better than anything else".<sup>455</sup>

It is thus clear that during 1974 Mvubelo was on the forefront of the fight for the workers of South Africa, not only in South Africa, but also internationally.

### **2.2.2 Mvubelo continued canvassing for support for South Africa nationally and internationally, by fighting disinvestment (1975-1980)**

In January 1975 Mvubelo responded to the letter from the Minister of Labour, in reply to her memorandum of the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1974. She wrote: "I note with grave concern your refusal to grant our request for registration as a trade union under the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956."<sup>456</sup> She added that it was clearly apparent to all who were in contact with the African workers that works liaison committees were completely unsatisfactory as a means of expressing workers' aspirations or resolving disputes. She said that it had to be clear in view of the large number of strikes in the course of 1973 and 1974 and referred to **Hansard** of 9 September, 1974 (pp. 386-400).

<sup>455</sup> AH 1092, GWU, Cba 1.4.3.4 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Letter WG Lawrence-Mvubelo, 5 June 1974.

<sup>456</sup> AH 1092 1.4.3, GWU/NUCW 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Letter Minister of Labour-Mvubelo, 9 January 1975.

She continued her letter to the Minister by saying that he no doubt had seen in his visits to Japan, the Netherlands and France that 'works committees' operated successfully only when it did so in conjunction with a trade union.

Mvubelo concluded her letter with a request to the Minister to meet, at his earliest convenience, a delegation from her union to discuss the failings of works/liaison committee systems and the advantages of a trade union.<sup>457</sup>

Following the request by Mvubelo's NUCW (SA) to the Minister for recognition in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act, a delegation of the 23 000 strong NUCW (SA) was received by the Deputy Secretary of Labour, Mr JG Botha, on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1975. The Minister indicated that the appeal for registration had been refused. However, the department wished to discuss the NUCW (SA)'s memorandum with the union. Mvubelo introduced the union's case. She was supported by the rest of her delegation.<sup>458</sup>

At first, Mvubelo expressed appreciation for the Minister not ruling out the future existence of black trade unions, and that the department had realized the tremendous need that existed for communication between black workers and their employers.

The delegation explained the long history of the unions, the many benefits that it offered its members and the contribution it had made in the informal negotiations for the clothing industry in 1974. Mvubelo pointed out that NUCW (SA) had co-operated fully and in a responsible fashion in settling industrial disputes which government officials had found impossible. An example of this was the Charlestown strikes in 1968 and 1973. She expressed grave concern about political influence amongst black workers who were not committed to the framework of the Industrial Conciliation Act. It was further pointed out that the union had defended South Africa's interest on the international front. Mvubelo always criticized boycotts of South Africa and encouraged investment.

Concerning works and liaison committees, the union and Mvubelo explained that these did not fulfil the needs of an organized industry, like NUCW (SA). The committees had no power to

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<sup>457</sup>

**Ibid.**

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AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3, GWU/NUCW 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Paper with procedures and notes Mvubelo prepared for meeting the Department of Labour, 21 March 1975.

enter into collective bargaining and could negotiate only in one factory at a time; through these committees there was no access to benefit funds. On the other hand the employers in an industry were organized. The delegation expressed the view that while they accepted the establishment of works and liaison committees, these were more suitable for unorganized workers, and the garment workers were well beyond that stage.<sup>459</sup>

The Deputy Secretary for Labour, Botha, replied that while he sympathized with the many points raised by the NUCW (SA) and Mvubelo, the law was such that no registration could be allowed. He made it clear that Mvubelo and her union were respected in government circles as a responsible body adhering to the principles of true trade unionism, and expressed appreciation of its achievements in maintaining labour peace. He appealed to the union to be patient and to work through the existing system, as in time black workers would have access to the Industrial Council through these committees.<sup>460</sup>

The refusal was a bitter disappointment to Mvubelo and her union, but Botha did indicate the government's concern for black workers, and said that the recognition of black unions was a matter of time. Mvubelo afterwards commented, "Let us stretch our patience just a little longer."<sup>461</sup>

Subsequently, however, Botha denied in the press that he had expressed himself in favour of responsible black trade unionism. He described it as 'totally untrue' and said that the sympathy he had expressed extended only to wages and working conditions. Mvubelo expressed her extreme surprise and bitter disappointment at Botha's denial, "The feeling of hope for future co-operation and understanding between black workers and the government has been dealt a severe blow by this two-faced behaviour."<sup>462</sup> It appeared that the government's department of labour was at that stage deliberately misinterpreting the function of works committees. Works committees formed a part of a trade union and did not operate in isolation. There was no substitute for trade unions as a protection for workers' rights and the government had to realize that black workers would never accept second class workers' rights. Mvubelo also spoke about her concern about international labour's hostility against South Africa and the rise of a black

<sup>459</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, NUCW Correspondence and Papers 1972-1975. Press Statement, NUCW(SA), 21 March 1975.

<sup>460</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 April 1975.

<sup>461</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, NUCW Correspondence and Papers 1972-1975. Press Statement, NUCW(SA), 29 April 1975.

nationalist movement in South Africa. She said further polarization amongst the blacks was inevitable. Mvubelo concluded the interview by stating that the NUCW (SA) was responsibly 'raised' by the GWUSA and employers had recognized this and was ready to meet them and negotiate with their union.<sup>463</sup>

This denial by Botha had done great harm to the government's credibility with black workers. Government appeared to be able to easily enter into détente with outside people, yet they treated their own nationals in a shocking manner.

In a letter in January 1975 Mvubelo wrote a letter to the then Chief Minister of Bophuthatswana, Chief Lucas Mangope with a view of gaining support for their request to be registered as a trade union should the opportunity arise. Mvubelo extended an offer of assistance in any form to his future negotiations on the question of African trade unions. She also warned Mangope that there appeared to be a grave contradiction in the South African government's overtures for détente on the one hand and the refusal to recognize the problems the urban Africans experienced on the other hand.<sup>464</sup>

In 1975 South Africa was in the grip of an inflationary spiral that made it even more difficult for the ordinary working men and women to make ends meet. The soaring prices of essential commodities and articles were astronomical, and it was because the poorer sections of the population had to pay proportionately much more for these essentials, that they suffered most in this time of run-away inflation. Mvubelo said that the devaluation of the South African currency was a blow to the working man.<sup>465</sup>

On the observation of the Physical Planning and Utilization of Resources Act Mvubelo warned the workers that the government was determined to investigate the clothing industry. This meant possibly more hardship to hundreds of African women who were the breadwinners, and who had to feed mouths and provide homes which were so difficult to obtain. Mvubelo asked, "Why

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<sup>462</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 April 1975.

<sup>463</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU/NUCW 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Paper with procedures and notes Mvubelo prepared for meeting the Department of Labour, 21 March 1975.

<sup>464</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU/NUCW 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Letter Mvubelo-Lucas Mangope, 8 January 1975.

<sup>465</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 28 November 1975.

should there be so much intimidation when South African blacks were loyal to the government and country?"<sup>466</sup>

The ordinary workers never had enough money to spend on luxuries, but in 1975 they even had to cut down on essentials. It is no wonder that union members started to approach their employers themselves for increases in wages. The union leaders like Mvubelo were then contacted by employers to assist in this serious situation. The union's leaders addressed their members and realized that the situation was indeed very serious. An immediate cost of living adjustment had to be negotiated with the employers who in turn requested that workers had to be more productive and on time. Mvubelo addressed her members and pointed out that just as much as the employer had to adhere to the Industrial Council agreement, so the workers had a definite responsibility to the clauses of that agreement.<sup>467</sup>

Mvubelo, supported by the GWU of SA also called upon the authorities to establish a standing committee on home improvement to investigate how it could be done, what could be done and what the obstacles were. She requested that all facts on the housing crisis be examined and a programme be drawn up before it was too late.

Considerable publicity was given to the housing crisis in Soweto. The crisis existed in two forms, both crying out for solution and action. Not only was there an alarming shortage of dwelling units, however inadequate they were to live in, but the existing 100 000 units required improvement to change them into homes. Mvubelo also stayed in Soweto and she was determined to fight for house improvements for her people. It is accepted by historians and social scientists that one of the most important stabilizing factors to change a township into a community is home ownership. In order to combat crime and violence and to allow a sense of self-help to emerge amongst people, they had to feel they belong to the area where they live. They become citizens with a sense of community pride and a determination to achieve once they become a home owner.<sup>468</sup>

On Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> June a full meeting of the Garment, Textile, Knitting and Leather Workers' Unions' consultative committee was held in Garment Centre, Johannesburg. The aim of this

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<sup>466</sup>

**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 19 May 1975.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 16 May 1975.**

committee was contained in its name - to promote co-operation and consultation between unions in the various provinces of South Africa and also between unions in industries closely allied to the clothing industry.

Perhaps more than most people trade unionists were aware of the strength to be gained from unity, and so it was seen as vital that unions informed each other of their activities, so as to both strengthen the action of individual unions and prevent contradictions from arising. Of course both advice and ideas were freely and frankly exchanged so that union affairs could be run more smoothly in the various centres. This was especially true of this meeting where Mvubelo and Scheepers (President of GWU of SA) were able to give the Natal unions information on the organizing of black workers.<sup>469</sup>

There was such a close working relationship between Mvubelo, Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius (General Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa) that one cannot but mention that they were also close friends. In correspondence found between Mvubelo and Cornelius, Mvubelo addressed Cornelius as "My darling Miss J.C!" and concluded her letter "Your child, Lucy".<sup>470</sup> Mvubelo saw Scheepers and Cornelius as "Mothers" whilst the latter two women saw Mvubelo as one of their children.

Like a 'child' she often asked for their advice and was always grateful for every bit of help she received from the President and General Secretary of the GWU of SA. In turn Scheepers and Cornelius were always very proud of Mvubelo and whenever the opportunity arose they praised her.

The consultative committee also dealt extensively with international matters. Concern was expressed over the difficulties experienced by South African unions on the international front due to misunderstanding of conditions in the South African labour field. The difficulties that Mvubelo experienced at the ILO were an example. Scheepers remarked that "(t)hese people must realise there are people and people in South Africa", and that those working for changes

<sup>469</sup> AH 1092, Cba 1.4.3.4, GWU/NUCW 1972-1975 Correspondence and Papers. Letter Mvubelo-Johanna Cornelius (General Secretary of the GWU(SA)), 3 December 1975.

<sup>470</sup> *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*, 27 June 1975.

and improved conditions in South Africa needed to be supported and helped, not further criticized and isolated.<sup>471</sup>

The committee decided in principle to send a delegate to the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation's seminar for colleagues of developing countries in Germany during early March, 1976. All unions would also be represented at the ITGLWF congress in Dublin, during the latter part of March 1976. Generally the discussions of the consultative committee ranged over a fairly wide field. Mvubelo and Scheepers as experienced leaders of the garment workers, made useful and constructive contributions.<sup>472</sup>

The consultative committee planned to make the following proposals on behalf of South Africa at the ITGLWF congress in Dublin:

- "The South African affiliates welcome the establishment of an African Regional Council of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation.
- "South Africa, representing over 50% of the membership of Africa (December 1973) figures, and having trade union experience for over a century, would like to share their experience with trade union colleagues on the same continent.
- "A sharing of experience will benefit all concerned.
- "The South African affiliates to the ITGLWF are committed to trade union rights for all workers in our country and in that spirit extend a hand of friendship and co-operation to their colleagues in Africa."<sup>473</sup>

Mvubelo and Scheepers were both selected as delegates to the ITGLWF congress in Dublin. The pressure against South Africa was building and at world level the ICFTU executive board had called for an immediate campaign to stop emigration in South Africa. In a resolution passed at its executive board meeting in Brussels (June 26 and 27, 1975), it called on member organizations in countries which provided South Africa with labour to undertake such a campaign as a priority.

The ICFTU noted that there had been no improvement in the status of African workers in South Africa; that the wage gap between white and black workers had widened, and that African trade

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471 **Ibid.**

472 **Ibid.**

473 **Ibid.**

unions like Mvubelo's NUCW (SA) were not only denied recognition by the government and employers, but were harassed and intimidated. It pointed out further that recruitment efforts outside South Africa continued while African workers were still denied access to skilled jobs.

Scheepers, President of the GWU (SA), stated that the ICFTU and other organizations which advocated against immigrants to SA did not realize that skilled workers were needed to train black workers for more skilled jobs. Vigorous efforts were in hand to train and educate black workers. With a high economic growth thousands of black skilled workers would be required in addition to all other skilled workers to build up the South African economy.<sup>474</sup>

Mvubelo attended a seminar, 'The Syndicates for the Reconstruction of Society', organized under the auspices of the Brazilian Association for Moral Rearmament, in the city of Petropolis in Brazil, from the 26<sup>th</sup> of September to the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1975. Ninety-five delegates participated, representing 46 syndicates and four federations.<sup>475</sup>

The address that Mvubelo gave at the seminar clearly portrayed a picture to the delegates of how the NUCW(SA) had tried to have their union recognized and what they were doing in order to fight for a better life for the members of their union.

In the same year the General Secretary of the GWU of SA received a letter from the Brazilian branch of Moral Re-Armament congratulating the GWU of SA on their continuous fight to improve the conditions of all workers in South Africa. He wrote: "Lucy Mvubelo spoke about the steps taken by your organization regarding the formation of black trade unions and taking into consideration the present difficult circumstances in your organization, the entire seminar referred to, unanimously moved a vote extending hearty greetings and encouragement for your efforts for better living conditions for the workers of South Africa, regardless of race. This letter bears testament of our respect and friendly fraternity".<sup>476</sup>

It is clear from this letter that Mvubelo once again succeeded in explaining to the international world the close relationship that existed between the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA) and how the two unions worked together to ensure a better life for all garment workers.

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<sup>474</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 16 May 1975.

<sup>475</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 6 February 1976.

<sup>476</sup> **Ibid.**

The Trade Union Council of South Africa launched many training programmes. One such a programme undertaken in 1975 in which Mvubelo participated, was the TUCSA's education department leadership manual for shop stewards. She wrote a letter to TUCSA to express her appreciation:

"I wish to express the appreciation on behalf of students who participated in the Trade Union Council of South Africa's Education Department Leadership Manual for shop stewards.

We thank TUCSA for affording us this opportunity and trust that through these lectures, the shop stewards duties will be lighter.

Education and training is imperative these days, especially for African workers since we are looking forward towards their leadership.

I am looking forward to further courses in future and other African Unions participating fully to enrich their knowledge.

Long live TUCSA.

Long live the trade union movement."<sup>477</sup>

In 1975 Canadian metalworkers expressed support for black South African trade unions. A resolution passed by the Canadian UAW Council stated: "The policy of the South African Government is in total opposition towards the right of black workers to join any union and to deny them the opportunity to acquire any skills or upgrade what talents they may have."

The UAW asked their government to join with other nations in demanding that South Africa cease the monstrous denial of black workers' rights.<sup>478</sup>

As already clearly indicated Mvubelo always spoke out against disinvestments in South Africa. She said that she was a worker and trade unionist living in Soweto who knew how the ordinary African worker suffered under the discriminatory effects of apartheid. She wanted fuller participation by her black co-workers and all groups in the economy and political system of South Africa. She added that she had heard all the arguments and proposals for changing South Africa's internal situation through external pressures to isolate South Africa from the Western democracies, but she was not convinced. In the foreword of a book, *The Politics of Sentiment:*

<sup>477</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 16 May 1975.

<sup>478</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 12 September 1975.

*Churches and Foreign Investment in South Africa*, Mvubelo inter alia wrote as she had stated so many times before, "The vitality of South Africa's economy offers more hope to South African blacks than destructive forms of pressure from abroad."<sup>479</sup>

Mvubelo even clashed with Bishop Desmond Tutu. She labelled his plea for economic action by countries overseas against South Africa, according to a television newscast, as 'untimely'. Tutu, Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, in a BBC interview in London had called on Western countries to withdraw their investments from the Republic.

Mvubelo responded to Tutu's statement and said that foreign companies should rather be encouraged to establish those things which were of value to black people in South Africa.

"I believe these companies are here to serve a purpose, and we should try to assist them to set up something that would be of value to the black people of this country. It is unfortunate that perhaps Tutu has not seen that there are any changes whatsoever. He has never worked in industry."<sup>480</sup>

Asked how she felt about clerics attempting to influence South Africa's economic situation, Mvubelo replied: "It is very unfortunate because I believe that would lead to a revolution in our country. And once we have a revolution in this country not only the black people will suffer, everybody will suffer."<sup>481</sup> Another black leader who declared himself opposed to sanctions was Chief Buthelezi, Chief Minister of the former Zulu Homeland, Kwazulu. Mvubelo and Buthelezi were seen as government-appointed black leaders and were often viewed with suspicion.

The year 1975 was declared internationally as the *Year of the Women*. All over the world conferences, seminars and discussions were held on the problems of women. Mvubelo addressed a seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand on the 16 August 1975 on *Equality in Employment*. This lecture was one of a series to mark International Women's Year.

Mvubelo described the limitations put on the employment of black women. Not only did they suffer the same hardships of white women, but they remained "entangled in custom and tradition.

<sup>479</sup> Sincere, Richard E. *The Politics of Sentiment Churches and Foreign Investment in South Africa*, Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., p. ix.

<sup>480</sup> *The Citizen*, 10 June 1980.

Women were and still are regarded as perpetual minors, to be bought from their parents for marriage", she added.<sup>482</sup>

Women were also regarded traditionally as the producers of children and tillers of the soil. This position did, however, have an advantage in that it was established that women could leave the house to work. Consequently, the feeling that it was a disgrace for a wife to work (in modern context) quickly died out.

Mvubelo pointed out that although black women were originally largely employed as domestic servants, they quickly moved into the manufacturing industry, stimulated by the needs of World War II. The clothing industry, to which she was one of the early pioneer recruits, was the first major industry to employ black women. Mvubelo said that in 1975 it employed 16 712 black women in the Transvaal as opposed to 4 649 of other races, in a total of 24 746 employees. It was thus clear that black women formed the vast majority of workers in the clothing industry.<sup>483</sup>

She then briefly sketched the historical discrimination against black women in the garment industry. She pointed out that since the black women's entry into the industry these women had been discriminated against, had been paid lower wages and had been rejected by fellow workers, even the black men who had a functioning union at that time.

She explained to the audience (as it has been explained in detail already in this research) that after a court ruling obtained by the GWU (SA) all black female workers could not be members of a registered union because they were not pass bearers. Black women were then quickly enrolled into the GWU (SA) and with this union's protection discrimination against black women were minimized.

The result of this situation was that women enjoyed the rate-for-the-job principle with respect to their white counterparts, but gender discrimination continued to be applied against black women. Consequently the jobs of black men were taken over by black women at a lower rate. While the

481

**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 22 August 1975.

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**Ibid.**

garment industry had grown, the number of men employed had remained static. Mvubelo saw this as a clear proof that men had to demand equal pay for equal work for their own protection.<sup>484</sup>

Just like Scheepers, President of the GWU (SA), Mvubelo also very strongly spoke out against the lobola system. Mvubelo saw the lobola system as partly responsible for the higher rate of education of females entering the garment industry, and the greater percentage of girls at schools than boys. She pointed out that there were 10 000 more black female teachers than males. Despite this situation, she continued, prejudice against the employment of African females in clerical positions was still strong. "Comparing the earnings of black females to that of black males, the wide difference between the earnings of white females and white males did not exist, but then since both black females and males still earned low wages, this was perhaps not surprising."<sup>485</sup>

Mvubelo pointed out, however, that a discrepancy would arise if wages did not rise at an equal rate. Another disadvantage which she noted applied to women from neighbouring black states who had been forced to surrender their South African reference books or passports. They consequently lost unemployment insurance benefits, pensions and many other rights.

She further highlighted problems experienced by black women that white women did not face. The fact that 143 740 black women worked as domestic servants indicated that a good proportion of the 445 800 white women did not have to worry about the care of their children. In Soweto there were only 35 crèches for children. As women had to work, the social consequences were serious, especially considering that education was also neither free nor compulsory, and in fact thousands of Soweto children could not enter school. In conclusion, Mvubelo appealed to women to "form a united front to break down all those barriers that keep some of our sisters as third class citizens".<sup>486</sup>

Lucy Mvubelo was also a member of the Federation of South African Women, a non-racial organization, fighting for the rights of all South African people. She was an active member and leading figure of this organization. Many of the federation's leaders were women from the trade union movement, like Mvubelo, who realised that as trade unionists they had an essential role to

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

play in protecting the rights of all South Africans, whether these people were workers or women, black or white, against the selfish chauvinism so often displayed.<sup>487</sup> Discrimination against women in South Africa was so deeply entrenched it was difficult to work out where to begin to put an end to it. According to Mvubelo if all people worked together irrespective of their race a peaceful solution would be found.<sup>488</sup>

When Mvubelo as the General Secretary of the NUCW (SA) went overseas to represent her union and South Africa, she had to have written permission of her son before the government would grant her a passport. That was not because Mvubelo was an irresponsible person. It was simply because the South African government regarded her, and all black women, as perpetual minors who would never grow up. Throughout their lives they would be regarded as children who could not be trusted to do anything without the supervision of some man - even if that man was their own son.

This was a ridiculous situation, made even more ridiculous by the fact that many of these women - in some parts of South Africa the majority - were the breadwinners of their families. They were responsible for the education of their children and frequently for the support of their aged parents.

It was also more ridiculous because many employers said that the increasing number of women entering industry were better, more responsible and more dependable workers than the men whom they sometime replaced.

Even more important was the fact that these women, like Mvubelo, were forming a new class of independent people who were passing on new standards of self-respect and pride to their children. If anybody at this stage in history looked for 'evolution' or 'revolution' in the South African society, he/she had to forget politics and ideologies. The economic independence of the rising black female working class was starting to have a far more profound effect on the future of all population groups in South Africa. Mvubelo stated that it was high time that South Africa's legislators and union leaders should take a closer look at the situation and amend the archaic

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<sup>487</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 11 April 1975.

<sup>488</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 28 November 1975.

laws which afflicted black women. Scheepers also spoke out in the Senate against the same laws.<sup>489</sup>

Volume 29 of the South African Institute of Race Relations' annual **Survey of Race Relations** which appeared under the able hand of Muriel Horrel is packed with facts, figures and details of what happened in South Africa in 1975. It is a collection of information from newspapers, **Hansards**, Government reports, memoranda and other sources. The 1975 edition contains comprehensive information on education for the different race groups. **The Survey on Race Relations** supplied ample information on the improvement in educational services and facilities for Africans and brown people, but at the same time it was a warning that much more had to be done - and soon. Mvubelo believed in the importance of education and it is a fact that it is recognized throughout the world that education is an important factor, not only to improve the standard of living of people but to change housing complexes into communities.<sup>490</sup>

This survey supplies the researcher with the facts and figures necessary to understand the tremendous inequality and discrimination that existed in South Africa in 1976. The problems that especially blacks experienced were considerable and leaders like Mvubelo had put her mind to solving these unacceptable situations in a responsible way. She always 'preached' evolution and not revolution. Mvubelo often asked her union's workers to be patient because she believed that if all people in South Africa were willing to compromise and work together; things in South Africa could change for the better to create a peaceful united country. The Garment Workers' Bursary Fund, run by the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA) of Mvubelo, would help to pay towards adult education programmes of members of the two unions during 1976.<sup>491</sup>

In 1976 the GWU of SA and TUCSA submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Labour, opposing very vigorously the proposed amendments to the Bantu Labour Regulations Act of 1973. They believed that by introducing the proposed draft bill the channels of communication between black workers and management would be seriously hampered.<sup>492</sup>

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489 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 February 1977.

490 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 6 February 1976.

491 **Ibid.**

492 **Ibid.**

The GWU of SA asked the Minister to allow for the immediate registration of all 'representative' black trade unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act and to let those already in existence play their full part in negotiations for their working conditions.

The Memorandum concluded by stating that "The Garment Workers' Union of South Africa submits the memorandum based on many years experience with a sister Black Trade union in the clothing industry the NUCW(SA) of Mvubelo". The GWU of SA further stated that it was clear that the level of industrial peace and harmony was far greater in the garment industry than in many others. The reason for this was that the entire garment labour force, white, black and brown, was responsible for determining their own conditions.<sup>493</sup>

After seven years out of a co-ordinating body, the National Executive Committee and the shop stewards of the National Union of Clothing Workers had voted to apply to rejoin the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). Mvubelo, amongst other leaders of the NUCW (SA), explained the many advantages workers could gain from being a member of TUCSA. The NUCW (SA) was admitted as a member of TUCSA on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1976. It joined three other black trade unions in the ranks of TUCSA.<sup>494</sup> This move of the NUCW (SA) helped once again to unite more workers under TUCSA as an umbrella co-ordinating body representing workers of all races. What TUCSA and the unions stood for was equal education, job training and job opportunities at the rate for the job. In this way the dignity of all concerned was assured and racial conflict avoided.<sup>495</sup>

From the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1976, Mvubelo and Scheepers were among the representatives who attended the fourth-yearly Congress of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) in Dublin, Eire. It was especially the last two days of the congress that were important to South Africa and could affect its standing in the international sphere. During the two-day seminar it was planned to establish an African Regional Committee of the ITGLWF. This committee would consist of representatives from all countries in Africa where garment, textile of leather trade unions existed. Of particular importance was that South Africa represented over 58 per cent of the total membership of the ITGLWF from the continent

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<sup>493</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>494</sup> AH 1426, Ab 4.2. 1969-1971 TUCSA National Organisation Affiliation and Union. Correspondence with individual unions. Letter Mvubelo-TUCSA. Application for membership of TUCSA, 8 March 1976.

<sup>495</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 4 February 1977.

of Africa, i.e. 120 000 workers.<sup>496</sup> It was therefore of vital importance that South Africa should be fully represented on any such committee. Such a regional committee would give Mvubelo the opportunity to build bridges for South Africa with her African colleagues and the rest of the international world.

Scheepers, the President of the GWU of SA and one of the delegates at the ITGLWF congress very strongly stated the case of the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA) at the congress. After she had pleaded for understanding and not discrimination against South African trade unions, she said the black Garment Workers' Union of Mvubelo was able to supply black trade union leaders to other trade unions. This was because the registered Garment Union had supported black trade union activities for more than 40 years. All the South African delegates at this ITGLWF congress felt that they did not only learn a great deal about workers' problems in other parts of the world, but also managed to present a clear picture of the problems of the workers of South Africa.<sup>497</sup>

In 1976 elections for the position of general secretary of the NUCW (SA) had to take place. Since the formation of branches in 1968 this was the third session of elections and workers had been instrumental in 'voting in' people who had their interests at heart. Mvubelo was again nominated for the post. It was reported that during her term of office of the NUCW (SA) she had gained recognition from employers and had become known throughout the international trade union organizations. Her vast experience and understanding of the workers made her a true leader of her people.<sup>498</sup>

It was further reported that she had dedicated her life to a course of uplifting the standard of African workers, not only in the clothing industry, but in many other industries. Mvubelo was once again elected as General Secretary of the NUCW (SA) with an overwhelming majority.

Mvubelo received 10 830 votes and Johannes Mathe, who opposed her, 1 710 votes. After the results had been announced, Mvubelo commented: "I sincerely extend my appreciation to all workers who have proved their confidence in me now and through the period I have served as general secretary since the amalgamation of the all-male South African Clothing Workers' Union

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<sup>496</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 19 March 1976.

<sup>497</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 23 April 1976.

<sup>498</sup> Garment Worker/Klerewerker, 18 June 1976.

and the all-female Garment Workers' Union of African Women in 1962. I will always serve the workers to the best of my ability."

Mvubelo said that elections were important to ensure democratic control of the union. Furthermore elections were educative to the workers who had to be trained in the skills of a secret ballot in the hope that some day a franchise would be extended to blacks and these workers would be ready to take their place as voting citizens.<sup>499</sup>

"Lay off political issues and stick to proposals for action on world development!" This was the call of the newly elected President of the ILO, Michael O'Leary, when he opened its annual conference. The GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA) supported O'Leary in his bid to keep the conference apolitical.

Both Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA, and Mvubelo felt that the boycott against South African delegates was against the best interests of South African workers. South Africa could send observers to the ILO conference, but they were not allowed to express the views of South African workers. Instead, South Africa was 'represented' by the South African Confederation of Trade Unions (SACTU) which operated from London. SACTU wanted to maintain boycotts against South African participation in the conference. But by doing so, they were jeopardizing the lot of the workers.

Scheepers indicated that it was better to let resident South Africans represent themselves at the ILO conference. SACTU was totally against Mvubelo, because they saw her as a 'sold out'. SACTU also 'preached' disinvestments, whilst Mvubelo and Scheepers believed in foreign investment in South Africa. Scheepers noted that the only way that South Africa could improve the lot of the workers was by attracting more capital to the country.<sup>500</sup>

In 1976, 10 000 Africans were made jobless each month.<sup>501</sup> This was the grim situation facing South Africa and the labour front. The vast population of unemployed also faced dismal conditions. Scheepers wrote a letter to Mvubelo discussing proposals for an agreement to be negotiated in 1977. The executive committees of the Clothing Industry took cognisance of the

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499 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 11 March 1977.

500 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 11 June 1976.

501 **Ibid.**

bad state of the South African economy, and particularly the clothing industry, and decided that their demands had to be kept to the minimum.

The committees however decided to ask for a substantial increase in wages. Scheepers stressed in her letter that these were only proposals and not promises of an agreement. She said there should not be any misunderstanding, because in any negotiations you ask far more than you hope to receive.

It was further decided that an index linking should be asked and failing this, an annual escalation clause had to be asked for to enable workers to get increases every year during the period of the agreement. Scheepers also suggested to Mvubelo that they should ask the employers to double their contribution per worker to the Provident Fund. She also included a list of proposed wages.<sup>502</sup>

Mvubelo in March 1977 once again criticized the South African government for its attitude towards black trade unions. Giving evidence before the Cillie Commission of Enquiry into the urban unrest in 1976 in South Africa, she hit out at the authorities for using the National Union of Clothing Workers as a showpiece when foreign dignitaries visited the country, yet at the same time refusing legal recognition to it or any other black unions. "This is the largest black trade union in South Africa and is respected even by employers for the manner in which it runs its affairs and also for handling its matters in a convincing manner" she declared.<sup>503</sup>

Mvubelo agreed that black trade unions should be recognized to prevent their possible exploitation by irresponsible people posing as union leaders. Registered white unions were obliged by law to keep out of politics but no such restrictions were in fact placed on black unions.

The obligations of the Industrial Conciliation Act did not apply to black unions and they could be exploited by outsiders. Blacks were equal citizens of South Africa and expected equal rights, Mvubelo said. Black workers did not only ask for the rights which a trade union would bestow

<sup>502</sup> G 1982, Cba 1.4.3.5. Organising of the Clothing Workers NUCW, 1965-1979. Correspondence Letter Scheepers-Mvubelo, 7 October 1976.

<sup>503</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 25 March 1977.

on them, but also considered that they had the same obligations as other trade unions to run their affairs responsibly.

She believed that blacks rejected the Bantu Labour Relations Act which controlled industrial relations for them. They considered it as an inferior method, and members of works committees feared victimization if they represented the true aspirations of their fellow workers.

Turning to other legislation, Mvubelo urged the repeal of the Environmental Planning Act "which causes many hardships to blacks". If this act was strictly applied to the clothing industry she said nearly 6 000 black workers - the number over the quota - would be rendered unemployed. "Workers are already restless and under the circumstances even the dismissal of some hundreds could spark off industrial unrest." Such a situation could be exploited and the legal union would not be able to avoid the resulting catastrophe, she said.

In the clothing industry job reservation provided for 25 per cent of workers in the Transvaal to be white, 37,5 per cent brown and 37,5 per cent black. In fact, in 1977, there were 4 per cent whites, 16 per cent brown and 80 per cent blacks employed in the industry.<sup>504</sup>

In an interview with the **Garment Worker**, Mvubelo once again criticized the amendment to the Environmental Planning Act in the strongest terms. At that stage the bill was before Parliament, with a view to enforcing, among others, section 3 of the act which controlled the number of black workers a factory may have legally employed. This was likely to result in many more prosecutions against employers who disregarded the 2,5:1 black-white labour quotas in urban areas, or who exceeded the number of black employees employed on 18 January 1968.<sup>505</sup> The underlying purpose of the section of the act was to control the influx of black workers into urban areas, to protect white and brown workers and to encourage industries to decentralize to border areas where labour was available.

Since 1968 the act already had a bad effect on the clothing industry in the Transvaal, which grew only 2%, while that in the Western Cape grew by 98,4% and the Durban industry by 112,5%.

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 29 April 1977.

Mvubelo expressed her grave fears over the loss of jobs at that stage held by black garment workers on the Witwatersrand. She was convinced that an enforcement of the act could unleash intense bitterness on the part of the workers.

"We had hoped the Government would change their attitude, particularly in the last years with the incessant talk of change. Workers will inevitably question whether they were ever sincere. This Act is promulgated to undermine black workers", she commented. "Many employers feel complacent that they have been allowed to employ over their quotas in the past, I am convinced there is to be a vicious application of this Act. The clear intention is to close down the Witwatersrand clothing industry so as to make the homeland policy more economically viable - specifically to boost Bophuthatswana, which covers the Babelegi and Rustenburg border areas", she added.<sup>506</sup>

Mvubelo sketched the background of the present situation. She said that when the blacks entered the industry during World War II it was the first such avenue open to black women; there were food and canning, and tobacco industries, but that had a limited scope for men. Increasingly white and brown workers started to leave the clothing industry, so of course increasing numbers of blacks had been employed. In the meantime blacks had become industrialized and competed well on the market for skilled workers. "If this threat materialized it would set the clock back to the war years and boost unemployment to a frightening extent," she said.<sup>507</sup>

Strict implementation of the act could have devastating consequences. Factories could not get enough white and brown workers and could not expand. Ultimately the industry would die because stagnation was the first step to decline, and factories were being forced to stagnate or move. The reef clothing industry was a significant employer of blacks - the National Union of Clothing Workers' membership was roughly 20 000 in 1977. As Mvubelo put it: "This measure may benefit Bophuthatswana in 20 years' time, but what about the workers now in Johannesburg? Once again the government were trying to legislate us out of existence, for ideological reasons."<sup>508</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

A significant fact was that trade unions and industrial councils were not allowed in border areas. A destruction of the urban clothing industry would in effect destroy the strength of the NUCW (SA), which was by far the strongest black union in South Africa. Mvubelo pointed out that this might well have been an additional motivation behind the tightening of the act: "Why is the Act not strictly enforced in the Cape? The brown workers need the employment, but here we are discriminated against in the most blatant manner, and regarded as expendable in the interest of policy. The destruction of the NUCW (SA), which functions perfectly in a harmonious industry, would be a blow against those arguing for normal trade union rights for all black workers."

It is interesting to note that during the Parliamentary debate on the amendment of the act, MP's questioned whether the ideological aims could ever be achieved anyway. Only factories with over 500 workers were likely to afford to move to border areas and many smaller factories failed to qualify for aid anyway. Most factories on the reef were small factories which would never move. Without labour they would have to close down in the face of competition from other areas.

In 1976 the NUCW (SA) could not hold a conference because shortly after Mvubelo had returned from the ITGLWF Conference in Dublin, the riots in Soweto broke out, and there were urgent problems and preoccupations to solve.

At the NUCW (SA)'s 6<sup>th</sup> National Conference held on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 1977 Mvubelo explained the threat posed to workers by the Environment Planning Act, saying to them that thousands of black workers could be added to the unemployment figures if it was implemented.<sup>509</sup>

Mvubelo reported on the union's attendance of the ITGLWF conference in Dublin in 1976, and expressed the view that other delegates had at first been suspicious of them as a result of being misinformed on South Africa. Dealing with the union's affiliation to TUCSA, also in 1976, she explained that the executive committee had acted on the belief that the principle of the trade union movement was 'unity'. Mvubelo, who strongly believed in the need and power of education, reported that over 100 children of NUCW (SA) members had been helped by the

bursary fund, designed to further university education. She explained, however, that a 2c contribution was too small.

Membership of the NUCW (SA) decreased tremendously, as the then Transvaal lost 16 factories involving 2 000 workers, and a further 200 were laid off. It is no wonder that Mvubelo so strongly advocated training and education of her workers and that whenever she got the opportunity she spoke out against anything that could cost the workers their jobs.

The resolutions put to the conference reflected a range of problems facing Mvubelo and her union. There was a call for the recognition of the Soweto Lift Club Association as a means to improve transport for workers. It is clear that workers did not have enough transport and felt unsafe travelling by train.

Other resolutions prompted discussion on black unemployment and the low wages paid in the clothing industry. There was a call for a single national wage agreement and for TUCSA to provide lectures to shop stewards and committee members. Mvubelo once again suggested that discrimination against black workers had to stop so that all workers would be subject to the same wage agreement. Workers would receive better wages if peace prevailed in their industry under trained leadership. The conference also urged that the Unemployment Insurance Act be amended to cover all wage earners irrespective of their earnings.<sup>510</sup>

Dissatisfaction was expressed over the R2,00 increase in the premiums of black pensions, and the fact that black divorcees, widows and unmarried mothers were unable to purchase houses.

Mvubelo concluded the conference by saying that the 1977 conference of the NUCW (SA) was important in the light of a need for efficient and solid trade unions capable of defending workers' interests in the increasingly difficult times, and a union, like any organization had to 'go back' to its members in this way for strength.<sup>511</sup>

It is important to note that during the conference NUCW (SA) received many messages of support, which proved that Mvubelo and her union were known and could bargain on the co-operation of the international world. Amongst others Mvubelo received messages from the

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<sup>510</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>511</sup> **Ibid.**

President of the ITGLWF (5 million members) based in Brusells. He inter alia wrote: "We wish every success to your Conference and pledge our solidarity and fullest co-operation in your struggle to promote the interests of, and improve the conditions for, African workers in the clothing industry in your country."

Another inspiring message came from George Meany, President of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

All these organizations representing millions of people would not have known about the existence of an organization like the NUCW (SA) if it was not for the dedicated work of the Africans' leader, Lucy Mvubelo. She attended congresses across the world and although she was often not allowed to speak on platforms, representing South African trade unions, she nevertheless made many friends for her union and workers of South Africa wherever she went.

After urgent representations to various Cabinet Ministers and MP's, NUCW (SA) was granted an interview with the Minister of Planning, Dr Schalk van der Merwe, over the application of the racial quotas for factories as laid down in the Environmental Planning Act. It was encouraging for NUCW (SA) that a minister agreed to have a discussion with a delegation from a black trade union, which was in fact not recognized in terms of industrial legislation.

The delegation of the NUCW (SA), under the leadership of Mvubelo, reported after their interview with the Minister of Planning on racial quotas, that the meeting had been frank and cordial, and the minister had welcomed the information and views given to him. A prepared memorandum had been handed in, and delegates had explained the objections of the workers to the application of the act.<sup>512</sup> They had pointed out that clothing industry workers were urban dwellers, with the right of permanent residence, not migrant workers. They would not be transferred to border areas with any factories that moved, as they were not willing to lose urban rights. The union had once again expressed its grave concern at the prospect of increased unemployment at a time when it was already a serious national problem.

Furthermore, workers rendered unemployed by an application of the white-black quotas in the clothing factories would lose out on the various benefit funds they had helped to build up over the years, such as sick pay and slack pay.

Mvubelo had pointed out that the black workers were an innocent party to the contraventions of Section 3 of the Act, yet they would suffer most if it were applied. Workers, who faced unemployment, felt extremely resentful in the threatening situation they were in. She had said that the union constantly advised its members against strike action to achieve their aims, but in a desperate situation the influence of radicals could outweigh that of the union.

The delegation had requested that in the light of the representations, the situation as it had been at that time should be condoned and that all employers be granted permits allowing them to continue employing their existing number of black workers.<sup>513</sup>

The spirit of co-operation which marked the meeting between the Minister of Planning and the NUCW (SA) was noteworthy. It demonstrated that rational discussion between the executive authority of South Africa and a responsible black union could lead to a potential resolution of a difficult problem.

The NUCW (SA) received from the Minister the assurance that the application of the Environmental Planning Act's black-white quota system for factories would not be harshly applied in the clothing industry. Mvubelo said that the Minister had made it clear that it was still the government's policy to decentralize industries. She stated that the NUCW (SA) was fairly happy with the interview and if the spirit of this agreement would be implemented the crisis facing the black garment workers might be averted and that they were more hopeful for the immediate future. The most important outcome of the meeting was the hope that the jobs and economic security of thousands of black workers would be secured.<sup>514</sup>

Since 1977 Mvubelo's struggle for a better life and dignity for all workers continued. Speaking against the background of the mass rent protest in Soweto she supported the call for economic wages for black workers made by Mr Manie Mulder, chairperson of the West Rand Bantu Affairs Administration Board. "Then our children will stay at their school desks, qualifying

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<sup>513</sup>**Ibid.**<sup>514</sup>**Ibid.**

themselves for the skilled jobs they will have to do if our country is to prosper, and not crowd into the streets protesting," she said.<sup>515</sup>

Mvubelo said that she had repeatedly stressed that black workers should be paid enough to enable them to become consumers in the full sense of the word. "This will enable our industries to expand and because workers will be able to consume the goods they make, it will also inevitably have an effect on the quality," she stated. It would also remove the necessity of subsidies for black housing and other services.

However, while such legislation as the Physical Planning Act, which could limit the number of jobs available to urban workers, was hanging over the heads of both employers and workers, there was little chance that real progress in this direction would be made, she stated. Mvubelo said, "These young people are inflamed by the indignities their elders are continually subjected to. It is no good asking these young people what they have to do with the rents their parents have to pay. They see it as just another example of the humiliation of the blacks as people."

Mvubelo explained: "Pay us enough and we can buy the fruits of our labour. There is an old Afrikaans saying: Those who won't work, can't eat. Let us turn it around; Those who can't eat, can't work." What did the word 'eat' mean according to the Soweto children? For them 'eat' included food, housing, education, transport, clothing, leisure time activities - the lot! That is why Mvubelo wanted the government to listen to the children of Soweto - so that they could understand what it was that made them go out onto the street to protest. If the government did this there would be less talk of tsotsis and unruly elements and more of the real grievances of the children and their parents.<sup>516</sup>

When the Minister of Labour, Fanie Botha, made a comment that unemployment was not as serious as in 1932, he said that the official figure represented about 30 000 whites, brown people and Indians, but his department knew there were several hundred thousand unemployed in these groups. Scheepers of the GWU of SA said that the minister had to be ignorant of the situation in the urban areas.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 6 May 1977.

<sup>516</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>517</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 9 September 1977.

Mvubelo agreed with Scheepers. "Mr Botha must have his figures wrong. We must remember that most blacks do not register as unemployed, whether through ignorance of the facilities of the unemployment insurance facilities, or through fear of being 'endorsed out' of the urban areas." She said she was quite amazed to read the minister's statement, as he should be aware of the real position. "To us the comparison with the depression of the thirties is irrelevant anyway. Our people were not so urbanized or industrialized, and they were less dependent on work and income. The position may well not be as bad for whites, because they have taken good care of their position, but for black workers the position is already acute, as anyone who is familiar with the situation in the townships, especially Soweto, will bear out."<sup>518</sup>

Whilst doing this research it was quite difficult to find statistics on black unemployment figures in South Africa that were really reliable. The figures that could be found and the situation in reality did not correlate at all.

Mvubelo did not only as general secretary of the NUCW (SA) try to better the life of people around her, but as a Soweto community leader she also called on Minister Hendrik Schoeman to ensure that more milk at lower prices was supplied to black townships. Mvubelo said that the high price of milk and the poor distribution system in the townships were depriving hundreds of thousands of youngsters of the staple food.<sup>519</sup>

It is ironic to note that at this stage there was a surplus of fresh milk which farmers found difficult and unprofitable to dispose of. Mvubelo said that she was sure that a compromise could be reached which would supply a good, steady and safe supply of milk to the townships without the high costs of distribution which was at that stage involved.<sup>520</sup>

Whether at home in Soweto, or representing the NUCW (SA) overseas, Mvubelo always presented South Africa's case in such a way that she gained more and more support for the black labourers. Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA, called on the government to identify itself with labour leaders like Mvubelo who were engaged in countering the barrage of anti-South African propaganda overseas.

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 5 August 1977.

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**Ibid.**

Mvubelo said that with due recognition, the representative trade union leaders could do much to change overseas attitudes and canvas investment capital which was urgently needed for the benefit of all South Africans. Speaking after the labour debate in the Senate, Senator Scheepers told the **Garment Worker** that the South African labour movement came in for especially heavy attacks, frequently from political organizations who claimed to represent black workers and unions in South Africa.<sup>521</sup>

"However much the established unions may try to do their part in presenting a balanced view of the situation here, and among other matters, canvas investment capital, there are always those who are ahead of us with reports of violence and pending revolution which destroy confidence in our economy," she said.<sup>522</sup>

Senator Scheepers said that organizations like SACTU, who had been active overseas for a number of years, seemed to have unlimited resources to use for their anti-South African purposes. Its policy was purely political and was not concerned much with the immediate improvement of the conditions of workers. SACTU also tried to convince Mvubelo to join them and end the NUCW'S membership of TUCSA.

There was no doubt that SACTU received assistance from a number of organizations and had been able to swing large bodies of European and British trade union opinions against South Africa. It must be remembered that because of the high level of trade union membership in these countries, it represented a very important part of public opinion and influenced the press significantly. Overseas elements like these even attacked the more radical labour thinkers in South Africa if they did not advocate the violent overthrow of the system. Mvubelo was quite often attacked as a 'moderate' leader who preached 'evolution' and not 'revolution'.

Scheepers said that trade unionists (like Mvubelo) had already played an important part in the canvassing of support for South Africa overseas and that the government could do more to identify itself with the efforts of the trade unionists.<sup>523</sup>

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521 **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 24 June 1977.

522 **Ibid.**

523 **Ibid.**

Mvubelo once again received an opportunity to be an ambassador for South African workers when she was invited as one of a group of trade unionists to meet Dr David Owen MP at the British Embassy in Pretoria. The black unionists agreed that if British employers in South Africa gave evidence in favour of black unions to the Wiehahn Commission, this would be of great value.<sup>524</sup>

Mvubelo said it had been pointed out to Dr Owen that British firms should, above all, practice the same principles in South Africa as they applied at home in the United Kingdom. "This includes full union recognition, which means allowing black unions to organise the work force and then negotiating with the union." She said that the meeting had been frank and useful.

"With people abroad paying more attention to our problems, it is correct that they at least get our view on things," Mvubelo added. She said she appreciated that Owen had taken time to meet them and that he did it in such a way that made it clear that he was investigating and not interfering. His main interest was the obligations of British companies in South Africa. According to press reports, Dr Owen made it clear that Britain did not wish to interfere in labour matters in South Africa, but it was under great pressure to do so, for example Britain's trading partners expected her to take a stand.<sup>525</sup>

In 1977 a Code of Conduct for South African employers was published in South Africa. This followed two moves when a group of American companies produced a 'manifesto' on employment practices, and European countries later issued their Code of Conduct.<sup>526</sup>

It was pointed out that this was a South African code drawn up by South Africans and appropriate to South African conditions. The code showed the intention of the South African industry and commerce to eliminate discrimination in employment practice, and it underlined that much had already been done in this direction. Responding to the code, Anna Scheepers, as president of the GWU of SA, said that she was impressed but she had some reservations.

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<sup>524</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 9 September 1977.

<sup>525</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>526</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 17 February 1978. The South African code urged: "The recognition of the basic rights of workers of freedom of association, collective negotiation of agreements and conditions of service, the lawful withholding of labour as a result of industrial disputes, and protection against victimisation resulting from the exercise of these rights."

In Scheepers' view, the code had two major limitations. It only 'recommended' to employers that they had to adopt or subscribe to the code, and even after that there was no way to ensure they would comply with it. "Who will see that the code is accepted, and once it is, what compulsion is there to live and work by it?" she asked.

Secondly, in dealing with freedom of association of the workers, the code failed to specifically come out in support of trade union rights for all workers. "This can be read into the code if you want to, but it is not specific on unions. We need an explicit statement that employers are prepared to recognise black trade unions, not just any organisation", Scheepers added.<sup>527</sup>

This point was also focused on by Mvubelo, who urged all employers to follow those in the clothing industry by giving de facto recognition to black unions, irrespective of whether they were state recognized or not. She said she was disappointed that these bodies did not take this step forward - why had it to be left to foreign pressure?

Mvubelo continued by saying that she was extremely optimistic about the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry (which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 1) in terms of possible legal recognition of black or multiracial trade unions. But this in no way, she stressed, removed the need blacks had for enlightened employers and for bodies like the Urban Foundation to voice their support for these basic rights of workers. They had to realize that responsible and free trade unions were in the interests not only of the workers but of employers, industry, and the country as a whole.<sup>528</sup>

A mere commitment by various companies to the code was thus not going to ensure that its provisions would be fully implemented. Was this code only empty promises made to workers to eliminate discrimination in employment practices? Clearly employers couldn't rest back happy with a declaration of intentions. If the South African Code was to escape being ignored as so many nice words, it had to be given teeth by those who backed it. Mvubelo clearly pointed out that trade union recognition for all workers, irrespective of race, was what would really satisfy black workers.

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

In March 1978 Mvubelo once again called on the government. This time her request was to ease the tax burden on black workers in South Africa. She said that the new universal point-of-sale tax would mean that the lower paid black workers would be paying a high percentage of their incomes to the government. She suggested that essential commodities like mealie meal should be exempted from the tax. Many things would cost more because they would be subject to a new all-embracing tax. The workers who spent most of their income on basic foodstuffs and clothing would be hard hit. Mvubelo said that the government could at least put blacks on the same tax basis as whites.

All black men had to pay a 'head tax' of R2,50 a year. Black taxpayers could not get reductions for children, dependants, medical expenses and insurance. Black widows were treated as single people, whatever the number children they had, whereas widows of other colours were given married status and therefore paid less tax.<sup>529</sup>

In her response to the 1977 budget, Mvubelo appealed to employers to help the workers: "We know that many employers pay above the agreement wage, but we appeal to those who pay only the agreement wages to give a bit more to meet the workers' needs. Our workers often live from hand to mouth. In several other industries workers earn more and this makes us feel inferior and dissatisfied."<sup>530</sup>

She felt grateful that the poll tax was scrapped, but she said that the gap was still large in ordinary pensions and it should be eventually closed. She was perturbed about the four per cent sales tax. "Especially blacks in the townships will be hit by this tax as it will come on top of the recent rent increases and the increase in train fares. Whatever improvements the budget gave, we are back to square one."<sup>531</sup> Not only within South Africa but also internationally, Mvubelo kept on negotiating for a better deal for black workers.

Mvubelo left on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1978 as one of the TUCSA delegates representing South African labour at the International Labour Organization Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. This

<sup>529</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 31 March 1978. Tax paid directly has also been described as discriminating, whites (and brown people and Indians) who are unmarried start to pay income tax when their earnings rise above R700 a year, and R1 110 if they are over the age of 60. If they are married then tax starts at R1 200 a year, if they have four children, at R3 000 a year. Blacks, on the other hand, must start paying when their income reaches R360 a year - whatever their age, marital status or number of children.

<sup>530</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 7 April 1977.

<sup>531</sup> **Ibid.**

overseas 'visit' by TUCSA came at a time when world pressure against South African government policies was mounting. The year 1978 had been set aside by the ILO as International Year Against Apartheid. On the other hand there had been a drive by employer associations in South Africa to eliminate racial discrimination and promote black advancement.

South Africa was no longer a member of the ILO and the TUCSA delegates thus attended as observers. Mvubelo, however, told **Garment Worker** that they would plead for a platform to participate in workers' groups and discussions, to put forward the views of TUCSA. They would also try to have some consultation with the Director General of the ILO.<sup>532</sup>

It would be Mvubelo's fifth trip to the Conference in Geneva, but the first since her unsuccessful attempt to speak there in 1974. In her words: "Considering the signs of change on the labour front in South Africa, it should be easier for us to sell the policies of the trade union movement here."<sup>533</sup>

Mvubelo referred to the withdrawal of the USA, with the support of American labour, from the ILO in 1977 because of the intrusion of politics into the organization. "From a trade union point of view it grieves and embarrasses one that colleagues can snob you just because you are South African. After all the world knows we blacks have no say in the policy making of the South African government."<sup>534</sup>

The Director General of the ILO, Francis Blanchard, presented his annual report on South Africa to the ILO, in which he said that "the combination of racism and repression, and pressures on the economy, have played a part in translating an unjust and oppressive society into one wrecked by unrest and resistance".<sup>535</sup>

After the ILO conference the TUCSA delegates went on to London and met with Trade Union Congress (TUC) leaders. Here they discussed matters of mutual interest and drew attention to the latest moves in industrial relations in South Africa.

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<sup>532</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 2 June 1978.

<sup>533</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>534</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 7 July 1978.

<sup>535</sup> **Ibid.**

Arthur Grobbelaar, General Secretary of TUCSA, and Mvubelo then proceeded on to Houston in Texas for a conference organized by the South African Foreign Trade Organization (SAFTO).

It was made quite clear that officially no trade unions abroad would go against the views of all 171 members of the International Labour Organization. They were simply not prepared to condone discrimination in South Africa in any way. Until there were real changes and trade union rights for all South African workers, South African delegates to overseas conferences were going to get a cool reception. Unions abroad felt that a black union like the NUCW (SA) of Mvubelo was being used as a model, but in fact there was little backing because there were few unions like it and black workers had to be organized.

It is interesting to note that garment workers in many countries were faced with identical problems that their fellow workers in South Africa were experiencing. For example, American clothing workers faced the same problem in what in South Africa was called border areas. Employers moved to small towns away from the centres where unions operated, so that they could pay low wages.<sup>536</sup>

At the end of June 1978, Mvubelo told American businessmen at a seminar on investment in South Africa, held in Houston, Texas, of the new force for change which was emerging in South Africa - an alliance between employers and workers. This had in the end to "result in the complete displacement of the apartheid policy." In the course of her speech she listed many reasons for this new alliance for change.<sup>537</sup> According to her the impression was often created that without external pressures no internal changes would ever come about in South Africa. "The assumption of this attitude totally disregards the very powerful forces at play within South Africa", she added.

In the clothing industry, the principles of the new labour codes had long been applied, she said. Employers had realized that black trade unions were not unlike any other trade union in that they could negotiate and bargain to achieve satisfactory conditions of employment which were necessary for industrial peace. She told the delegates that they were in the very fortunate position in South Africa that all the leading employers' associations, the Chamber of Industries and Chambers of Commerce, were openly advocating the granting of full trade union rights to all

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<sup>536</sup>

**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 21 July 1978.

black workers and full legal recognition for black trade unions. She was confident that the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry would result in exactly this.<sup>538</sup>

Mvubelo said that 80% of South African labour was black. Blacks had an unequal political dispensation, and employers had been forced to compensate for this by demanding trade union rights for their black workers, in order to ensure industrial peace. "Necessity here has created strange bedfellows between employers and workers," she said, "but can it be surprising in a situation in which the very narrow and restrictive ideological concepts of apartheid still rule?"

Mvubelo stated that the Environmental Planning Act was an example of such ideology. Employers had continued to employ many black workers in breach of this act, and its one positive result was that it made all employers antagonistic to government policy, "but even more important it brought home to all employers the value of their black workers".<sup>539</sup> It also underlined the value of skilled workers.

She continued her address by telling the delegates that job reservation was also a matter of concern to workers and employers alike, but it had never been strictly applied in the clothing industry. Pressure from employers who needed workers, and from black workers, had meant that conservative white unions which backed job reservation were no longer in the strong position they had been in. Mvubelo gave as an example the agreement made during the first half of 1978 between employers and unions in the iron, steel and engineering industries in South Africa, where there were large concessions as to jobs that might be filled by blacks.

Mvubelo also claimed that the virtual impossibility of a legal strike by black workers at that stage, combined with the very inadequate works committee system, made it possible for workers to be goaded to illegal strikes. Employers realized this and it was another reason why they backed trade unions. She stressed that this new common interest between workers and employers was not a result of foreign pressure. Even in Western countries employers were not keen on union rights, and it was clear that many foreign firms in South Africa were reluctant to recognize black trade unions and they hid behind 'government policy'. Changes were possible at this stage

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

in South Africa because of the internal crumbling of the apartheid policy, not pressure, she emphasized.<sup>540</sup>

Dealing with the external remedies for South Africa, Mvubelo said that advocating armed violence only spurred greater concern for government security. Should there be violent change, blacks would suffer most and no one would be the winner. She concluded her address by saying that the destruction of apartheid through economic means and boycotts and sanctions would also not work. It would entrench remaining concepts of apartheid and white privilege, and would give the state the chance to remove all unemployed blacks from the cities to the homelands, according to apartheid ideals. "The burden of sanctions and unemployment would be carried by blacks", she said.<sup>541</sup>

American companies with investments in South Africa faced a lot of pressure to disinvest because of the government's racial policies, or at least to halt all new investment. Union leaders like Mvubelo and Scheepers had a tough time overseas and in SA to convince foreign investors and international organizations and workers' unions that change was taking place. Mvubelo not only explained to the American businessmen in Texas that workers and employers were forming alliances to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, but Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA, also called on the delegates at the ITGLWF conference to recognize small changes that had taken place in South Africa and to help to work towards peaceful changes.<sup>542</sup>

After Arthur Grobbelaar and Mvubelo had left Texas, they planned to go to Washington for a meeting with George Meany of AFL-CIO, the American trade union organization. Mvubelo looked forward to putting her view at this meeting: "We are perturbed by the strong anti-South African resolutions adopted by the AFL-CIO last year (1977). As much as they think they are helping black workers, we do feel that these resolutions were not framed by people with our workers' interests at heart."

Although changes had taken place in South Africa, one could ask whether it was not a question of 'too little, too late?' Experts predicted that the critical unemployment situation in South Africa would get even worse the next few years. It was estimated in 1978 that 1 000 new jobs per

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 2 June 1978.

working day had to be found, merely to keep pace with the growth of the South African population. By 1980 South Africa had to provide 3 million new jobs.<sup>543</sup> It was hoped that the Wiehahn, as well as the Riekert Commission, would help to ease some of the labour problems with their recommendations.

Anna Scheepers opened the NUCW (SA)'s annual National Council Conference, held on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1978, by pointing out to the delegates that they should be concerned for the position of all workers, as they were all brothers and sisters and "what happens to one part of the family effects the rest".<sup>544</sup>

These words of Scheepers reaffirmed the close relationship that existed in the garment industry between the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA). Mvubelo also gave a report of the union's activities. She dealt with the unemployment situation in the industry, saying that factories were still closing down or retrenching hundreds of workers. "This has caused untold hardship since there is hardly any other industry which can absorb them, particularly that most of them are women," she said.

Good news was that job reservation had been cancelled. TUCSA, the GWU of SA and the NUCW (SA) fought job reservation over the years, until it was cancelled in 1977. The Environmental Planning Act was still in force, and although significant exemptions had been achieved, the fight would have to be continued until the act was repealed.

The National Union of Clothing Workers of SA, along with many other bodies, had submitted a memorandum to the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry into Labour Laws. Wiehahn urged trade to face up to the demands of coming change. "I want to emphasise that trade unions without the desire or means of change will run the serious risk of losing their existence. Mvubelo said that especially with Arthur Grobbelaar of TUCSA on the commission, there was confidence that drastic changes would come about. In February, 1978, Mvubelo and other delegates from the NUCW (SA) led oral evidence before the commission. Mvubelo said that this commission was a hopeful sign. "We commend the Minister of Labour on his efforts to bridge the gap between the racial groups as far as employment practices are concerned."<sup>545</sup>

<sup>543</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 18 August 1978.

<sup>544</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 25 August 1978.

<sup>545</sup> **Ibid.**

In 1978 Mvubelo celebrated her twenty-fifth year at the helm of what was at that stage the biggest black trade union in South Africa. She had frequently represented her union at conferences overseas, where she had spoken with authority on black workers in South Africa. Since her union had joined TUCSA she had spoken as representative of even wider groups of workers.

Asking Mvubelo how she viewed the future, she said: "I hope to soon see changes in the labour setup in South Africa. I will never be satisfied until black workers in SA have the same rights as their white brothers and sisters."<sup>546</sup> She continued to say that she hoped one day to be able to retire, but then to use her strength in the service of the township community.

The year 1978 also brought a lot of sadness for Mvubelo. Her husband, Mackenzie, passed away and was put to rest on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1978.<sup>547</sup> As it was discussed earlier in this chapter he suffered brain damage and was paralyzed after an assault in 1956. All these years from 1956 to 1978, besides her trade union responsibilities, Mvubelo had to cope on her own raising her children, educating them and taking care of her husband. Taking this fact into consideration, one realizes that she had to be a phenomenal woman to be able to have achieved all the success.

Labour relations was like the sword of Damocles that hung over South Africa in 1979, loaded to the hilt with imponderables, subject to the vagaries of economic, political and social forces. "The new year is a very big question mark," Mvubelo said. "We are waiting for the Wiehahn Commission for a re-definition of the black worker which I regard as central to sensible labour practice in South Africa," she stated. Black hopes, she claimed, were for changes in the "whole industrial set-up" under the Industrial Conciliation Act.<sup>548</sup> Black workers, she reiterated, were simply not defined as employees under the act. She therefore hoped for recommended legislative changes from the Wiehahn Commission "to afford SA trade unions international recognition and acceptance". Hoped-for changes from the commission were the removal of job reservation and the scrapping of the Environmental Planning Act.

<sup>546</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 1 September 1978.

<sup>547</sup> **Garment Worker/Klerewerker**, 7 July 1978.

<sup>548</sup> **Financial Gazette**, 5 January 1979.

"This terrible weapon is worse than a machine gun," Mvubelo added. She said that through this lethal legislation they had lost more than 5 000 black workers in the clothing industry. When the act was promulgated there were 12 000 workers. Mvubelo was "gloomy" about prospects for 1979; she believed the onus was on the government to design a programme to actively encourage industrialists to expand and thus create jobs.<sup>549</sup>

At that stage the reverse applied. The Transvaal clothing industry was visibly shrinking. She then asked, "What was the use of the Urban Foundation and its Code of conduct if there were no workers?" However, if meaningful action was taken, Mvubelo believed, like she had said so many times before, then there would be hope for the future.<sup>550</sup>

In February 1979 the workers in the clothing industry in the then Transvaal asked for a 25 per cent increase in their wages. If they got their way the minimum pay would go up from R10,00 to R13,75 a week from 1 July 1979. Asked if the increase was too small, Mvubelo said: "Even in other countries, workers in the clothing industry earn this much. Whites in the same positions get the same amount - there is no discrimination on the basis of colour."<sup>551</sup> After deductions there was almost nothing left of the salary.

Legally the NUCW (SA) was not party to the Industrial Conciliation Agreement between the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association and the GWU of SA on salaries paid to workers in this industry. But the NUCW (SA) under the leadership of Mvubelo played an active role behind the scenes because of their close relationship with the registered GWU of SA.

Good news for the black clothing workers came in a letter from the Minister of Planning and the Environment, Chris Heunis, when he said that black women who qualified in terms of section 10(1)(a) and (b) of the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act to live in the Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vereeniging area and who were housed satisfactorily, would not be considered when determining the clothing industry's black/white labour ratio in this area. The Minister invited applications to his Department "with the minimum delay" from clothing factories which were

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**Ibid.**

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**Ibid.**

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**Post**, 21 February 1979.

exceeding their authorised quotas operating on temporary permits or wishing to extend their operations.<sup>552</sup>

This major government concession removed the threat of unemployment which had been hanging over thousands of Transvaal garment workers. It had also raised prospects for new jobs in their previously doomed industry. "I'm so thrilled, I nearly jumped out of my skin," an overjoyed Mvubelo said when she received the news. "It means there will be more jobs for my people."<sup>553</sup>

Since black women represented by far the majority of the clothing industry's labour force, the concession was seen as giving employers in the clothing industry a free hand where they had previously been stifled.

In an article in **The Star**, Mvubelo also spoke out against exploitation of black domestic workers. The exploitation of these workers continued despite calls by black and white leaders to upgrade the wages of these workers to living standards. Mvubelo said "they are contributing to the economy of the country and therefore need protection".<sup>554</sup> She also pointed out that most of these domestic workers were breadwinners and needed a salary high enough to support a family. Thus not only as a trade union leader, but also as a community worker, Mvubelo spoke out against injustices in society and tried wherever she could to be an agent of change so as to bring about a better life for workers.

When the price of fuel went up on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1979, the price of paraffin also increased from 20c to 36c a litre. Paraffin was (and still is) an essential basic commodity in the black townships and this price increase really hit them hard. The increase in the petrol price also meant an increase in taxi fares and other modes of transport to and from work.<sup>555</sup>

Mvubelo said that blacks were being hard-hit by the escalating costs of their daily needs. "Only last week we were told that the prices of dairy products had been increased. Now it is petrol, gas and paraffin." She commented that although the cost of living was increasing, employers were not keen to increase workers' wages. "Employers tell us that their black workers are not

<sup>552</sup> **The Star**, 27 March 1979.

<sup>553</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>554</sup> **The Star**, 16 May 1979.

sufficiently productive, that is why there is inflation in the country", she said. Black wages, which were much lower than those of the whites, were not taken into account by the government when price increases were considered," she stated.<sup>556</sup> More than half of Soweto households were earning less than the minimum living level of R178,22 a month for a township family. A survey concluded in March 1979, found that a fifth of Soweto's adults were earning less than R99 a month.<sup>557</sup>

Mvubelo was a member of the regional committee for the Witwatersrand-Pretoria-Vaal Triangle. This committee was created by the government to advise the Minister on how best urban blacks could be administered. Mvubelo said she had joined the regional committee because she was satisfied that the government was trying to do something for urban blacks. "They are now getting close to us in an attempt to meet our aspirations", she added. This was just another platform Mvubelo used to put the case of the urban black forward.<sup>558</sup>

The 20 000 garment workers covered by the Industrial Council for the Transvaal Clothing Industry were very disappointed when their new pay packets were made known to them. According to an agreement signed by the registered GWU of SA and employers in the clothing industry an overall 7,5 per cent increase was granted to all categories of workers. All workers thus got the same increase. The whites would still get more as the wage gap was not narrowed, but maintained by the agreement.<sup>559</sup>

Mvubelo said they were aware that their members were being paid far below the minimum living level. She said her union had negotiated for a basic salary of R250,00 a month for its workers, but this was not approved by the different factory managements. She told the reporter of **Post** that she and other officials of her unions had been fighting for the past years for better payment. According to Mvubelo, her union had more than 20 000 members throughout South Africa. She said 16 500 were black.<sup>560</sup>

Taking these figures into consideration, the majority of the garment workers were discriminated against and lived far beyond the bread line. Mvubelo mentioned two more important

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<sup>555</sup> **The Citizen**, 9 June 1979.

<sup>556</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>557</sup> **The Star**, 20 July 1979.

<sup>558</sup> **The Citizen**, 14 July 1979.

<sup>559</sup> **Post**, 29 June 1979.

factors concerning workers' wages in an interview with **The Star**: "Fortunately some employers are going to improve on this minimum increase" and "we must also appreciate that the industry lost thousands of jobs to areas which pay less and work longer hours". She was referring to the hourly rate paid in Johannesburg that was more for a 40 hour week than the rate for an hour paid in Natal and Cape Town for a 42,5 hour week. Thus in Transvaal the clothing workers received a higher wage and worked shorter hours per week - perhaps this was something small that the Transvaal workers could be thankful for - but on the other hand equal pay for equal work was what the workers fought for.<sup>561</sup>

The principle underlying a trade union is the striving for solidarity and the securing of social justice for **all** workers irrespective of the colour of their skins. After many years of disappointment and struggle, the Wiehahn Report and recommendations were accepted with jubilation by black trade unions. The report recommended that both trade union organizations and individuals should be afforded full freedom of association. Individuals should be free to join any appropriate trade union of their choice and trade unions should be free to prescribe such membership qualifications in their constitutions as they might deem fit, whether or not race, colour or gender was a consideration.

"What worker could have rejected such a progressive decision?" Mvubelo asked. Her union, which was the largest black union in South Africa, had participated actively in seeking recognition of union rights for black workers since the exclusion of women in 1953. Hence, she said, "The government's acceptance of the recommendations (of the Wiehahn Commission) was highly appreciated".<sup>562</sup> She explained that black unions felt that they could consolidate their efforts in organizing the unorganized workers without any fear of being questioned or refused access by some unscrupulous employers who were not prepared to accept black unions because of their non-registration.

In August 1979 union leaders were still highly upset about the wage deal concluded in June 1979. Scheepers said the negotiations had lasted for months, had reached deadlock twice and had been concluded after a strike threat. Mvubelo believed it was the fault of the government.<sup>563</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**The Star**, 15 June 1979.

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**To The Point**, 6 July 1979.

However, this happiness of black workers was short-lived when the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament. This bill destroyed the very relationship between racial groups which the commission had already described in black people's minds.

Their aspirations were shattered by the definition of 'employee'. The definition which previously excluded all, then created two classes of blacks: those with trade union rights as prescribed in the act and with the rights of gaining "registered trade union status", and those who were excluded, the so-called frontier "commuter" and "migrant", who retained only the right of belonging to an association of persons.<sup>564</sup>

Mvubelo warned against many problems that might occur if this bill would become a law. To achieve registered trade union status, black unions that existed at that stage had to exclude all the "commuters" and "migrants" from membership by amending their constitutions. These unions had legal obligations to members who had gained privileges as members of funds such as the Death Benefit Funds or Educational Bursary Funds.

The trade union leaders were faced with a legal impasse, Mvubelo said; either to remain unregistered or run the risk that opposition trade unions, excluding commuters and migrants and thus becoming eligible for registration, might come into being. She said that the industrial unrest that would result was inconceivable and it was certainly not what was intended by the extension of trade union rights to black workers as recommended by the Wiehahn Commission.<sup>565</sup> The government's new labour legislation could have "disastrous results on the economy", Mvubelo warned. She sent a memorandum to the Minister of Labour, SP Botha, warning the government about the negative effects this legislation would have on the workers and the economy in South Africa.

She said this new legislation had created two classes of blacks and this had placed black labour leaders in the serious dilemma of having to play at white politics or become involved in black politics. "Regretfully", she said, "politics had now been introduced with a new emphasis that could have disastrous results on the economy."<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> **The Star**, 9 August 1979.

<sup>564</sup> **To The Point**, 6 July 1979.

<sup>565</sup> **Ibid.**

With few migrants in her ranks, Mvubelo's union was expected to hail the new legislation as a dream that has come true. Instead she appealed to the Minister to bring about changes so as to make it possible for her union to co-operate. Mvubelo objected that the legislation:

- "Is a heavy-handed effort at deceiving the outside world that blacks in South Africa have trade unions rights;
- "contains the necessary encouragement and inducements to create disharmony among black workers;
- "gives intolerable powers to resist (white) unions to exclude others, even though they may constitute the vast majority of employees in any industry (by virtue of an industrial council veto)."<sup>567</sup>

Mvubelo said that at that stage it could easily be said, "Stop the agitation - commuters and migrants would be included under the provisions of paragraph (b) of the definition."

The press quoted Professor Wiehahn as saying that this would be done. But the interests of black workers at that point in time did not lie in handouts over a period. They wanted acceptance of their rights as they had always been contributors to the economy of South Africa.<sup>568</sup>

Mvubelo said that South Africa's political arena could truly be said to be in an extremely confused state if such devious backdoor methods had to be used, giving with one hand and taking away with the other. It had to be remembered that whatever occurred in white politics equally occurred in black politics and similarly "devious white politics" would become "devious black politics", she said.<sup>569</sup>

Mvubelo stated that it was appreciated that there were some politicians who were planning vast changes for South Africa and "this will enable us to face the future with confidence, rather than bending our heads down", she said, referring to the Riekert Commission.

Mvubelo thought that the Riekert Commission and its recommendations were far-reaching. That South Africa was subject to shortages of "skilled" manpower had been noted repeatedly by

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<sup>566</sup> **The Star**, 21 June 1979.

<sup>567</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>568</sup> **To The Point**, 6 July 1979.

leading trade unionists such as Anna Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA. The fact that all workers, regardless of colour, should be trained, was ignored.

The Riekert Commission in its recommendations clearly spelled out the need for training of black workers, not as blacks, but first and foremost as workers. Such recommendations, Mvubelo said, were applauded by all right-thinking blacks.<sup>570</sup> Employers and workers in the clothing industry, in particular, were relieved that the Environment Planning Act had been set aside. As the Riekert Commission pointed out, the enforcement of Section 3 of the Act had a detrimental effect on the clothing industry in the important Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal area. This section created artificial unemployment - so much so that, as it has already been discussed earlier in this research, thousands of workers in the clothing industry became unemployed. Mvubelo stated that she held the Riekert Commission recommendations in high esteem and was grateful for the changes brought about on its recommendations.<sup>571</sup>

The promise of exemption from the migrant and commuter ban in the Government's Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill was not enough to persuade black unions to apply for registration as government would have liked them to do. Both major black co-ordinating bodies - the Federation of SA Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions - opposed registration. The **Financial Mail** reported: "Even a conservative 'parallel' union like Lucy Mvubelo's National Union of Clothing Workers had said it is dubious."<sup>572</sup> So even the more conservative African unions like the NUCW (SA) affiliated to TUCSA were not yet applying for registration. "We haven't even considered asking for registration. We want to know where we stand as far as migrants are concerned", Mvubelo said as TUCSA executive member and General Secretary of the NUCW (SA).<sup>573</sup>

Indeed, it was ironic that government's post-Wiehahn bill achieved a unity between FOSATU and the consultative committee which had eluded them for years, although black unionists admitted that the differences between the two groups were probably too great at that stage for permanent formal co-operation. Manpower Minister Fanie Botha's announcement that all South African workers would be granted union rights did not spark off a "rush to register" by black

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<sup>569</sup> **The Argus**, 28 June 1979.

<sup>570</sup> **To The Point**, 6 July 1979.

<sup>571</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>572</sup> **Financial Mail**, 29 June 1979.

<sup>573</sup> **Financial Mail**, 15 June 1979.

unions. It did however send important ripples through the African union movement. This move of the Minister marked an important reversal of government policy. It was welcomed by business and slammed by the white union movement. But the reaction of the black trade unions was crucial, for government's move was aimed at bringing them into its new labour system and its success depended on the extent to which it would win converts among these unions.<sup>574</sup>

Mvubelo, as TUCSA's Deputy Vice-President, asked the minister whether the state would take any action against black unions which did not want to become registered. Botha replied that there should not be a double system. He favoured a unitary system for everybody - not one above and one below the table.<sup>575</sup>

The announcement by the Minister of Manpower Utilisation that all South African workers, including those who were citizens of territories "which previously had been part of the Republic", would be allowed to register as trade union members, "might prove to be the most significant policy statement of the last 30 years", **The Natal Witness** wrote. If Botha meant that blacks were to be admitted to the same union structure as whites under the Industrial Conciliation Act with no additional handicaps and that multiracial unions would be registered, the news was breathtaking. Mvubelo described the move as the fulfilment of the black people's aspirations and proof of real change in South Africa. She added that if on the other hand the announcement was another example of ambiguous newspeak then the disillusion it would cause might be the last straw which breaks the back of the camel; in this case the patience of the urban blacks.<sup>576</sup>

Mvubelo was however overjoyed by the news. She said the concessions removed suspicions that the granting of union rights to blacks was only 'window dressing'.<sup>577</sup> "The world could now see real changes were taking place in South Africa."<sup>578</sup> She appealed to black unions to respond and apply for provisional registration as soon as possible. With this concession the government had moved towards full implementation of one of the most crucial recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry into Labour Laws. The concession came at a time of major policy adaptations in other fields, including homelands consolidations, constitutional changes and even

<sup>574</sup> **Financial Mail**, 28 September 1979.

<sup>575</sup> **The Argus**, 13 September 1979.

<sup>576</sup> **The Natal Witness**, 27 September 1979.

<sup>577</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 25 September 1979.

<sup>578</sup> **Evening Post**, 26 September 1979.

suggestions that the government might be prepared to scrap the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act.<sup>579</sup>

The National Union of Clothing Workers (SA) was one of the first black unions to apply for registration. Mvubelo said this was the happiest moment in her life. She said that she had never thought that Africans would be defined as employees in her life-time.<sup>580</sup>

"We have a monster coming - the monster of sanctions." This was the warning Mvubelo gave the delegates at TUCSA's annual conference in Cape Town. She told delegates that bishops and ministers of religion were starting to advocate sanctions. Mvubelo was referring amongst others to Bishop Tutu and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Jackson planned to encourage disinvestments in South Africa as well as pressing for economic sanctions. He also wanted to stop the Gerrie Coetzee-John Tate boxing world title fight at the then Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria.<sup>581</sup> She could not agree with Jackson's stand on disinvestments. "He has not discussed the matter with the people it will affect - the black people, to see how they feel about it. He lives well ... and he can improve the lot of the black by giving them work and keeping bread in their mouth".

She had heard Jackson speaking in church and he had put his point across that a lot needed to be rectified in South Africa. "But he didn't say anything new. Since 1952 I have personally been saying the same - that we must pull down walls between blacks and whites, that we must talk, have dialogue and consult each other." She was perturbed that he was trying to stop the fight. "This is not his scope as church minister". She added that under Minister Piet Koornhof sports had begun to progress and had brought understanding between the races and that they anticipated that this would go further.<sup>582</sup> She therefore called on the delegates at TUCSA's annual conference to sign petitions against sanctions. This was Mvubelo's second move to have petitions signed against sanctions in South Africa. In August, 1979, Mvubelo with the chairperson of the Soweto Community Council, Mr David Thebehali, pledged support for a "campaign for peace and work in Southern Africa" - the brainchild of the Association of German Companies in Southern Africa, which had a membership of 250.<sup>583</sup>

<sup>579</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 26 September 1979.

<sup>580</sup> **Post**, 28 September 1979.

<sup>581</sup> **The Citizen**, 1 August 1979.

<sup>582</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>583</sup> **The Argus**, 16 August 1979.

The campaign started with students of the then Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit collecting signatures on a petition to be sent to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. This was after German church groups had planned an anti-South Africa campaign which was due to start on 19 October 1979, the anniversary of the 1977 clampdown on 18 black organizations and two newspapers.<sup>584</sup>

Mvubelo also called on the government to issue books of life - like those for whites - to all blacks in urban areas. She was speaking in support of a motion adopted unanimously by TUCSA's annual conference. The motion welcomed recommendations in the Riekert Commission's report designed to relax discriminatory legislation affecting manpower. But the motion expressed disappointment that the commission failed to recommend the repeal of all discriminatory legislation hindering economic growth. At the conference she also proposed that South Africa should relax influx control if it wanted to be accepted by the rest of the world.<sup>585</sup>

Just before Mvubelo left for a tour of the United States of America to meet industrialists and trade unionists to "fight sanctions against South Africa", she also participated in what the **Evening Post** called "the union scramble for African workers". At TUCSA's annual conference a resolution was taken to organize black workers. Mvubelo had taken up the challenge to organize the black workers in the brewing industry and she disclosed that her next target was the radio and electronics industry.<sup>586</sup>

Mvubelo however, first had to go to the USA on her three-week visit, sponsored by the South African Foundation, of which she was a trustee. As a black South African labour leader she urged Americans to keep investing in South Africa, saying that black workers would be the first to suffer if foreign companies withdrew. "I know that Rome was not built in one day", she told a New York audience, "but we have struggled for 55 years to achieve the opportunity we have today. Now do you want to starve us to death?" Addressing a meeting of the Council on Religious and Foreign Affairs, she said the black labour movement in South Africa had won a single victory in September 1979, just before she went on her visit to America, when the government of SA agreed to recognize black unions.<sup>587</sup> Black workers still had many battles,

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<sup>584</sup> **Post**, 13 September 1979.

<sup>585</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>586</sup> **Evening Post**, 5 October 1979.

<sup>587</sup> **Die Volksblad**, 11 October 1979.

including the fight for a minimum wage and the right to organize black miners, domestic workers and farm workers. Wages for blacks still fell far short of wages for whites in the same jobs.

Mvubelo pleaded for time to let the new labour laws work before foreigners recalled investments. She said multinational corporations in South Africa had done nothing for blacks before 1970 but since then, largely under pressure from blacks inside South Africa, such firms had made great progress. "How can I welcome something that is going to be detrimental to my people?" she answered to repeated questions on disinvestments.<sup>588</sup>

Several members of the audience, including members of the US National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, nevertheless wondered how else foreigners could bring about an end to apartheid. They argued that foreign firms provided few jobs for blacks - one estimate was 70 000 in a nation of 22 million - but provided great amounts of capital to the country, allowing South Africa to perpetuate legal discrimination. The critics added that many other labour leaders and exiled South African did support disinvestments and other tough measures, and they suggested that Mvubelo was in the minority.

Mvubelo believed it would be better that black unions stayed segregated for the time being. She said whites might overwhelm blacks and deny them opportunities if the unions were integrated immediately.<sup>589</sup>

Addressing the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Mvubelo told an impressive audience that South Africa had entered a new phase with rights and privileges being extended to black, brown and Asian people. "The changes taking place are often described as 'cosmetic' but it is no longer plastic surgery that we see - it is much nearer to a heart transplant because a change of heart has taken place", she said.<sup>590</sup>

The common thread that ran through her discussions and her speeches was her vigorous opposition to any withdrawal of United States investment in South Africa, or even the curtailment of future investment. Mvubelo stressed that clearly there was only one solution to the South African problem and that was evolutionary change.

<sup>588</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 12 October 1979.

<sup>589</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>590</sup> **The Argus**, 16 October 1979.

Speaking of change, she said the Afrikaners had a new prime minister and a definite new direction was being taken. Interesting to note at this stage was that the Botha Government's new policy directions had earned South Africa the kind of American publicity Dr Eschel Rhoodie could never have bought with his secret millions. A three-page spread in **Newsweek** painted perhaps the most positive picture of South Africa since the death of Steve Biko and 1977's October 19 bannings had sparked an international outcry against the country.

Most of it was attributed directly to the initiatives of Prime Minister<sup>591</sup> PW Botha, since he had taken over the reins from Mr John Vorster on 28 September 1979. Wagging his finger from political pulpits, Botha offered his bewildered white constituents a stark choice: "Adapt or die". He also declared that "total permanent separation built on artificially maintained white supremacy cannot continue in South Africa." But apartheid was far from dead. **Post** editor Percy Quoboza wrote: "If apartheid is dead then urgent funeral arrangements need to be made. The body is still around and is making a terrible smell."<sup>592</sup>

Mvubelo said there was no need for any foreign pressure to hasten change in South Africa. "Prime Minister Botha had done much unexpectedly - enough to jeopardise his re-election", she said. "I still expect another miracle," she added. She expected that urban blacks would get the franchise within her lifetime, pointing out that she was getting old.<sup>593</sup> (So she hoped that things would change at a swifter pace!)

Mvubelo voiced a profound truth when she told an American audience that so long as there was movement in South Africa's socio-economic and political development, revolution would be an unattractive option for change. It was a truth that had eluded people such as Marie Antoinette, but was much appreciated by European reformers following her, to the confoundment of Marxist theory: "Who would storm the Bastille for the sake of it, when change is coming anyway?" she asked. "South Africa had come perilously close to the static situation that breeds revolution", she told the audience. "Fortunately the tempo of change had picked up", she concluded.<sup>594</sup>

<sup>591</sup> **Sunday Times**, 28 October 1979.

<sup>592</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>593</sup> **The Star**, 29 October 1979.

<sup>594</sup> **The Daily News**, 12 October 1979.

Mvubelo told a Washington audience that any attempt to convert the evolutionary process in South Africa into revolution would be rejected equally by black and white. She declared that the situation in South Africa was neither static nor sterile, and that "changes will come about in an evolutionary way acceptable to the majority of whites and of my own people. It is only far left wing or communist elements that still see revolution as an answer." She further explained to the audience that calls for economic withdrawal by the USA from RSA were made by "desperate revolutionaries who realised full well that basic conditions from which revolution could arise did not exist in South Africa".<sup>595</sup> "They (the blacks) will be the first to lose their jobs, they will be left to die of starvation and they will be the first to be killed in a revolution,"<sup>596</sup> she stressed once again.

Mvubelo said during her many talks throughout the USA, one fact that had been hammered home to her was that the death in detention of black consciousness leader Steve Biko had given South Africa a bad name. During her talk at Notre Dame University, Indiana, a professor asked her what black South Africans had done to avenge Biko's death. He said the present generation of black South Africans should make sacrifices so future generations could have freedom. He was clearly talking about revolution, she commented. She then told him that it was very easy for people outside South Africa to prescribe solutions. She said that she was against revolution, because "it was our children's blood that would flow".<sup>597</sup> Mvubelo said she sometimes thought Americans, both black and white, who advocated armed struggle were really saying to her and her son and to all her black workers: "Go ahead and fight, we'll hold your coats." This was a frightening prospect with tragic possibilities, she added.<sup>598</sup>

She also suggested to some of the companies that not only should they maintain investments in South Africa, but they should set up an education fund for black children.<sup>599</sup> After the 1976 student riots, the government realized that it had to change its policies regarding black education. Although there were still shortages of black teachers and of accommodation at black universities, South Africa's educational system on the whole had been upgraded, Technical colleges were being built for black 'children', and many of the black teachers were returning to school to further their own education, Mvubelo explained. She then asked: "Now, in the light of the

<sup>595</sup> **RSA World T-R-E-N-D-O-G-R-A-M**, 30 November 1979.

<sup>596</sup> **The Argus**, 16 October 1979.

<sup>597</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 30 October 1979.

<sup>598</sup> Blamick, B (ed), **Lucy Mvubelo: A Black South African Trade Union Leader looks at the role of American companies in South Africa**. Mungfer Africana Library Notes, January 1980, p. 12.

number of educational opportunities available to blacks, why are the disinvestments of American companies being proposed?" She said removing the jobs created by the presence of these companies also removed the major incentive for black children to obtain higher education. The attitude of those who advocated disinvestments was irresponsible.<sup>600</sup>

She told the people she addressed that she appreciated their concern for the black workers of South Africa, but they needed to realize that if American companies were withdrawn from South Africa, the employment situation would regress to its former state. American withdrawal would make the government feel that it was free to continue indefinitely its policy of apartheid. She begged her audiences to campaign against those who advocated disinvestment and to let them know that the presence of foreign companies was beneficial to the black people, and provided both jobs and the motivation for attaining higher standards of education. Perhaps, too, she continued, South African firms would follow this example and begin to hire educated blacks to help fill the shortage of skilled labour that had always existed in South Africa.<sup>601</sup>

On the whole Mvubelo found that her many audiences listened attentively to what she had to say on disinvestments in South Africa. She met a wide range of American opinion formers during her visit. An American Congressman, Thomas Evans, warned his colleagues that economic withdrawal from South Africa would hurt the blacks - "the very people we are trying to help". He said, "It would strengthen the hand of extremists within South Africa and one - if not the most important - lever we have to encourage peaceful change in South Africa."<sup>602</sup> In short, disinvestments may satisfy an emotional need, but it would inhibit rather than enhance opportunities for all South Africans. I share the ultimate goal of these protests, which are designed to bring about an end, once and for all, to the ugly system of apartheid. However, I believe that US investment in South Africa can serve as a bridge over which black South Africans can move from oppression to economic and political opportunity. To end or curtail South African investment would be counterproductive in our efforts to promote internal change through external economic pressure."<sup>603</sup>

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599 **Rand Daily Mail**, 30 October 1979.

600 Blamick, p. 13.

601 **Ibid.**

602 **Post**, 19 October 1979.

603 **Ibid.**

Evans had read into the Congressional Record a column written by the **Washington Post's** respected black columnist, Mr William Raspberry, who extensively quoted Mvubelo. The Raspberry column referred to Mvubelo as "no government stooge ... indeed she has spent a good many of her 50 years fighting the government on one front or another" and recalled her successful leadership of a 1944 bus boycott and the strike she had organized in 1957 which killed job reservation in the clothing industry. Raspberry said: "Mvubelo is a black South African here to argue against disinvestments in her country. She detests what her government is doing to her people, but she is convinced that disinvestments would leave them disastrously worse off."<sup>604</sup>

Another person who responded positively to Mvubelo's visit to the USA was John Chettle, Director of the SA Foundation in New York. "She is the most effective speaker we have ever brought to this country", he said. Reports told of the favourable impression she was making during her American tour on politicians, businessmen, civil rightists, academics and the press.

Chettle supplied many reasons why Mvubelo was "effective". According to his statement to **The Argus**, Mvubelo was effective because she was black. When she talked against foreign investment in South Africa her views carried weight. She believed that anything that reduced job opportunities in South Africa where a million black people were out of work was madness.<sup>605</sup>

Chettle further linked Mvubelo's effectiveness to the fact that she could point to important change back home, notably in her own field where the government at last had conceded trade union rights to all the people. The change came without revolution. This strengthened the belief of a woman who had fought for union rights for 26 years that freedom could come by evolution. This was the message Mvubelo had taken to America. It was a message that needed to be heard at home even more urgently. He agreed with Mvubelo that violent means had to be ruled out in the political struggle. The heaviest responsibility for ensuring this rested on the government or, more truly, the white electorate, whose mission had to be, in their interests as well as those of the whole of Southern Africa, to bring to their country a new fair deal that would keep the support of moderate people like Mvubelo.

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**Ibid.**

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**The Argus**, 12 October 1979.

In the welter of bitter rhetoric and sectional politicking that bore so heavily upon South Africa's political scene, the certain truth was sometimes forgotten that the majority of all peoples, black and white, simply wanted to do their own thing in peace, Chettle stated.<sup>606</sup>

There were, however, many individuals, organizations and unions that differed from Mvubelo on the anti-disinvestments campaign she waged in South Africa and internationally. Some American students, teachers and staff from a Chicago University prepared a leaflet attacking Mvubelo. They felt she was a speaker who spread propaganda for South Africa's racist regime. The heading of the leaflet clearly spelt out how they felt about her speaking on their campus, addressing the issue of disinvestments. "If you were the rulers of the most repressive, racist government in the world, what type of person would you allow out of the country to go around talking about conditions at home?"<sup>607</sup>

In the rest of the content of the leaflet they pointed out that Mvubelo was constantly under attack, by black people, fighting for their freedom in South Africa. They named John Caetsewe, exiled Secretary General of the South African Congress of Trade Unions as one of the people strongly denouncing her. In addition they pointed out that the **Sechabe** magazine, the official organ of the ANC, named Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and Mvubelo as two spokespeople for the South African government in its February 1979 issue. The students concluded that by supporting Mvubelo and inviting her as a spokesperson to their campus, they would actively support the South African government. They warned their fellow students that they should not be taken in and be careful of deceptions.<sup>608</sup>

According to the labour reporter of **The Star**, Sieg Hannig, Mvubelo had said at a press conference that her trip to the USA in 1979 was very successful - more successful than her 1971 visit during which she persuaded American companies successfully to provide equal employment conditions in their South African subsidiaries.<sup>609</sup>

After Mvubelo had toured the USA in October 1979 criticising the South African government's homelands system and presenting a hard-hitting, unequivocal message on disinvestments,

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<sup>606</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>607</sup> AH 1426, Ab 4.2.1969-1971. TUCSA National Organisations. Correspondence with individuals. Leaflet denouncing Mvubelo's stand against disinvestments in South Africa.

<sup>608</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>609</sup> **The Star**, 29 October 1979.

summed up by her statement that those who wanted economic withdrawal from South Africa were "kicking the black masses in the teeth", she made a second visit to the USA within six weeks. In November 1979, she went to Washington DC under the auspices of the South African Foundation.<sup>610</sup> Mvubelo once again held discussions with top American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) men on disinvestments. She also presented her views on economic withdrawal from South Africa to top State Department officials, repeating what she had said a month before on her USA tour.<sup>611</sup>

Mary Ntseke, Secretary of the Black Allied Workers' Union, was also touring America with a basic message: "Break all economic ties with South Africa and stop your involvement in a system which dehumanises and oppresses blacks." She bitterly rejected fellow black trade unionist, Mvubelo's point of view, calling her a sell-out. Ntseke said her organization wondered whether Mvubelo was not selling the workers of South Africa down the river by her "championing the white oppressors cause".<sup>612</sup>

These two prominent black SA women trade unionists, who toured America at the same time, differed diametrically on US investment in South Africa. The disinvestments debate that raged in America just continued back in South Africa.<sup>613</sup>

After Mvubelo had come back from America, she was cheered by more than 1 000 members who supported her stand on disinvestments in South Africa. This was at the general meeting of NUCW (SA) held at Johannesburg. Many posters with slogans like: "We want jobs, not sympathy", were displayed at the conference.<sup>614</sup> The meeting adopted a motion which supported Mvubelo who had called for investment in South Africa during her overseas trip to America.

The meeting unanimously agreed to register their union. Scheepers, President of the GWU (SA), proposed that her union form a federation of garment workers with the NUCW (SA) of Mvubelo. This was also unanimously accepted by the meeting.<sup>615</sup> In her address to the delegates at the conference Mvubelo said that they wanted companies to invest more in South Africa so that blacks could have more jobs and the economy could grow. She added that blacks wanted

<sup>610</sup> Pretoria News, 23 November 1979.

<sup>611</sup> The Argus, 20 November 1979.

<sup>612</sup> The Argus, 23 November 1979.

<sup>613</sup> The Daily News, 22 November 1979.

<sup>614</sup> Beeld, 29 October 1979.

bursaries so that their children could improve their qualifications in order to qualify for better posts.<sup>616</sup>

In November 1979, Mvubelo and Iama Xenopoulos were elected as co-chairwomen of the multi-racial Women for Peace (WFP) organization. Although they came from widely differing backgrounds and worlds, they had much in common. As **The Star** reported: "They were both deeply concerned about the lack of contact between the races; they were both outstanding public speakers; and they were both straightforward, and easy to speak to."<sup>617</sup>

Xenopoulos said she had served on the WFP executive with Mvubelo and was thrilled that they were to be co-chairwomen. "She is a courageous, wise woman and a clear thinker," Mvubelo said when asked to comment on her WFP co-chairmanship. "God is giving me the energy to cope because it's all for my people."

Although Mvubelo was a great talker, she didn't believe in 'drama'. "There's no point shouting big things from a platform which you find later you can't fulfil," she said. "So WFP will continue the way it is, talking to and with all those who will listen." Xenopoulos said: "We've extended the hand of friendship and it has been taken. It will be a full-time job keeping up with the 5 000 members we have."<sup>618</sup> WFP with its emphasis on personal contact between the races provided another platform for Mvubelo to work towards racial peace in an evolutionary manner. She said many black women saw her as a traitor because she was a member of a racially mixed women's club. Mvubelo, however believed that black women had to speak with white women. Xenopoulos said she said knew nothing of black women and black women did not know what white women thought and felt.<sup>619</sup>

At the end of November 1979, Mvubelo became the only black trade unionist and one of the only two women appointed to the 41-member Manpower Commission. This commission was recommended by the Wiehahn Commission to advise the Minister of Manpower Utilisation on all labour matters concerning government labour policy and on all labour administrative matters. Mvubelo was appointed because the Minister and (Chairperson of the Commission), Dr

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<sup>615</sup> **Post**, 8 November 1979.

<sup>616</sup> **Beeld**, 8 November 1979.

<sup>617</sup> **The Star**, 14 November 1979.

<sup>618</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>619</sup> **Beeld**, 7 November 1980.

Reynders, thought her to be an ideal candidate because she represented so many interests groups: black interests, women's interests and trade unions. It is interesting to note that there were 200 per cent more women represented on the Manpower Commission than on the Wiehahn Commission.<sup>620</sup>

Mvubelo as the only African trade unionist nominated by TUCSA, said that she would have been happier if other unregistered unions had also been represented on the Manpower Commission, so that this should not appear to be a TUCSA affair.<sup>621</sup> Trade unionists were not exactly delighted about the composition of the National Manpower Commission. The commission would play a crucial role in the post-Wiehahn labour dispensation. Nevertheless, Mvubelo once again got an opportunity to voice her opinion and to fight for a better life for all workers.

Mvubelo welcomed the government's concession on permits allowing people of all races to use facilities like libraries, private hospitals, clubs and restaurants. She said government decisions like these made her proud about the development and changes that occurred in South Africa. This once again proved that her belief in dialogue, to meet and to talk to and understand and accept each other, was correct.<sup>622</sup>

Mvubelo said she did not condone apartheid, she always just named the facts of life, that "our children, who today have acquired higher education, should work, should have places and opportunities open to them, to do their work".<sup>623</sup> Her credo was dialogue: "To save us all from destruction the only thing is to talk as Christians and to come to an agreement."<sup>624</sup>

"Despite the frenzied campaigning for investment in South Africa to ensure a better life for workers, Mvubelo retained the warm comfortable presence of the traditional black earth mother", the **Financial Mail** reported.

She had more commitments than she could ever handle but no one in need was turned away. It was not surprising that people sought out her advice, help and understanding at all times. Mvubelo's phone rang incessantly. "I'm always committed," she said. She wanted to spread the

<sup>620</sup> **The Argus**, 13 November 1979.

<sup>621</sup> **Post**, 2 November 1979.

<sup>622</sup> **Die Burger**, 11 December 1979.

<sup>623</sup> **Financial Mail**, 14 December 1979.

<sup>624</sup> **Ibid.**

trade union movement. Benefits include bursaries, projects, crèches for children of working mothers, a provident fund. "If workers feel they really have something they're working for, they get involved."<sup>625</sup>

In this article in the **Financial Mail** the reporter sketched a clear picture of Mvubelo, the "black earth mother". One realises what a strong, faithful and warm person she was. For her it seemed important to really be like a mother, caring for her 'children' - all workers, irrespective of the verbal attacks made on her, at home and internationally.

It is no wonder that the voters, from half a million women readers of **The Star**, were overwhelming in favour of choosing Mvubelo to win, **The Star's** Woman of the Year Award. She was the first black woman to win the award, the first year it had been a national award.

"The winner today reminds us that racialism has been allowed for too long to dominate our actions and our thinking in this country," Mr Harvey Tyson, editor of **The Star** said as he announced the winner and presented Mvubelo with the trophy. "Our winner is a moderate, who does not ignore the realities and differences, but who does ignore the ugly pressures that are brought to bear by extremists on both sides of the colour bar," Tyson added.<sup>626</sup>

In voting for the Woman of the Year, this is what readers had to say about Mvubelo: "She is a wise and courageous woman. She is advocating the cause of South Africa internationally by working for her people. She is the right woman at the right time. This woman is a true ambassador for South Africa. A fighter. Sincere and faithful for thousands of black workers."<sup>627</sup>

Clad in bright pink and wiping away a tear, Mvubelo said winning the award was the surprise of her life. "I never knew that I had men and women who followed what I did. All our people cannot understand the position in South Africa as we who have struggled. We still carry passes and are still subject to the same obstacles. But there's a ray of sunlight. We have a prime Minister and a Minister of Co-Operation and Development who are prepared to stick their necks out for all South Africans," she said.<sup>628</sup>

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**Ibid.**

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**The Star**, 5 December 1979.

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**Ibid.**

Mvubelo had thus proved to be an outstanding mother, fighter for her fellow workers' rights and champion of South Africa. "In her life work she has transcended the divisive pillars of racism. So have the tens of thousands of readers who elected her," **The Star** reported.<sup>629</sup> The newspaper concluded the article by emphasizing the significant role women played in the South African society.

In 1980 Mvubelo also became a member of an advisory panel setting up the Barclays Executive Women's Club. The club formed a basis for a 'think tank' for top women. Membership was open to women of all races and nationalities across South Africa who qualified by virtue of their position and achievements. Applicants were screened by the advisory panel. The club's objectives were to watch over and advance the interests of women executives in South Africa, promoting personal and managerial development and offering support, information and business opportunities to members. This they wanted to achieve through discussions and debates on topical issues, educational talks and seminars and forums for the interchange of ideas.<sup>630</sup>

As a member of the advisory panel of this prestigious club, Mvubelo once again made her mark and once again proved her point that dialogue was important to ensure peace in South Africa.

In January 1980 black trade unionists were up in arms about government relaxations of immigration to allow more skilled workers into South Africa. Large-scale immigration in the absence of serious efforts to train the unskilled and unemployed would sabotage South Africa's labour reforms, Grobbelaar, General Secretary of TUCSA said. Sikhakhane, another prominent black unionist, said.<sup>631</sup> "It's scandalous to even think of - the government should be training the available labour in SA in view of large-scale black unemployment"

"The SA government should long ago have trained all race groups in skilled jobs instead of only training whites," Mvubelo said. She reacted on a speech by the Minister of Manpower, Fanie Botha, that South Africa was having difficulty in finding enough skilled labour to meet the demands created by the economic upswing. Mvubelo commented that the scheme to train all race groups, not only whites, to do skilled work should have been speeded up by the government long

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**Ibid.**

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**The Star**, 4 December 1979.

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**Rand Daily Mail** 20 February 1980; **Pretoria News**, 14 February 1980.

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**The Argus**, 21 January 1980.

ago. "I am looking forward to a stage when there would be expediency in training blacks to do skilled jobs," she said.<sup>632</sup>

Referring to white immigrants, it was said that their services might have fulfilled a need at that stage, but the immigration system was going to create problems for both the government and blacks who would be squeezed out. Grobbelaar said, "Perhaps it is fortunate that conditions in South Africa are unlikely to attract many immigrants."<sup>633</sup> Mvubelo and many other prominent trade unionists believed that not white immigration, but the training of all races in skilled jobs would be the answer to meet the demands for skilled labour.

In reaction to an announcement that the price of white and brown bread would be raised, Mvubelo said it was incomprehensible why the government, in the light of the economic upswing in South Africa at that stage, could not award a higher government subsidy on bread. "The consequences of the price hike on an average black family would be unthinkable. Bread is the staple food of most black families", she reacted.<sup>634</sup> She was thus speaking out against government for not helping workers fulfilling one of their basic needs - to be able to afford to buy enough food to feed their families.

Because government fully recognized black trade unions, she could bargain and negotiate with employers on behalf of workers. She could also negotiate with government on issues like bread prices and subsidies. Mvubelo told the reporter of **The Star** that for many years she had fought for the recognition of black trade unions with full privileges and rights. "I never thought it would happen in my lifetime," she said. "But I am so pleased. I feel now that my work is done."<sup>635</sup> But Mvubelo still had many 'battles' to fight on behalf of the workers of South Africa.

She explained that her union, NUCW (SA), while remaining a black union at that stage, did not dismiss the idea of mixed unions. "A number of unions have been granted exemptions to become integrated. For those which have never had organised black workers, it is an opportunity to be organised in already well-established unions," she said. She believed the same privileges would be given to each racial group in these unions.<sup>636</sup> "There will not be white or black domination

<sup>632</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 3 March 1980.

<sup>633</sup> **The Argus**, 21 January 1980.

<sup>634</sup> **Die Burger**, 27 March 1980.

<sup>635</sup> **The Star**, 30 April 1980.

<sup>636</sup> **Ibid.**

only people working together as workers. Such members have proved to the government that both black and white can stand together. I am in favour of progressive trade union unity." Mvubelo said that at that stage, for the time being, NUCW (SA) would remain a black union belonging to the federation of Garment Trade Unions.

Although its numbers would give it the power to dominate a mixed union, Mvubelo explained, "We do not want to dominate; we want the same status as other groups. This is why we have established the federation." But, she said, "a mixed union would be something to consider in future".<sup>637</sup> This view of Mvubelo of the possibility of one union for garment workers, irrespective of race, just proves very clearly that she was in favour of integration and believed 'unity makes strength'.

When Mvubelo was nominated for Business Woman of the Year in June, 1980, she was not keen on the award. She explained that if she won the award it would "create confusion in the minds of the people", as she was known as a trade unionist and not a businesswoman.<sup>638</sup>

Since June, 1980, the disinvestments issue once again flared up very strongly following Bishop Tutu's appeal on a BBC programme for Western countries to cease investment in South Africa - and the strong repudiation of this viewpoint by Mvubelo. Tutu's adherence to a policy of forced change, even if it meant a total economic blackout on South Africa, raised the ire of unionists such as Mvubelo. Tutu's view that economic sanctions would not mean much to the blacks in South Africa because they already had so little, proved to Mvubelo just how little political activists knew and understood of the government's labour strategy.<sup>639</sup> "Blacks are now paid according to their worth, and not according to the colour of their skin." This fact, she said, was something which black labour bodies had been asking for. The second report of the Wiehahn Commission that came out soon after Mvubelo's repudiation of Tutu's BBC interview, had given further impetus to the rejection of moderate blacks, like Mvubelo, of extremist attitudes in the labour field."<sup>640</sup>

As Assocom pointed out, the Wiehahn Commission's second report represented another step in the evolutionary process of formulating a new deal in South Africa. The government's intention,

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<sup>637</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>638</sup> **Post**, 8 June 1980.

<sup>639</sup> **Beeld**, 11 June 1980.

as stated in the White Paper, was "that the country's labour force, irrespective of race, colour or creed, should be developed, utilised and protected to the optimum".<sup>641</sup>

The move away from job discrimination was a fact, and was shown by the principles adopted by the government. Mvubelo could thus back up her argument that significant advances were being made in employment practices; and there was undoubtedly an edge to her observation that Bishop Tutu had no experience in the industrial scene.

The contention that foreign companies could make a substantial contribution in promoting the development and well-being of black workers was the most potent response to the mounting pressures for disinvestments. These pressures were not likely to be diminished of course by allegations at that stage that some British companies were paying 'starvation wages' to blacks, below the minimum living level. Arguments about the positive benefits of investment obviously required that these benefits be visible.<sup>642</sup>

Important as these obligations were in the case of foreign investors, they applied even more urgently to South African companies which after all had more at stake. Industrialists had to improve the life-chances of black workers. South Africa could well do without the kind of conditions highlighted by strikes in the textile industry.

Mvubelo was very positive about the recommendations of the second report of the Wiehahn Commission. She commented, however, that there were still many whites that felt that any rights that would be given to blacks might be misused. She firmly stated that there was no room for racism at the workplace. "If a revolution should start in South Africa, white and black would die together", she added. She also sounded a warning that SACTU and the ANC tried to bring all unions that supported the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission in discredit. She said that equal opportunities in the labour field and education were very necessary.<sup>643</sup> There was still much development in the labour field necessary before unions could speak with one voice in South Africa.

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<sup>640</sup> **Die Transvaler**, 12 June 1989.

<sup>641</sup> **To the Point**, 20 June 1980.

<sup>642</sup> **The Natal Witness**, 11 June 1980.

<sup>643</sup> **Die Transvaler**, 27 June 1980.

At the annual congress of TUCSA several resolutions were made. One of the resolutions stated that the differences between unions and the competition for the scramble to win workers to join unions had to end, because it threatened trade union solidarity. Mvubelo seconded this resolution and was very upset about unions who exploited workers. She explained that some unions had not yet negotiated for better working conditions for their black workers and some apparently pocketed the membership fees of their workers.<sup>644</sup>

Another resolution that was adopted at the congress was that the policy of separate development and the government's unnecessary interference in the economy were the main reasons for the high inflation rate in South Africa, and that the co-ordination and standardization of union leaders' training in labour relations had to be applied urgently. The Wiehahn Commission had already in its second report made similar recommendations.<sup>645</sup>

"It was unfortunate that ever since the government allowed blacks to form organised trade unions, everyone wanted to get onto the bandwagon", Mvubelo said. She was commenting on industrial disputes and strikes in the border areas. She was angered by a statement in a weekend newspaper claiming that strikes in the East London area were being caused by TUCSA and its agents. The statement had been made by the General Secretary of the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), Mr SKB Kinine.<sup>646</sup>

"If SAAWU will leave organised workers in peace and concentrate on the numerous industries with no organised unions, I would be happy with them because they would be assisting in organising the unorganised," Mvubelo said.

The GWU of SA, of which her union was part, had been responsible for negotiating agreements, including agreements in the Eastern Cape, for all workers in the clothing industry, she explained. "To my surprise SAAWU is now discrediting our efforts in the belief that they will organise a better deal for workers."<sup>647</sup>

What worried Mvubelo most was that this struggle between black workers was giving some people in government circles a chance to justify their belief that blacks were not ready for trade

<sup>644</sup> **Beeld**, 26 September 1980.

<sup>645</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>646</sup> **Daily Despatch**, 25 November 1980.

unionism. "If SAAWU is such a strong organisation why can't it consult with other trade unions which have been operating all these years and have actually made it possible today that they (SAAWU) can operate as a trade union?" she asked.<sup>648</sup>

Mvubelo called for closer co-operation between all trade unionists. "What we need is co-operation and consultation, not confrontation", she stressed. She felt that the efforts made by her union for 27 years in trying to get recognition of black workers in unions were not being appreciated by those who sought to discredit them. She said that black workers have struggled to upgrade their living standards and working conditions ever since the promulgation of the first Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924.

When the Native Labour Settlement of Disputes Act was promulgated in 1953, blacks were forced by law to separate from workers of other race groups. Mvubelo said, "We did not blame the union for this because they had nothing to do with it. It was government law. Neither did we sit down and cry over the tragedy. We worked ourselves up and proved that a black worker is just as valuable as any other in this country."<sup>649</sup>

Mvubelo was, however, very careful just to unite her union, the NUCW (SA) with the GWU of SA. She told the reporter of **Hoofstad** that her union discussed the idea of unification with the NUCW (SA), but decided they would stick to the status quo of just having the federation they had formed. The NUCW (SA) first wanted to monitor whether the Federation of Garment Workers would function effectively. Mvubelo said: "We do not want to dominate; we want the same status as other groups. This is why we have established the Federation."<sup>650</sup>

Mvubelo said closer ties between the NUCW (SA) and the GWU of SA were necessary and that these two unions were once one union before the government forced them in 1956 to divide into two separate unions. She said no final decision had been made - the idea was still open for further consideration.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> **Die Oosterlig**, 12 Desember 1980.

<sup>648</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>649</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>650</sup> **The Star**, 30 April 1980.

<sup>651</sup> **Hoofstad**, 27 August 1980.

If Mvubelo did not fight disinvestments or problems within trade unions she spoke out against racism, poor wages and working conditions, just to mention a few. Mvubelo used the Craven Week Rugby as an ideal 'occasion' where racial mixing of youths in South Africa could take place, after a few brown children playing rugby at the Craven Week had created a major incident. It was exactly this kind of mixing of our youths that would lead to greater understanding and to a better command by black children of English and Afrikaans. "Surely the incentive of knowing the language of your rugby or soccer rivals is a greater incentive than knowing the language of your oppressor."<sup>652</sup>

"What are the feelings developed by the total separation of apartheid?" Mvubelo asked. "We were born aliens in our own land to the superimposed white culture and technology. We have been carefully herded into remote areas where cars, refrigerators, electricity and all things quite normal in any white household were totally absent ... where chairs and tables, knives, spoons, forks and plates constituted luxuries."<sup>653</sup>

Training facilities were being made available - and still the tendency remained for black centres, brown centres and Asiatic centres, she said. "If we are to work together, let us get to know each other at the training centres. Let us develop common standards, common interests and concepts," Mvubelo said.

In August, 1980, Mvubelo once again became involved in an issue when the Soweto Community Council increased the rent in Soweto. She expressed her disgust about the reports that the Soweto Council increased the rents "in order to have their salaries increased". She said that this was sinful. "I agree with those who say they (the Council) should have surveyed the township before they could think of increasing rents," she stated.<sup>654</sup>

Mvubelo said starting wages for factory workers were very low, which meant that the rent hike would affect not only them but all workers. She further commented that the NUCW (SA) also served as a watchdog "for unscrupulous employers who want to have people work for nothing".<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Post, 20 August 1980.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

<sup>654</sup> Post, 28 August 1980.

Towards the end of October 1980, Mvubelo went on a four-nation European fact-finding mission. She visited France, Austria, England and the Netherlands.

In Paris she had to defend herself against accusations that she was a "female Bishop Muzorewa". Mvubelo told a press conference that several days before when she visited the Netherlands, a 'dominee' in Amsterdam had attacked her in this manner and she replied: "I have chosen evolution instead of revolution."<sup>656</sup> She admitted to journalists that similar criticisms were also made against her by young people in Soweto, but she claimed that "only a minority do so. Many others come to me to thank me for getting them a job." Mvubelo said that the Amsterdam 'dominee' told her: "You are being used, just as SA used Bishop Muzorewa. He lost the elections because the people did not back him. Do your people back you?" She replied: "I am proud of my record. We do not want to get hand-outs as though we are cripples. We want to work and I organise work."<sup>657</sup>

Reverend van der Veen of the Dutch Council of Churches also called Mvubelo "'n strooipop van die Suid-Afrikaanse Regering". On a question whether the reverend wanted a revolution to start in SA, he did not answer her. Mvubelo said that blacks in SA were disillusioned, and that this was quite understandable. She said her passport stated that she was a South African citizen, but that was only acknowledged when she was overseas. In South Africa, suddenly, she was not a true citizen anymore. Mvubelo stated that the petty apartheid mostly disappeared but blacks had no fundamental rights: like equal pay for equal work.<sup>658</sup>

A member of the Jan van Riebeeck Foundation then stated that black wages in SA was much better than in most surrounding countries. Mvubelo responded by saying that blacks did not want to be compared with blacks in other countries. She said they lived in South Africa and would like to be compared with other citizens of the country.<sup>659</sup>

In reply to other questions from the reporter of **De Telegraaf**, the biggest newspaper in the Netherlands, Mvubelo said that she was worried about the younger generation of SA that was trained in Angola and Tanzania. "They are indoctrinated with violence and know exactly how to

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**Ibid.**

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**Rand Daily Mail**, 28 October 1980.

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**Ibid.**

658

**Die Transvaler**, 8 November 1980.

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**Die Burger**, 1 November 1980.

destroy and blow up everything. ...We, the moderates, would be the first to die." Mvubelo further told the reporter that the South African government had to establish closer links with blacks and talk to them, so that they would be better informed about what was going on. "They need not to do good things for us. They had to do good things with us. We can also reason and think", she said.<sup>660</sup> She also told the reporter that in her lifetime many things had changed for the good - "sometimes I close my eyes and think that I am dreaming".<sup>661</sup>

Mvubelo did not want the whites to leave South Africa. "They came more than three hundred years ago to South Africa. They see to employment opportunities. What would happen to the garment workers if a revolution in South Africa should start and all clothing factories should close down?" she asked. Mvubelo believed that at that stage there were too few skilled black workers to control SA.

Mvubelo stated that she wanted universal franchise in SA. "This did not mean that only blacks would be elected for government. We want the best candidates. It could be whites as well." She added that there are a lot of whites whom she would campaign for.<sup>662</sup>

Mvubelo was the Vice-President of the International Textile Federation and represented her 21 000-strong National Union of Clothing Workers at the Federation's annual conference in Vienna. There she told newsmen she favoured a Constellation of States in SA - but on condition that homelands were dissolved.<sup>663</sup>

Mvubelo said that it was a shame that so much 'ammunition' was still placed in the hands of South Africa's enemies. The refusal of a passport for Rev. Beyers Naude was constantly brought up on her tour. It would also help if the dismantling of discrimination could be speeded up. In the meantime, Mvubelo said, everybody that came forward to act as an ambassador for SA were seen as government puppets.<sup>664</sup>

When Mvubelo spoke at an international congress in Dublin in 1976, the Kenya delegation walked out. At the Vienna congress in 1980 they stayed to listen. "I expected the Dublin

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<sup>660</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>661</sup> **Die Burger**, 3 November 1980.

<sup>662</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>663</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 28 October 1980.

<sup>664</sup> **Die Transvaler**, 8 November 1980.

experience to be repeated at the congress in Austria of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation", she said. "But I was given a very good reception."<sup>665</sup> She informed the congress of the progress that had been made in South Africa, the new dispensation of the labour legislation, and the Industrial Conciliation Act which had given black workers the right to register. "Afterwards", Mvubelo said, "the Kenyans came over and discussed issues and programmes in their own countries with us - we were real brothers and sisters."

Questioned on why this change in attitude of the Kenyans, Mvubelo replied: "Probably they can see that we practise true trade union principles. Also that though black people do not have a say in the government of the country, at least the South African government has now given us hope that we will in the near future be given our rights as citizens."

Mvubelo said that the granting of 99-year leases had given blacks a feeling of security. "The government had at long last accepted as a fact that we are not mere sojourners in our country of birth", she added. She believed that changes in SA that had been made up to 1980 were effective, not merely cosmetic or window-dressing as some alleged. "The changes in the educational system, the training of black children into artisans' jobs - those are not cosmetic either. That is what we as a nation need to enable us to grow", Mvubelo said.<sup>666</sup> From all these addresses Mvubelo gave to overseas audiences and press conferences that she responded to, it was evident that Mvubelo was not afraid to speak her mind.

### **2.2.3 Mvubelo fought for the staple food of survival – bread and butter issues. (1981-2000)**

From 1981 to 2000 Mvubelo continued her struggle for the workers. She even spoke out for domestic and farm workers, saying: "Domestic and farm workers contribute to South Africa's economy, and yet they have no protection. We'll fight at trade union level for this."<sup>667</sup>

When train fares increased in April 1981, Mvubelo said it was time for employers to subsidize the cost of their workers. "It is blacks who mostly use trains and the employers should upgrade

<sup>665</sup> **The Daily News**, 6 November 1980.

<sup>666</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>667</sup> **The Star**, 26 February 1981.

their wages", she added.<sup>668</sup> Mvubelo also spoke out against lack of housing, pension funds, General Sales Tax (GST) and rent increases.

When the government announced a one per cent GST increase, Mvubelo said the government was taking the bread out of people's mouths to spend on defence. "If the GST was increased to build homes for the homeless it would be a bit more acceptable," she said.<sup>669</sup> Mvubelo always asked the question why blacks should pay tax at all if they had no political representation. It was unfair, she believed for blacks to pay equal tax without equal pay.<sup>670</sup> She believed that the housing crisis, which forced people to live in poor overcrowded conditions, was one of the major causes of black poverty and lack of skills. Mvubelo called on government to appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate the housing crisis in South Africa.<sup>671</sup> "Housing is not merely a matter of bricks and mortar. It affects the total life of people," she argued.<sup>672</sup>

Education was another issue Mvubelo pursued whenever the opportunity arose. She wanted children to go to school instead of roaming the streets. "There could be no talk of equality of opportunity as long as unequal educational facilities existed," she said in an interview after she had been awarded an honorary Doctorate of Science at Rhodes' graduation ceremony. She called for an educational revolution in which all South Africans should be involved. This educational revolution had to be directed at a higher value of living she said.<sup>673</sup>

Mvubelo did not only struggle for equal opportunities for everybody, but also very strongly believed in equality at the workplace among all workers. She therefore welcomed the government's proposed legislation to remove gender discrimination at the work place. "In the past men had always been employed in preference to women. We're tired of being dominated by men," Mvubelo exclaimed.<sup>674</sup>

Although Mvubelo had in the past, before 1981, supported government labour reforms, she attacked the proposed Industrial Amendment Bill in terms which were as sharp as any made by more militant unionist. Her criticism involved a clause which allowed the government to close

<sup>668</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 24 February 1981.

<sup>669</sup> **The Natal Mercury**, 6 September 1982.

<sup>670</sup> **The Star**, 14 August 1981.

<sup>671</sup> **The Argus**, 23 September 1982.

<sup>672</sup> **The Sowetan**, 10 November 1982.

<sup>673</sup> **Eastern Province Herald**, 13 April 1981.

<sup>674</sup> **The Star**, 30 March 1981.

down a registered union if it had acted unlawfully, or "has failed to observe" any provisions of its constitution, or "has acted unreasonably towards its members". Mvubelo said that the government seemed incapable of introducing reforms without imposing increasingly severe controls which inevitably undermined and even destroyed its good intentions. She described the proposed bill as a "disgrace" and "unfair". "We who have laboured for registration for so many years have now been given many rights, but the government now wants to take it all away again," Mvubelo commented.<sup>675</sup> The South African society had to look at itself if compulsion, threats and violence had to be used as "conciliation" machinery when all that should be necessary was communication.<sup>676</sup>

Leading figures in the NUCW (SA) maintained that since their union had been registered, they wanted to prove their worth and their ability to exercise their newly-granted bargaining rights. Scheepers, President of the GWU of SA perceived that the black unionists wanted to enjoy their new-found freedom, but she was disturbed about the drift away from multiracialism.<sup>677</sup>

Mvubelo's overseas visits and addresses she gave on disinvestment were not in vain. A Dallas company, Dresser, that also had some major investments in South Africa, published an interview held with Mvubelo on disinvestment in the **Wall Street Journal**. The interview appeared under the heading: "A message to American investors in South Africa. Your withdrawal from South Africa would be seen as a lack of faith in your own democratic system". Dresser spent #43 000 on this article to ask American investors not to withdraw from South Africa. It is important to note that the **Wall Street Journal** had a circulation of 1,8 million readers across the world! This meant Mvubelo's message on disinvestment did not fall on deaf ears. People took notice of what she said, not only in America, but also in the rest of the world.<sup>678</sup>

In September 1981, Mvubelo was coldly received in Australia where was accused of "being a government stooge and an Aunty Tom". It is absolutely necessary to make mention of this visit of Mvubelo to Australia because a change in her attitude towards the South African government could clearly be detected.<sup>679</sup> In Sydney she dropped the name Lucy in favour of her African name, Buyaphi, and surprised her critics with a vicious attack on the South African government.

<sup>675</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 15 April 1981.

<sup>676</sup> **The Star**, 18 June 1981.

<sup>677</sup> **Rand Daily Mail**, 27 November 1981.

<sup>678</sup> **Rapport**, 1 March 1981.

<sup>679</sup> **The Daily News**, 21 September 1981.

She said that because the youth - both black and white - had lost patience, South Africa would "low" sooner than anyone realized. "Unless Prime Minister Botha accelerated his changes which were going well in 1978-79 and then stopped in 1980, I'm afraid South Africa is leading to catastrophe," she stressed.<sup>680</sup>

Mvubelo in her 'attack' said "South Africa doesn't belong to the whites as they claim. We are still waiting on the President's Council recommendations, moving at a snail pace and confronted by radical Afrikaners who would rather turn the clock back." She said blacks wanted their freedom and wanted to be included in the voting process. Blacks have waited too long for their freedom. She added that "if revolution does come, it will happen everywhere - but particularly Johannesburg, because that is where the blood is boiling".<sup>681</sup>

This outburst against the South African government could somehow be expected. It was as if the tension could not be stretched out a millimetre further. In 1981 Mvubelo went on a two-week visit to West Germany.<sup>682</sup> She experienced less hostility from the Germans and the reporter of **SA Panorama** who interviewed Mvubelo after her return to South Africa wrote about Mvubelo, saying that "when this woman of steel spoke, people listened because she was a woman who realised that the staple food of survival was the daily bread and butter issues".<sup>683</sup>

It is no wonder that Mvubelo and other trade unionists of long standing were quite offended to learn that AZAPO (Azanian People's Organization) and the Women's Federation of SA had suggested that Mvubelo did not represent black workers. Sarah Chitja, a leading trade unionist, defended Mvubelo, stating that Mvubelo had always struggled to have her brothers and sisters represented in the country's labour dispensation and had argued the black's case in South Africa and abroad. She also served her union, the NUCW, to the best of her ability. The editor of the **Golden City Press** wrote: "Whatever one feels about Mvubelo, nobody can deny that she has worked her guts out in the cause of her fellow workers."<sup>684</sup>

Mvubelo had also rejected claims that she supported apartheid by asking foreign countries to invest in South Africa. "How can I be said to be supporting apartheid when, even when I am

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**Ibid.**

681

**Ibid.**

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**Pretoria News**, 12 November 1981.

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**SA Panorama**, 31 March 1982.

684

**Golden City Press**, 20 June 1982.

abroad, I am regarded as a non-person in the country of my birth", she asked. Mvubelo said that when she sat on the regional committee to make recommendations to the government to amend the constitution, "I wanted all racial groups to be represented in parliament."<sup>685</sup>

Mvubelo was very surprised and bitter when blacks were left out of the new constitutional dispensation. On 13 October 1982, Mvubelo appeared on television when she received the Adelaide Ristori Award, which is annually awarded to women in non-communistic countries who excelled in their respective areas.<sup>686</sup>

She announced that she changed her mind and would not vote for Botha when she would in future perhaps be allowed to do so. She said she no longer had confidence in the Prime Minister because he was using double standards. Mvubelo said her optimism was shattered because blacks had been excluded from the President's Council. "I visualised the President's Council as the starting point of amending the constitution to include all the groups in SA at government level," she explained.<sup>687</sup>

On 15 July 1984 Mvubelo's house was destroyed by petrol bombs.<sup>688</sup> As already discussed, Mvubelo had come under fire (not literally!) quite often because she had chosen not to take a radical stance. She had not been in the good books of a number of black leaders for encouraging investment in SA. She also called on the ANC to support the call to invest. A week before Mvubelo's house was destroyed, she had said she supported all liberation movements and called for the scrapping of apartheid in South Africa. She also warned of problems if the government did not implement changes soon.<sup>689</sup> Mvubelo said: "People attack me because I confine myself to the workers' interest, choosing not to dabble in politics. I will not take my union to a political party." She said people should be allowed to vote for whoever they wanted and they had to be allowed to think for themselves.<sup>690</sup> Mvubelo told a reporter of the **Sunday Times**: "My family has fought for what we believe to be right. I have battled all my life to raise the lot of the worker, and I have achieved so much. Why should I be singled out? After all I have achieved is this my reward?" she said pointing at her home.<sup>691</sup>

<sup>685</sup> **The Sowetan**, 12 July 1982.

<sup>686</sup> **Die Volksblad**, 26 October 1982.

<sup>687</sup> **Sunday Times**, 28 November 1982.

<sup>688</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 July 1984.

<sup>689</sup> **The Star**, 17 July 1984.

<sup>690</sup> **Sunday Times**, 22 July 1984.

<sup>691</sup> **Ibid.**

Mvubelo however remained optimistic that SA would 'recover'. She believed that there was still enough goodwill amongst black and white people to ensure successful negotiations. She told the reporter of **Die Volksblad** that leaders must not let anybody intimidate them. "If we are afraid, we won't achieve anything," she said.<sup>692</sup>

Between 1985 and 2000 thousands of workers in the clothing industry, especially in the then Transvaal, had lost their jobs owing to retrenchments while great uncertainty hung over the future of the industry as inflation and recession took its bite. Mvubelo believed many companies did not close down due to the recession but because "these companies were moving to the homelands where they exploit cheap labour".<sup>693</sup> She stated that as a result of quantitative import controls that were no longer applied, all goods from the Far East would be dumped in South Africa. She predicted that SA markets would be flooded from especially the Far East and more factories would have to close down.<sup>694</sup>

At present, in 2007, what Mvubelo 'predicted' came true. Established industries like, for example Rex Trueform, had to close down because of cheap imports from overseas.

Mvubelo retired in 1987. The **Sowetan** wrote that she could not be called the most militant trade unionist. By the time she retired she was no longer agile. She spent most of her time, she joked, attending funerals!

Her self-sacrifice, dogged by police and arrested for illegally organizing workers, her initiatives and contributions were instrumental in bringing about phenomenal change in the black trade union movement.<sup>695</sup> Mvubelo stated: "If the parties involved, labour, capital and government, accept the challenges posed with vigour and commitment, a true democracy can grow out of it."<sup>696</sup>

The following quote taken from a paper Mvubelo delivered at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit beautifully summarizes who Mvubelo was: "Why should we be so divided, why

<sup>692</sup> **Die Volksblad**, 9 May 1986.

<sup>693</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 February 1986.

<sup>694</sup> **Financial Mail**, 9 March 1984.

<sup>695</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 March 1992.

<sup>696</sup> **Eastern Province Herald**, 13 April 1981.

should the gap be so wide now when we are supposed to be civilised, to have adopted the western civilisation and Christianity? Our actions do not prove that we are Christians. We have to change all together and since there is nobody who will do it for us, we have to start doing it now."<sup>697</sup>

In her home in Orlando West a picture of the civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, hung on the wall. The words, "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as people will get to the promised land", inscribed below King's picture, prompted a question about this woman.

In 1992 she was 72 years old. She suffered from arthritis and had several operations to her legs. Did she believe her legs were not strong enough to carry her to the new South Africa? She was doubtful, not of her health but of the political climate at that stage in SA, especially the strife that surrounded black political organizations. "I see a bleak future and I am worried." Mvubelo said. "We were just about to taste the freedom that all human beings deserve but I do not see that happening any more..."<sup>698</sup> And: "My people do not recognise me for what I did for them. They labelled me a sell-out when I called for investment. But I believed I was doing it for their own good."<sup>699</sup>

Anna Scheepers, veteran labour organizer and President of the GWU of SA, summed up the esteem with which Mvubelo was held by her fellow unionists: "Lucy was respected by a wide spectrum of the South African population and has done much for her people to earn their loyalty."<sup>700</sup>

Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo died on Monday, 30 October 2000 at the age of 80 after having devoted 34 years of her life to the workers' struggle. In a figurative and literal sense her life was concerned with contrasts, clashing tides and battles between opposing forces. As the Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes had said when the university awarded Mvubelo an honorary doctoral

<sup>697</sup> Sentrum vir die Ondersoek na Rewolusionêre bedrywighede. Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, Konferensie Vakbondwese in Suid-Afrika: Rewolusie of Vrede, 10 October 1984. Aspirations of Trade Unions in SA. Address by Lucy Mvubelo.

<sup>698</sup> **Sowetan**, 17 March 1992.

<sup>699</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>700</sup> Blamick, p. 5.

degree: "She has lived with the contrasts of poverty and wealth, of power and defencelessness, of those who hope for tomorrow and those who cling to yesterday."<sup>701</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Anna Scheepers and Lucy Mvubelo, two formidable trade union leaders, through their endless struggles, did enable workers, not only garment workers, to live a better life. Official published government statistical data and economic reports (White Papers) provided general information to help to determine that working conditions between 1960 to 1980 did improve. A detailed literature study on the life and work of Scheepers and Mvubelo gave the factual information to prove that they were indeed agents of change in two decades of apartheid, not an easy task.

In the turmoil of the apartheid years they succeeded in helping to bring about better relations between all the peoples of South Africa. Scheepers and Mvubelo regarded a worker a worker, irrespective of colour or creed. Both women fought racism with tooth and nail. They proved that through evolution and not revolution, change can be brought about. As Mvubelo believed, "Only through participation and not isolation can significant, positive change be brought about."<sup>702</sup>

Many of the problems Scheepers and Mvubelo experienced in their fierce struggle to improve labour conditions can be ascribed to the racial division of the working class within the context of a rapidly developing industrial capitalism. Especially labour legislation hampered their work. Not only in South Africa, but also internationally these two women were treated by some as outcasts because of South Africa's policy of separate development.

Notwithstanding the cold shoulder they often received overseas, both women took a firm stand for South Africa and very strongly opposed disinvestment. They believed that countries had to invest in South Africa so that the economy could be strengthened. They stated that only if the economy was sound, apartheid could be destroyed.

Moreover, Scheepers and Mvubelo fought for the dignity of all workers. They ensured that legislation was changed to give all workers the opportunity for better housing, education and equal pay for equal work. They fought for bread-and-butter issues whenever and wherever they could.

It is sad if one looks at the garment and textile industry of contemporary South Africa that many of the things that Scheepers and Mvubelo warned against are indeed happening. Old established factories in South Africa are closing down because of cheap imports that are flooding the markets. These two women already saw this danger coming when the government relaxed quantitative influx of goods, especially from the Far East.

Today, in 2007, thousands of garment and textile workers have lost their jobs because quality was replaced by quantity. Local industries producing garments of a very high quality cannot compete against imports, especially from the Far East, which are very cheap, and not of a good quality.

Mvubelo and Scheepers always tried to keep politics out of their trade unions. Ideologies they said would not pay your bills and put food on your table. Both women were very upset that most trade unions became very politically inspired, especially after they had retired as trade union leaders.

There are, however, many changes that these two women helped to bring about that are presently still evident. Equal pay for equal work, equal benefits, equality between men and women at the workplace, shorter working hours, better and more housing, crèches, training colleges for garment workers, international relations with garment and textile organizations across the world and one garment and textile union for all garment workers in South Africa. In a nutshell, if Mvubelo and Scheepers did not directly have a hand in ensuring a better future for all garment workers, they indirectly helped to lay the foundation for it.

The trade union history in contemporary South Africa continues. Perhaps this thesis should end with an incomplete sentence, a kind of unfinished symphony. The trade union movement of this country is still on the move - new unions are being formed and new leaders are arising. The plans of the South African government to 'bleed the African trade unions to death' failed and today all garment and textile workers can join the union of their choice.

Mvubelo and Scheepers accepted and lived by the dictum, "However bad things are, something can be done in this given situation." Through their behaviour and conduct, they taught the

workers that it was important that people learn to help themselves - to achieve something within the given perimeter or boundaries of a situation in which they find themselves.

Without determination to face the odds, no group of people can ever achieve true self-confidence and humility. They both believed that problems could be solved through the close co-operation of all people in South Africa.

These two women rose from the ranks of garment workers to become well-loved and respected trade union leaders. Like Scheepers, Mvubelo had an open heart for all workers. Both of them were seen by many workers as 'mothers'. In life they were born organizers and leaders. In death they were mourned by thousands, but the memory of these two great female leaders will be a living example of true trade unionism. White, brown and African workers and friends will, at all times, remember them as individuals who cared for others. There is no doubt that the memory of Scheepers and Mvubelo will live on. Their lives were dedicated to organized labour. In the South African trade union history Anna Scheepers and Lucy Mvubelo's names are written in bold letters. It was the garment union with its courageous, able leaders like these two women which set workers free from the hell of starvation wages and slum squalor.

History is indeed the story of the development of man (and woman!), women like Scheepers and Mvubelo. Therefore, in the words of the historian Luli Callinicos: "Sometimes we must examine the pattern of the past that we have constructed. It is important to revise our ideas in the light of all the new or more detailed information, about the past and present, which is constantly being revealed to us. For it is through this changing knowledge that we can try to gain a greater understanding of our lives, and even find the means of improving them."<sup>703</sup>

This research concludes with the words of Scheepers: "I consider the job of the trade unionist not as an ordinary one but as a job of sacrifice and dedication - a labour of love."<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> Luli Callinicos, *Working Life - Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture 1886-1940*, (page 2 of c)  
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<sup>704</sup> **Sunday Times**, 21 November 1999.

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## APPENDIX 1

### **TIMELINE: TRADE UNIONS AND COUNCILS FOR GARMENT WORKERS; LABOUR LAWS AFFECTING THEM AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS BETWEEN 1896 AND 1960 IN THE LIVES OF ANNA SCHEEPERS AND LUCY MVUBELO.**

- 1896 - The Witwatersrand Middleman Tailors' Association (WMTA) established. (Forerunner of the GWU of SA).
- 1903 - Henochsberg first clothing factory established in Johannesburg to supply uniforms for the Railways, Postal Services, Army and Johannesburg Municipality.
- 1907 - First clothing factory established in Cape Town. (The clothing industry initially grew tremendously in this area.)
- 1913 - Workers in tailoring establishments decided to establish the Witwatersrand Tailor's Association (WTA).
- 1917 - Report of the Select Committee of the Union House of Assembly on the regulation of wages (Sc4 - 1917). The committee found that "(t)he payment of wages below a subsistence minimum was common".
- 1918 - Factories Act of 1918 promulgated to regulate hours of work and laid down rules for hygiene and safety in factories.
- May 1918 - Executive Committee of the Witwatersrand Tailors' Association (WTA) called on the SA government for protection for the poorly paid girls in the clothing factories.
- 1919 - Formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africans (ICU).

- 1924 - Industrial Conciliation Act introduced to legislate the right of employees to belong to trade unions and to make provision for collective bargaining with employers through industrial councils.
- 1924 - The Witwatersrand Tailors' Association (WTA) and Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association (TCMA) - first bodies to register and form an industrial council (TUC).
- 1925 - Wage Act (Act 27 of 1925) passed to provide for the unorganized workers and a Wage Board was also established under this act.
- 1928 - With assistance of the Communist Party and the WTA African workers in the clothing industry were organized into a representative body, SACWU, for African males. Gana Makabeni was Secretary of SACWU.
- 1928 - Solly Sachs became the General Secretary of the WTA.
- 1928 - The Native Laundry Workers' Union, The Native Bakers' Union and The Native Clothing Worker's Union were organized into a federation of unions called the Non-European trade Union Federation, later known as FNETU with a membership of 10 000.
- 1929 - The Garment Workers' Union adopted a constitution which altered the name of the union from WTA to the GWU and set down the principles on which this body would be run.
- 1930 - The South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC) was formed.
- 1931 - Three weeks' general strike in the garment industry.
- 1932 - After much struggle and strife the GWU had to submit to 10% reduction in wages.

- 1933 - Between 1933 and 1939 approximately 400 000 Africans were added to the industrial labour force, doubling previous levels.
- 1933 - Anna Elizabeth Prinsloo Scheepers entered the garment industry and started to work at Jaff and Co.
- 1934 - The clothing industry split from the Tailoring Workers' Union.
- 1934 - The Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) began a campaign to promote Afrikaner trade unions.
- 1935 - Garment Workers' Union for African Women established. Number 2 branch for coloured garment members formed.
- 1938 - Anna EP Scheepers elected President of the GWU.
- 1941 - Formation of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (Transvaal) (CNETU).
- 1942 - Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo joins the garment industry as a worker in a dress factory called London Model.
- 1944 - Transvaal Supreme Court ruled that since black female workers did not carry passes, they were 'employees' in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act.
- 1945 - Mvubelo became one of the first five black women to be elected as representatives on the executive of the GWU.

- 1947 - South African Congress of Trade Unions formed.
- 1947 - First split in the South African Trades and Labour Council/ The Co-ordination Council of South African Trade Union formed (CCSATU) – a racist union - against allowing African unions to affiliate to SATLC.
- 1948 - Rise of the National Party to state power (SA).
- 1948 - There were about 500 black females employed in the clothing industry.
- 1950 - Far larger split from SATLC over passing of the Suppression of Communism Act - South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) formed.
- 1952 - Defiance campaign against unjust laws in South Africa.
- 1952 - 55 000 workers join South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).
- 1952 - Solly Sachs banned from South Africa - went to live in London.
- 1953 - Introduction of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act.
- 1954 - Dissolution of the South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC).
- 1955 - Majority of non-racial industrial unions joined with CNETU unions to form South Africa's first truly non-racial trade union federation, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).
- 1955 - Mvubelo elected Vice-President of SACTU.
- 1955 - Mvubelo breaks ties with SACTU.

- 1955 - CNETU decided to dissolve and merge with SACTU.
- 1956 - Introduction of Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 - changed the term 'employee' once again.
- 1956 - Two branches of the GWU existed - a Number 1 branch for white members and a Number 2 branch for brown, Indian and African women workers. The Garment Union was thus divided by race in 1956.
- 1957 - Mvubelo joins South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).
- 1959 - Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa (FOFATUSA) is formed. Mvubelo plays an important role in FOFATUSA.
- 1960 - Nation-wide strikes in response to banning of ANC. (Unlawful Organisations Act banned the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC))
- 1960 - Sharpville massacre.
- 1962 - National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW) established.
- 1962 - Trade Union Congress (TUC) changed its name to Trade Union Congress of South Africa (TUCSA) and opened its membership to all bona fide trade unions.
- 1963 - International Labour Organisation (ILO) voted to expel South Africa.

## APPENDIX 2

(Statistics)

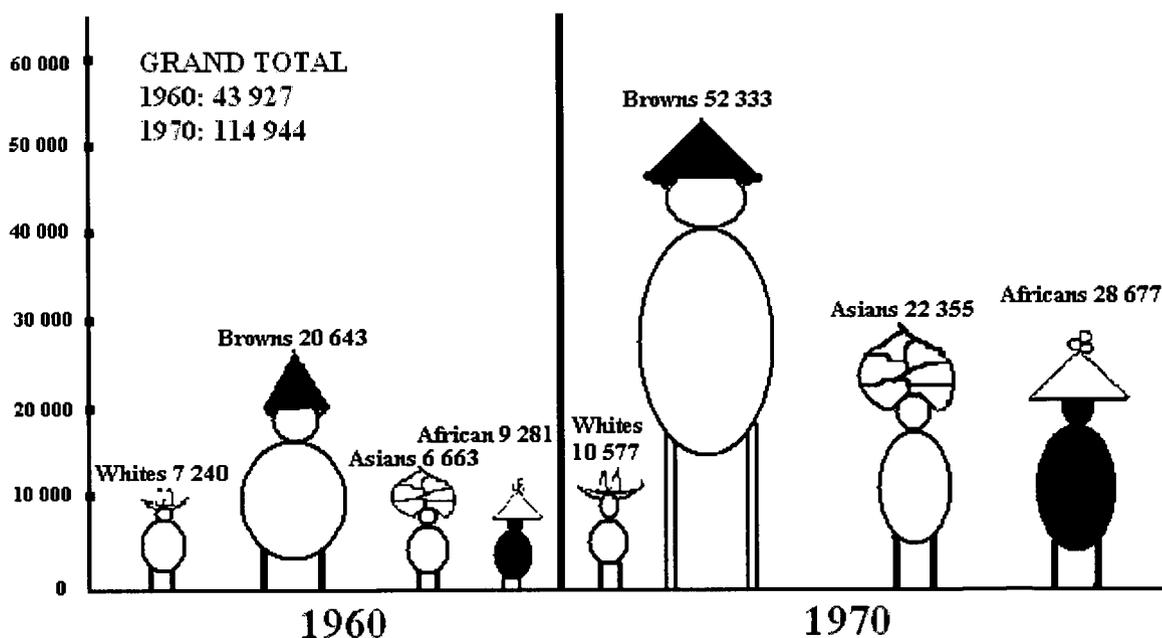
### DEPENDENCE ON BLACK, BROWN AND ASIAN LABOUR-ABSOLUTE IN 1970

1960 – 1970 was the most dramatic decade of black, brown and Asian integration in South African history.

The figures which are provided on the following pages, speak for themselves. They prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, the following:

- Apartheid in the South African economy was collapsing.
- Seventy-two per cent of the nations' workers were black, brown and Indian in 1970.
- South Africa was absolutely and irrevocably dependent on black, brown and Asian labour for economic survival.
- The integration of blacks, browns, Indians into the South African economy was so far-reaching and so deep-rooted that it could never be reversed or eliminated.
- Job research scarcely existed.

### DRAMATIC RISE OF BLACK, BROWN AND ASIAN WORKERS IN THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY.



The graphs illustrate the dramatic rise in the number of black employees in the clothing industry, despite a decree by the Industrial Tribunal in 1957 that 70 per cent of the jobs in the industry in the Transvaal should be held by whites.



**TOTAL FOR ALL SECTORS OF EMPLOYMENT (EXCLUDING AGRICULTURE)**

|             | <b>WHITES</b>    | <b>BLACKS</b>    |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>1960</b> | <b>987 000</b>   | <b>2 561 000</b> |
| <b>1970</b> | <b>1 283 000</b> | <b>3 733 000</b> |

**MANUFACTURING**

|             |                |                |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>1960</b> | <b>210 702</b> | <b>433 407</b> |
| <b>1970</b> | <b>277 288</b> | <b>883 078</b> |

The above figures reflect the overall position in the manufacturing industry.

**TEXTILES**

|             |              |               |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>1960</b> | <b>5 150</b> | <b>29 285</b> |
| <b>1970</b> | <b>8 100</b> | <b>73 909</b> |

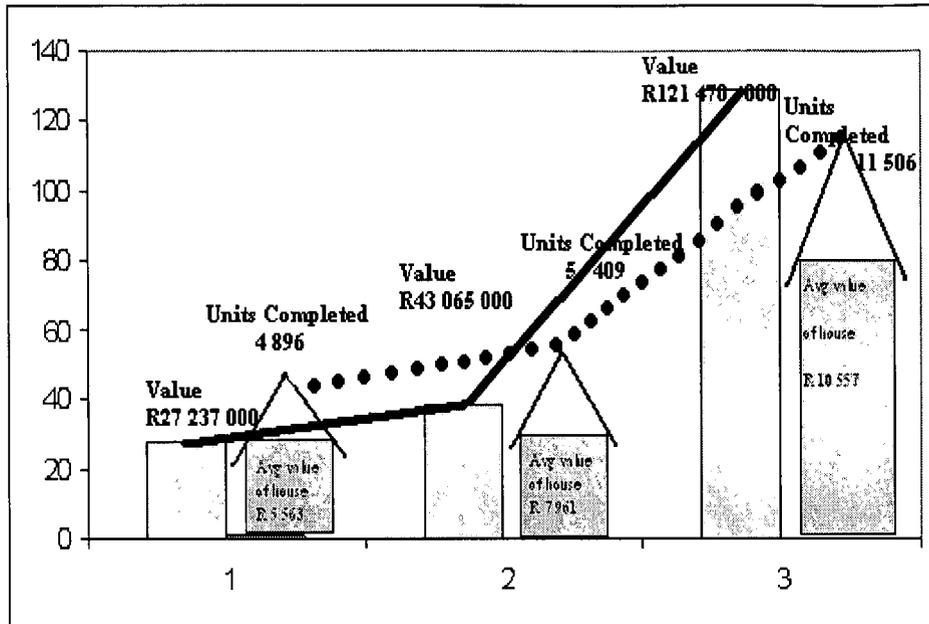
**CLOTHING**

|             |               |                |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>1960</b> | <b>7 240</b>  | <b>36 687</b>  |
| <b>1970</b> | <b>10 577</b> | <b>104 365</b> |

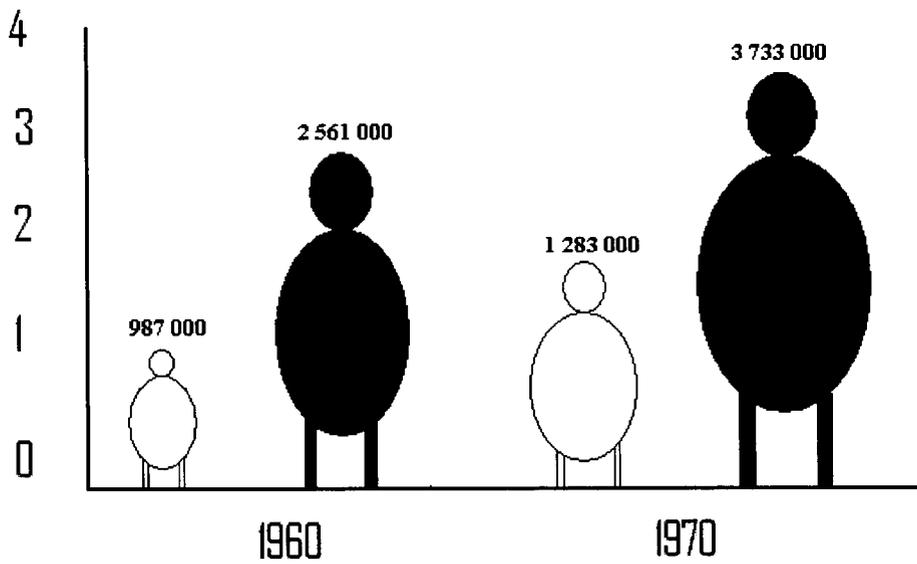
**FOOTWEAR**

|             |              |               |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>1960</b> | <b>8 254</b> | <b>29 413</b> |
| <b>1970</b> | <b>3 100</b> | <b>31 021</b> |

## HOW HOUSING COSTS HAVE RISEN



The value of housing completed by the building industry in 1968 was almost four times as much as in 1960 – yet there was still a tremendous backlog in comparison with the demand. While no direct comparison had been made between every specific type unit built, average figures clearly demonstrate the substantial rise in costs.



The diagram above illustrates the tremendous influx of black labour into the white economy from 1960 to 1970. Black workers outnumbered the white workers by about three to one.

Source: Sunday Times - 31 January 1971  
Sunday Times - 7 February 1971

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to highlight the importance of two formidable female trade union leaders, Anna Scheepers and Lucy Mvubelo, women from different cultures, in their struggle to improve labour conditions. Through an extensive examination of private collections, periodicals, books, dissertations and archival material a picture of who these two ladies were and their contribution made as leaders in the garment industry could be constructed. The dissertation has no pretensions of providing either a comprehensive history of the Garment Workers Union (GWUSA) or biographies of Scheepers and Mvubelo. Instead themes were highlighted.

These themes were examined in the light of the overall theme of the dissertation - "labouring for a better life". Documents from the GWU archives illuminated the history of the open industrial unions and contained interesting information on general left-wing labour politics. This information on the early history of the GWU and National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW) provided the necessary background information on the environment and times Scheepers and Mvubelo worked in.

The personal papers of Scheepers and Mvubelo gave insight in the correspondence between these ladies and their professional relationship. The **Garment Worker/Klerewerker** proved invaluable in determining a chronology of events in their lives. The Wiehahn- and Riekert (government) Reports introduced a new era for Black labour in South Africa. Mvubelo and Scheepers fought for all their recommendations.

A short biographical overview of the history and character of each of the two ladies were given in order to understand why they dedicated their entire lives to the garment worker industry and to be able to determine what or who moulded them to become the persons they were.

Finally the study attempts to ascertain how Scheepers and Mvubelo achieved better conditions and the problems they experienced in the above-mentioned struggle. This research aims to show that Scheepers and Mvubelo had much in common. Their views on job reservation, racism, disinvestment and apartheid underline the similarities in their attitude toward these issues. Scheepers and Mvubelo had an enormous impact in ensuring a better life for all workers.

**Keywords:**

Anna Elizabeth Scheepers/ Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo/ Labour/ Garment workers/  
Workers' unions/ Woman leaders/ Apartheid/ Garment Workers Union of South  
Africa/ National Union of Clothing Workers of South Africa/ Disinvestment

## OPSOMMING

Dié tesis beoog om Anna Scheepers en Lucy Mvubelo, twee fenomenale vroue uit verskillende kulturele agtergronde, se belangrike bydrae as leiers van werkersunies te belig.

Met behulp van uitgebreide navorsing van privaatversamelings, tydskrifte, boeke, tesse en argivale material, kon 'n akademiese prentjie geskets word van wie hierdie twee vrouens was en wat hul bydrae as leiers van die klerewerkersunies was.

Hierdie tesis beoog geensins om 'n historiese oorsig van die geskiedenis van die Klerewerkersunie van Suid Afrika of 'n biografie van Scheepers en Mvubelo te gee. In plaas daarvan, is temas uitgelig.

Herdie temas is nagevors terwyl die oorhoofse tema van die tesis – “om te werk vir 'n beter lewe” - voortdurend in gedagte gehou is. Dokumente van die argiewe van die Klerewerkersunie, was onontbeerlik om die geskiedenis van die klerewerkersunies behoorlik te verstaan en het eweneens interessante inligting oor algemene linkse arbeiderspolitiek verskaf.

Hierdie informasie oor die vroeë geskiedenis van die klerewerkersunies het die nodige agtergrondsgeskiedenis verskaf om die milieu en die tydsomstandighede waarin Scheepers en Mvubelo gewerk het, ten volle te begryp.

Die privaatversamelings van Scheepers en Mvubelo het verder die nodige inligting verskaf oor die briefwisseling tussen hierdie twee vroue wat meer lig op hul professionele verhouding gewerp het. **Die Garment Worker/Klerewerker** was van kardinale belang om die kronologie van gebeure in hul lewens te bepaal. Die Wiehahn- en Riekert-regeringsverslae het 'n nuwe era vir swart arbeid in Suid Afrika ingelui. Mvubelo en Scheepers het deurgaans vir al die voorstelle van die twee verslae geagiteer.

'n Kort biografiese oorsig van die geskiedenis en karakter van elk van die twee vroue word uitgelig ten einde te begryp waarom hulle hul hele lewe aan die Klerewerkersunie gewy het, asook hoe hulle as arbeidsleiers gevorm is.

Ten slotte poog die studie om te bepaal hoe en waar Scheepers en Mvubelo daarin geslaag het om beter werksomstandighede te skep en die probleme waarmee dit gepaard gegaan het. Die navorsing beklemtoon eweneens die baie ooreenkomste in die lewe en werk van hierdie twee arbeidsleiers. Hulle sieninge oor werkreservering, rassisme, disinvestering en apartheid korreleer verbasend. Hierdie twee unieke vroue het 'n enorme impak gehad in die daarstel van 'n beter lewe vir alle werkers.

**Sleutelwoorde:**

Anna Elizabeth Scheepers/ Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo/ Arbeid/ Klerewerkers/  
Werkersunies/ Vroueleiers/ Apartheid/ Garment Workers Union of South Africa/  
National Union of Clothing Workers of South Africa/ Disinvestering

