

‘I see you’ – Two marches and the fall of a Champion

The ‘I See You’

‘I See You’ – with that verbal transcription, tens of thousands of black people in South Africa cheered themselves up, in the late 1920s, with the morale-lifting sensation that the first black trade union in the world – for that is how the Industrial and Commercial Union styled itself – regarded them with a supportive eye, an eye that could outstare the white establishment that reigned in South Africa. The rise and fall of the ICU, especially in its more successful years between 1925 and 1930, has been thoroughly documented. In a post struggle climate, however, where South African history is no longer afflicted by a simplistic black/white polemic, we are at liberty to ask why the ICU ever existed at all, why it was allowed to get

away with its political truculence and could march through the streets with a protective police presence, reassured that the Supreme Court was its most obvious ally.

The thesis I imply in this essay is that it was only because, in the 1920s, white hegemony was not behaving as a ‘hegemony’ at all, that the ICU got its lease of life. What often appears in a liberation history of South Africa as a black/white chess game fielded, in those years, a self-confrontation within the white electorate itself, something like the legalised class war that was typical of much of the industrial world. The chess game (to use that metaphor) was being played within the white camp, but while it lasted it

gave the black ICU its opportunity. In the two Natal confrontations that this essay deals with – the one occurring in Pietermaritzburg in 1928 and the other in Durban in 1929 – the white belligerents certainly identified the ICU as their opponent, but to their surprise their own society did not close ranks with them. Many of them were taught to believe that a white government might simply dispense with the ICU by a riotous assemblies act or some such legal proscription. In the event it was – as was spelt out to them by a state-appointed judge after the Durban encounter – not ‘the natives’ who were ‘solely or even primarily to blame’¹ but their own premature response to a legal strike.

It is certainly not my purpose to idealise the nationalist socialist or ‘Pact’ government of General Hertzog – the coalition, that is, that ousted Smuts’ South African Party in 1924. I will make the case, however, that this unwieldy alliance gave the ICU a few years of quite exceptional legal success and public pre-eminence. It was a success story that could only last while Hertzog understood nationalism and socialism to be amenable to a mutual enterprise, being as yet innocent of the national socialism that, in the 1930s, began ominously to take the world’s stage.

The ICU was the brainchild of Cape Town businessman, English-born Walter Batty – a small retailer and factory owner who combined a trades’ union ideal with a businessman’s pragmatism. The coloured union he founded might not have reached beyond the Cape if he had not teamed up with one of the most flamboyant and gifted visitors that South Africa ever gained from black Africa, the

articulate, politically attuned Clements Kadalie, who arrived from Nyasaland to nurture his talents in Johannesburg.² Given the small beginnings of the ICU, its leaders probably never conceived that their platform was to find such a willing audience, and that not only in the cities but in a large swathe of the rural interior. If one reads reports of the first ICU meetings one must surely credit the mercurial Kadalie with the genius of the thing, the ability to voice a working-class affront to capitalist self-righteousness, and sound the persecuted tones of negritude. The ICU demagogues knew how to pitch their message just short of advocating direct insurrection and to thrill their listeners with a hyperbolic style that caused maximum irritation to the old caste of bosses.

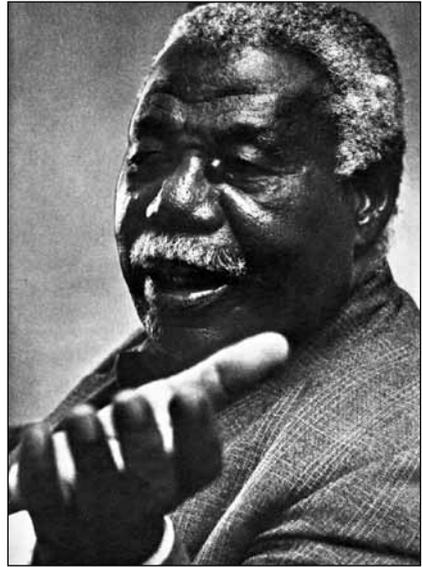
Although the small all-white South African Labour Party in its variation under Col F.H.P. Creswell was, in coalition with the Nationalist Party, the subject of almost amused derision in the liberal press, the alliance did have the effect of ensuring that workers’ rights, and even an incipient trade union presence, was part of the discourse of the day. The black ICU discovered that it could make use of that reluctant sensitivity. One has to ask how the rhetorical stance of the ICU, its admixture of outrageous defiance and super-subtle legal wrangling, could ever have continued without the precedent and the licence given it by the labour rump in Hertzog’s government. One has to imagine back to 1925, imagine back to the condition in which an ultra-small, educated black elite spoke – to the amazement of white observers, and the glee of a largely illiterate black audience – for a constituency that was supposed not to

exist. The nationalist, socialist alliance provided the legal umbrage that enabled Sam Dunn, ICU secretary in Natal, to claim: 'We have the honour to be the only Native Workers' Union in the world which belongs to trade unions ...'³

It was not always to be this way, of course. But while this strange licence prevailed, the ICU grew like wildfire, striking a rhetorical note that had never been heard before on the South African stage. Clements Kadalie was the unmatched master at touching this nerve-centre. Says one witness: 'We would all flock to Kroonstad anxious to hear Kadalie insulting the whites and promising us liberation from their oppression ... As he strode up and down on a table, wagon or cart, he would on occasion build up to his climax by successively tearing off his coat, waistcoat, collar, and finally his tie. The illiterate poor... could not have missed the social meaning of this charade ...' In Natal, however, 'the big forceful A.W.G. Champion enjoyed joyous welcomes. 'Oh, speak, dense forest... Hurrah; speak, dense forest', shouted Durban crowds, using his praise name Mahlathi Mnyama...'⁴ Helen Bradford contrasts the crowd appeal of the ICU with the 'dull and moderate Congress speeches' that were the style of the older organisation.

The question arises: Would the ICU have scored its successes in the late twenties under a Smuts government as it did under the Pact government of Hertzog? Let not the subsequent prestige of the beloved general and the author of *Holism* deflect our recognition that the SAP government of 1924 was a Randlords' edifice, putting down strikes, black and white alike, with brutal efficiency.

It was the reaction to Smuts's 1924



A.W.G. Champion photographed in old age in the 1970s.

(Photo: University of Natal Press)

policy that gained so much poor white and proletarian support for the alliance of nationalism and socialism in Hertzog's coalition. Hertzog had to respect his labour bench, even if he must put the near-eccentric Walter Madeley in as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, and allow a black trade union to operate within the legal scope of the country. In these years even that most traditional white political voice, that of farmers from the heartland, found itself reprimanded by the Supreme Court, while the ICU was allowed to parade in Cape Town and present petitions to the Minister of Justice. Of course, the protection offered by the Pact government would only last on sufferance – after the *swart gevaar* election of 1929, Hertzog could see (like a certain world-famous politician coming to public notice in 1930) that it was not so much socialism as nationalism, racially defined, that could unite the

proletariat and the poorer middle class without the tiresome mediation of parliamentary procedures.

Something of the flavour of an ICU meeting, and the *rapport* that operated between the Union's spokesmen and their audience, can be gauged from a verbatim *Natal Witness* report.⁵

Here for instance is an account of an ICU gathering at the Indian football ground in Dundee in July 1927, attended by some 4 000 labourers and miners. The reporter soon picked up the apocalyptic note that the ICU never hesitated to strike, especially when it was touting for membership. 'Take out your red money', said the opening speaker (referring to the two shilling membership fee) 'and we will fight your battles for you ... Join the ICU and you will see a new heaven and a new earth ...' During the meeting, says the report, 'Champion and his clerk were busy issuing the red tickets, and after the meeting there were hundreds of natives waiting to join ...'

Towards their largely illiterate audience, ICU speakers were not squeamish about defining their educational status. Kadalie instructed one Natal meeting (playing on the word 'sticks') 'Do not hit the white people with your sticks; that is only for savages. People with brains fight with statistics, so fight, my people, with statistics'.⁶ In the same way Sam Dunn, the ICU's Natal secretary, speaks as much down to his audience as up to it:

At the present time you are fools. You go to a beer drink and a tribal fight starts, and you all join in and fight among yourselves, and the only people who benefit are the white men ...

The audience obviously enjoys this harangue since it knows that there will

soon come a revelatory note: 'You must listen carefully with your ears. The ICU has come. God made South Africa for the coloureds ...'

God was on their side, but in 1920s South Africa it was well to be clear what secular authority gave the ICU its licence:

We are all Britishers born under the Union Jack, and only ask for fair treatment. The fate of the Africans is being discussed in high places by the two dominant races, while we, the people to whom Africa belongs, have no say in the matter at all ...

Given the secular umbrage of the Union Jack, ex-serviceman Dunn affords himself a swipe at the Hertzog government. 'In Parliament today', he tells his audience, obviously excited by the sheer temerity of the speaker, 'there are people whom I have chased on the mountains for trying to disintegrate the British Empire ...'

The power-base being thus accounted for, what comes through thereafter is the note of common negritude, the fate of being perpetually misunderstood, written off as the poor of the earth. Membership of the ICU takes on gospel overtones, blending the biblical and the domestic:

All we want is fair play. God help me, as I hope He will help you. You must not be afraid of the ICU. Pay your red money and let us fight for you ... we will buy farms for you and make pretty little villages like Dundee for you to live in ...

When Champion himself takes the stand, we might ask whether a Garvey or a Booker Washington had the pithiness of utterance that he could muster. Alison Wessels George Champion was pure Zulu, but was adopted and named

by missionaries from the American Mission. In that tradition his message has a parable-like simplicity:

If you tie a dog up and instruct your wife not to feed it, when it breaks its string it will be bound to steal because it is hungry. And that is the case with the native ...

Thus could ex-policeman, ex-detective Champion combine the insight of a politician with the pungency of a preacher. An ICU demagogue had to be careful, however, that his fervour squared with the practical realities of the 1920s. 'We are today the enemies of the white people', he tells his audience, 'but some day we will be good friends ... Don't fight the white man or they will only wipe you out. I respect the white man and expect you to do the same ...'

Champion's listeners would have the wit, of course, to spot the diplomacy that was required of him. As he said: 'you buy a penny paper tomorrow morning and carefully read it and see what they say about this meeting. When you read it you won't believe that it was I who was speaking ...'

As a matter of fact, a good deal of white society at this time did not believe that a class of blacks even existed who might 'buy a penny paper tomorrow'. 'Probably 80% of workers', says an anti-ICU editorial in a 1927 *Mercury*, have 'not the slightest intention' of abandoning their tribal ties'. Though 'a certain number of the more advanced Natives would like to play with the toys of democracy, including ballot boxes and trade unions, it is plain they are wholly foreign to the minds of the overwhelming majority of the Natives ...'⁷

The ICU, says the article, may have 'dissociated itself from Communist doctrines' but that would make little

difference to 'unlettered Natives ... who still ascribe to witchcraft many of the more common natural phenomena ...'⁸

The *Natal Witness* opposes its rival. It maintains that 'no body such as the ICU could possibly grow up without an accompaniment of a good deal of occasional hot-headed talk'. That must not prevent the reader from 'squarely' facing the fact that 'Native Trade Unionism represents one aspect of a tide of social tendency which he has no power either to reverse or to arrest.

It is a matter in which the fundamental initiative rests with the native, and none can take it from him.' The ICU, says the paper, is 'a natural and inevitable outgrowth from the times in which we live...'⁹

Who got here first?

God may give Africa to the Africans, but the Union Jack was the statutory referee when it came to arguing one's rights to the land. To return to our sample for a moment – the ICU meeting in Dundee, July 1927. The 'unlettered' audience was literate enough to grasp Champion's ironic nudge at 'coloured' Mr Dunn's slightly soiled licence to be an ICU official. Champion teases Dunn when he congratulates him on his 'sacrifice' in joining a black trade union, especially since, in 1906, he had 'fought for the British against his own people ...' There is quite a buried history in this platform exchange. It was a typical ICU gambit to list for its audience its succession of legal victories. Time and again the ICU's counsel, the firm Cowley and Cowley in Durban, had successfully defied evictions of black families by recourse to the Supreme Court. Perhaps the most notable of

these triumphs concerned the Dunn family and the Dunn reserve north of Durban, and was cited by the ICU as a major interdict, preventing 'coloured' landlords from 'illicitly evicting African tenants ...'¹⁰

Champion's irony here goes a long way to exhibiting why the ICU so got under the skin of white Natalians, and rattled the nerves of what we might call, in a political context, *primogeniture*. A trade union of the time might have learned the rhetorical ruse from the 1926 General Strike in Britain of pronouncing the caste of bosses to exist only by luck of inheritance. Take away that chance advantage, and workers had every right to step in and 'seize the means of production'. If one transferred this logic to Africa, it was an easy step to label whites as exploitative visitors who might be dispensed with in due course. There was a complication in this argument, however. A slogan of the order 'Africa for the Africans' did not suit ICU strategy, since its 'back to roots' implication threatened to tie it to tribal (or shall we say feudal) origins. City workers did not want to go back to tribal Africa. If anything the 'back to roots' sentiment suited the managerial class that would like to have labour on a temporary basis and send it back to hearth and home when its usefulness was over.

The two confrontations we discuss in this article came at a time when the workforce needed, with increasing urgency, some sort of residential status, whether on the land or in the town. Durban might pride itself on its hygienic canteens and its inexpensive barracks, but what if its much-vaunted 'System' ensured that workers must never think of the city as a place of

belonging? At the De Waal Enquiry after the 1929 riot Champion made his position clear. 'In Durban,' he said, 'provision is made for the kraal native, and the educated native has to go back to his kraal to have his grievances expressed through his chief ... These chiefs know nothing about town life and are not interested in its problems ...'¹¹

As in the town so in the country. One might not think of the pastoral landscape of the Umvoti as signalling an industrial age, but the change of technique in the processing of leather had, in fact, required a production-line cultivation of wattle trees. The discovery that wattle bark extract was more effective for tanning than the Argentinian *quebracho* brought heavy industry to the hills of Natal.¹² In the Umvoti this might mean economic salvation for white farmers, but for black labourers it spelt a severe social disarray. One thinks of the 18th century enclosures in Britain when landlords swept away the feudal network and the value of land became more and more determined by factory demands. Helen Bradford shows that by 1927 mature wattle had doubled land values in the Umvoti district. The painful social consequence was spelt out by the Chief Native Commissioner. Slow-maturing crops were rendering 'the presence of labour tenants superfluous; indeed, every acre of land they occupy is of more value to the farmer than their labour ...'¹³

This development brought about a sort of inversion of legal intention, an alteration that the ICU was quick to take advantage of. The 1913 Land Act was originally promulgated to the advantage of farmers and was meant to instil a feudal dispensation

where only a delimited serfdom had residential rights. But, with the coming of conveyor-belt industry, the 1913 Act turned on its beneficiaries, and often protected the serfs rather than the bosses. Wattle-growers might well have more use for 'thirty day ticket' labour from Pondoland or Lesotho than for those ancient retainers whose rights were entrenched by the 1913 Act. What could the farmer do to rid himself of the structures and appendages of the labour system of a previous dispensation? The Natal Agricultural Union recommended a similar tactic to that of the Durban Native Affairs Department: unwanted retainers should be consigned back to the never-never land of tribal affiliation. 'Eviction' was the slogan word of the hour. It became obvious, however, as the twenties progressed, that the bosses were not going to have it all their own way. Farmers found to their dismay that their eviction orders were challenged, and that the ICU was instrumental in the challenging. It says much about the times that the NAU advised its members to take their cases to the Native High Court and not to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court played by the new rules, and – in the ethos of workers' rights – was apt to give the ICU more successes to chalk up on its list of legal victories. The Native High Court, on the other hand, could be trusted to revert to ancient practice, and insist that 'kraal heads had complete control of and contract for the unmarried inmates of their kraals ...'¹⁴ – a technicality that could keep the whole labour force in thrall to the chiefs.

Given the Union's successes, one is hardly surprised that the Umvoti ICU received massive support, and that its

membership reached an alleged 16 000 in early 1928. (The historian has to filter some very different perspectives on the success of the ICU in the Umvoti in these years. In Kadalie's rendering, incensed European farmers 'refused to have tenants who were members of the ICU (and) "smelled them out", felling their huts to the ground, burning others, and throwing tenants on to the roads ...'¹⁵ His claim, however, that membership funds 'dropped markedly' does not seem to square with an alternative perspective in which farmers felt themselves almost persecuted by the lack of sympathy from the Pact government. The ICU had some foundation for boasting that 'when the white man evicts you ... you should come and join. We shall give you the law which prohibits the white man from evicting you ...'¹⁶ For those of us brought up in the apartheid era, it seems remarkable that farmers were not immediately assured that the state was on their side. As Bradford says, farmers were 'outraged' by the ICU's partial success in 'transforming the law from a weapon against servants to an instrument of their defence ...'¹⁷ The statistic that 160 ejection orders were granted in 1927 surprises more by its modesty than its excess, making it credible that the 16 000 ICU members had a point.

Given the constitutional recourse that the ICU enjoyed in those years, we can continue with our enquiry as to whether Hertzog's Pact government gave the ICU more legal umbrage than might a Smuts-led SAP government. The historian who tries to imbibe the mood of the time has to deal, sooner or later, with the conundrum that the segregationist programme of the Hertzog government could be

seen to offer more *Lebensraum* to Natal's blacks than the free market economics of the South African Party. 'Segregation', in that context, might be held to oppose the anti-interventionist outcry of the Natal Agricultural Union, with its dictum 'Not another acre of land for natives in Natal'. The word 'segregation', we must conjecture, did different work, in 1929, from what it did later in the century. Paging through the newspapers, one comes upon a context where 'segregation' is actually feared by whites because it will give land to Africans outside the supply and demand capacity of the province. Thus a *Mercury* article of April 1927: 'The Hertzog government realises that there is a need to increase reserve and location area but is in danger of bringing about hard and fast segregation ...'¹⁸ Why is segregation a danger? Not because it disadvantages the natives, but because it disadvantages the farmer! Farmers, says the article, 'must be able to sell off lands without loss ...'

The paradox that 'segregation', in a 1920s context, might have a humanistic phase, is exemplified in a letter published some weeks before the desecration of graves at Greytown. It comes from a Mr C.E. Hancock of Ixopo:

Few people realise the wakening that has taken place among the natives during the last ten years or so. They are fencing their gardens, buying fertilisers, using planters and cultivators for their crops, planting fruit trees, building better houses – in some cases with verandahs and having a flower garden in front – evidence of the rapid germination of a spirit of uplift, which, of course, is all to the good ...¹⁹

Today this letter must have something of a curiosity status, since it believes that 'segregation' – a state intervention,

a political redistribution – is needed to give black aspiration a fair chance. The author braves the verdict that 'everyone who favours segregation in land ownership is an unpatriotic negrophilist ...' Eighty years and a tide of human experience later we will hardly equate 'segregation' with a negrophilist attitude (the term would probably be rephrased today in the language of 'affirmative action' or 'compensation for historic disadvantage'.) One thinks of Natal's Edgar Brookes, one day to be chairman of the Liberal Party, who, in the early twenties, was a zealous Hertzogite, preaching the segregationist cause on humanistic and 'compensatory' grounds. Needless to say his Christian humanism led him to revoke in the late twenties (and especially at a celebrated SCA conference at Fort Hare in 1930) his old approach.²⁰

The Desecration of the Graves

'Segregation' might be one way of confronting the mindset implicit in the phrase 'Not another acre of land for natives in Natal'. But a more anarchic method was that of Zablani Gwaza who, on the night of 1 March, 1928, turned 'eviction' on its head and, by the systematic destruction of tombstones in the white cemetery at Greytown, offended to the very quick the sentiment of lineage.²¹ The wreckage of three quarters of the town's graves touched some of the rawest psychic nerves that a communal identity might sustain. One might say that Zablani's hours of smashing graves, some of which had lasted 50 years, had a sort of perverse genius in attacking the roots of clan memory and historic belonging.

Police dogs rapidly tracked down the perpetrator, and when he became identified as a sometime secretary for the ICU, the equation of the desecration

with the work of the ICU seemed irresistible. Reporters who rushed from Maritzburg (and got there faster, by the way, than the flying squad, whose train became derailed at Seven Oaks) gained memorable images of a womenfolk weeping amongst crumbled masonry, and a menfolk besieging the ICU offices, strewing papers and furniture before setting them alight. Even the sober Justice of the Peace, Mr Tatham, had no doubt that they were faced with a black conspiracy. 'There was not a black person or office in the location who was not aware of what was going to happen. The ICU had been extremely active ...'²²

In the subsequent reports on Greytown's white reaction, there is an oscillation between sincere sympathy for a community in shock and a nationwide censure of the 'lynching' frenzy that now seized its younger representatives. Farmers obviously believed that they had ample right, at last, to avenge themselves on the hated ICU. No-one stopped to ask whether the perpetrator was actually employed by the ICU or had put into effect an ICU initiative. Five car-loads of men, after homing in on and wrecking the local ICU office, proceeded 'to chase the secretary who was reported to be hiding in a nearby field of mealies. He was eventually found and severely thrashed ...' The self-generated commando then headed off for the office at Krantzkop and set it alight, 'all Krantzkop turning out to watch the blaze.'

To more dispassionate observers it soon became obvious that the local ICU was as amazed and as shocked as anyone. The committee in Greytown was quick to respond, and 'joined the community', it said, 'in condemnation

of this most wanton, wicked and dastardly action'. In Pietermaritzburg, the secretary of the ICU went out of his way to prevent an anti-white reaction:

I shall impress on the natives, when I address them, that they must treat this outburst against the ICU as a purely Greytown affair, and not a general attitude of Europeans to the ICU ... we reverence the dead ... [the desecration] is merely the act of madmen ...²³

(This somewhat benign estimate of the 'general attitude of Europeans' was perhaps caused by the recent invitation to three ICU members to join the Maritzburg Native Welfare Society. 'We do not, of course, countenance a certain amount of their propaganda', said chairman Major Tomlinson, but 'we have the intention of becoming acquainted with their aims and objects ...'²⁴)

'The desecration of graves', said a *Witness* editorial 'was so disgusting and so deliberately provocative an act that it was easy to understand, if not to excuse, the reaction which it produced ... Unfortunately it appears that there is a gang in Greytown which is still anxious to substitute lynch law for the law of the land.'²⁵ Natal's news-reading public would certainly know how unenviable was a reputation for being a 'lynching' state. As recently as March 1927 the *Mercury* reported some 80 church congregations in Georgia 'reprimanding the Governor for not standing up to the Klu (sic) Klux Klan ...'²⁶ The activities of the 'KKK' certainly came to mind when, on 3 March, Maritzburg saw scenes that might be filmed in the garish colours of *Mississippi Burning*. A throng gathered at the ICU offices when it became known that 'a contingent of young men from Greytown and district

motored to the city with the intention of raiding the ICU offices ...'

At 10 pm crowds were seen moving from both sides of Church Street, and the glare of a fleet of motor cars illuminated the whole area. As the crowd collected in front of the building about 60 uniformed policemen, under the command of Sub-Inspector Slater, marched briskly from Scott Street and were just in time to prevent the crowd from rushing the building. It was a case of touch-and-go ... Slater ordered the crowd to stand back ...²⁷

It was indeed touch and go, not just as regards the behaviour of a crowd but as regards the reputation of a city. Fortunately Inspector Slater and his men were not intimidated by the milling throng, which increased to about a thousand. 'It is not fair to judge the ICU' he said, 'without a trial. We are here to protect this building and we mean to protect it ...' The disappointed crowd amused itself by singing *Tipperary* and 'various patriotic songs'. It was midnight before they dispersed.

Gradually there emerged a more complete picture of what had actually happened at Greytown. The Commissioner of Police warned that 'persons having nothing whatever to do with this vandalism have been unlawfully interfered with and their property destroyed ...'²⁸ The *Natal Witness* waded in with the 'decent' view – a little comfortably Anglo Saxon perhaps:

South Africa, considering its history, its dependence on mining, its very mixed population, and its intensely complicated colour problem, has not had too bad a record in the past. Lynch law has never got a footing here, and it is intolerable that at this time of day, with the appalling example of the Southern States of America before

us, there should be anyone misguided enough to try and introduce it.²⁹

The paper reminded its readers that, although the ICU might have 'a great many foolish and mischievous utterances to its credit', it is 'not an illegal organisation engaged in a criminal conspiracy ...'

The hard core of Umvoti opinion, however, was not placated by this reasoning (encouraged, perhaps, by a *Mercury* leader which observed the 'privileged heartlessness' of those who preached at Greytown from a distance.) On 7 March came the announcement of the formation in Greytown of an 'anti-ICU party' whose first mission would be a tour of the province exhibiting photographs of the desecrated cemetery. The vein of outrage and sympathy being strong in rural Natal, it came as a shock to this group to find that the public did not close ranks with them. In the words of the *Cape Times*:

Nothing is easier than to share Greytown's indignation at an act of mischievous sacrilege. It is easy, too, to sympathise with Greytown's uneasiness at the scatter-brained violence of much latter-day ICU propaganda ... But with Greytown's practical reactions to that indignation and uneasiness it is impossible to have any sympathy ...³⁰

The *Witness* supported this view, announcing that 'in accordance with the attitude adopted by this paper' it would refuse 'the application for advertising space' of the Umvoti organisation. Natal must not have 'its relations with the Natives regulated', it said, by 'a crowd of irresponsibles from a country dorp ...' (Growled a Greytown farmer in response: even if the ICU – 'an organisation run by black

importations' – was not responsible for the desecration, 'it is their preaching that has inflamed the passions of the natives round here ...')

Came 3 April 1928 and a headline that announced a 'Trial of Vigilantes', namely those charged with burning the ICU offices. It was not difficult for the public prosecutor to prove that Zabuloni was a one-man show. He had been dismissed by the ICU in 1927 and since August of that year had had nothing to do with the organisation. More than that, where there had been small-scale acts of desecration prior to the Zabuloni affair, ICU officials had urged its members 'to assist the police in tracking the perpetrators of previous outrages'. One witness – a farmer who had given Zabuloni lodging a few nights before the desecration – said that the defendant told him he was 'anxious to start a revolt against the ICU' to which he had previously belonged.

The magistrate confirmed that there was 'no proof that the ICU was at the back of the affair'. The fines of £2 each that he laid on the Greytown men gave Clements Kadalie occasion for some choice sarcasm at the next ICU Congress. 'People were flocking to their banner everywhere. But what did they find? Their offices in Natal were burned down and the hooligans who did that were fined only £2 each ...'³¹ (Kadalie's grouse might be just, but his autobiography does not mention the desecration that triggered the incident.)

Champion and Kadalie: The Split in the ICU

The ICU might have come through the 'desecration' episode feeling the tide of history to be well on its side. It had been

emphatically and publicly exonerated; it had seen the Pact government using all its resources to protect *not* a venerated white agrarian community but, if anything, to render the Umvoti farmers the moral offender.

Why, then, might one or two cracks in the ICU edifice already be evident, spelling the possibility that the 1927 Congress in Durban marked the zenith of its strength and popularity? With a membership of 26 000 in Durban alone, and with an impressive catalogue of Supreme Court triumphs to its credit, its leaders could afford to mock Durban's mayor for not opening the proceedings (he said it was because of the Union's inflammatory agenda.)

Mayor Buzzard's absence provoked some choice sarcasm on the part of the ICU demagogues who thrilled their worker audience with an invective they did not usually dare utter:

'As long as the worker was content to remain a slave', said R.G.de Norman, 'the Mayor was content. But when the worker said he wanted more money ... then he was a bad boy ...' (Laughter and applause). The Europeans at the Cape were far more broadminded than the Europeans of this part of South Africa. (Hear, hear) ... In Cape Town the ICU had got the support of the mayor and police ... He recalled the incident when the ICU had marched to present a resolution to Parliament, and the police saw that no-one interfered with them ...'³²

Whether Durban was broadminded or not, it seems remarkable – to anyone brought up in the apartheid era – that Champion's ICU could march along its streets in red uniforms to the tunes of whistles and drums and not be subject to state interference.

By the end of 1927 the Durban branch of the ICU could list a whole

catalogue of court-room successes – modifications in the pass law, in the renting of rooms, in small-trading by-laws such that A.F. Batty could open a factory in Durban on co-operative lines. Perhaps the most dramatic success was the repeal of the 'dipping' requirement for those who entered Durban to seek work. The municipality – still convinced that it ran the model system for the whole country – demanded a de-lousing rite to stop the spread of typhus. In vain did Mr C.F. Layman, Durban's Native Affairs Manager, plead the council's good intentions and offer himself for de-lousing. The Supreme Court backed the ICU, and the 'demeaning' procedure was brought to a stop.³³

As one might expect, it was the Durban ICU, the largest and most financially buoyant of the Union's branches, that first exposed cracks in the organisation at leadership level. One must remember that the potentates of the ICU – they who pitched up at meetings on far-off soccer-fields in their Buicks and Pontiacs – were in those years at the helm of an organisation of unprecedented wealth and notability. At the end of 1927 Natal secretary Sam Dunn was found guilty of embezzlement of ICU funds. When the spotlight turned on Champion himself, however, he not only denied the charge but sued his accusers for defamation. He lost his case, not because of any misappropriation of funds but because the Durban ICU could posit no auditor's report to substantiate his claim.

Meanwhile, at the end of 1927, Kadalie set off for Geneva with the *kudos* of being perhaps the first black speaker ever invited to address the International Labour Organisation. He

was lionised in Switzerland and hosted at many a Fabian and liberal-socialist forum in Britain. In terms of the history of the ICU, however, he paid a price for becoming the darling of the hour. Being impressed with the restraining tactics of trade unionism (which, after all, did now have a Labour victory in sight) he sought to make the ICU politically respectable. (Back in South Africa his ICU audience teased him with the dictum that he went overseas a black man, and returned a white man.) Harkening especially to his white Johannesburg supporters, he secured the appointment of William Ballinger, a decent but dour Scots trade unionist, as the new ICU secretary.

It was while Kadalie was away and Champion temporarily took charge in Johannesburg that major dissension broke out in the ranks. Champion won no friends in an atmosphere removed from Natal. He was accused of mishandling funds, but in a context that suggested that headquarters was uncomfortable with his 'Zulu' style of leadership.³⁴ The chorus of opposition became shrill, and in November Kadalie had to come rushing back from the adulatory atmosphere he basked in in Europe. He managed to keep tempers down and hoped that the 1928 Bloemfontein Congress would paper over the cracks.

A sort of love-hate oscillation between Champion and Kadalie is palpable in the latter's memoir. 'As a Zulu' he says, Champion 'liked power, but without him Natal could never have taken a leading part in the affairs of the ICU ...'³⁵ He recalls the first time they ever travelled together on the country's crack train, *The Union Limited*. In these matters the Hertzog administration put on its best front.

'The railway authorities took special trouble to see that I was accommodated as comfortably as possible on the trains whenever I travelled.' One must remember that, in the late twenties, an elegant black traveller would have been an exotic of the order of, say, Duke Ellington travelling on *The Twentieth Century Limited*. When the two of them travelled together it seems that the railway authorities did not appreciate Champion's Zulu sensitivity. 'The notice card on the compartment window read 'Mr Clements Kadalie and his private secretary'. Champion 'did not approve of the description ...'³⁶

At the Bloemfontein conference Kadalie struggled hard to soothe anti-Champion feeling and stalled an actual proscription of Champion by promising a commission of enquiry into the finances of the Durban office. He did not anticipate that 'when delegates returned to their respective constituencies' it would be 'maliciously reported in Natal ... that I alone had "dismissed" him, which was absurd.' Absurd perhaps, but Durban was 'the stronghold for the union' and Kadalie realised that he must travel down to Natal and explain to the restless Durban branch why Champion had been suspended.³⁷

The next event is surely a red-letter episode in Natal's history, leading to the dismemberment of what might have been, in 1928, the world's largest back trade union. Kadalie set off by car for Durban but, because of heavy rains and bad roads, decided to stay overnight in Maritzburg, oblivious of the angry audience that awaited him at Durban headquarters. When that gathering heard of his delay they 'sent a well-organised, quasi-military

mob to Pietermaritzburg at midnight to fetch me into Durban by force ...' Kadalie is, of course, inclined to call any partisan group a 'mob', but he does recall that it was in this case accompanied by a white detective, 'head constable Arnold', who turned out to be perhaps the most intriguing character in the sequence of events. Did he represent the Durban Borough Police, or the CID, or even Champion himself who, at this point, was not in Natal?

To continue with Kadalie's narrative:

On arrival at Durban at about 2 am I was rushed on to the platform in the ICU hall, and I was jeered to scorn by the meeting of over a thousand people, while other "soldier" members threatened to strike me violently. I was ordered by an angry chairman to explain to the meeting why I had dismissed Champion ...³⁸

The mood of the audience would certainly have confirmed for the 'international' trade unionists in the ICU that their brother socialists in Durban were 'nationalist' in effect. According to a *Natal Witness* report, shouts of 'We love Champion. We want him back', rent the air. And of Kadalie the call was: 'Deport him. He belongs to Namaqualand ...'³⁹

Now came the moment when detective Arnold, having been a cohort of the ambushing party, became the lone ally of its victim. Recalls Kadalie: 'One of the illegal "soldiers" rushed forward with an instrument aimed at my forehead, but ... the detective drew his revolver just in time' and 'prevented the man from attempting a perhaps fatal blow'. The detective whisked him away on the half-promise that Kadalie would return next night and complete the proceedings.

If a novel were to be written on the convolutions of power and the psychology of infiltration, one might well cite the words of the ICU leader: 'I must put on record that Arnold alone of those present interfered in order to protect me from the mob ...' Was Kadalie ever to know that Arnold turned out to be a chief architect of the reformed Natal ICU (the ICU *Ya Se*) and had more than a hand in writing its constitution? William Ballinger was to reveal, at the De Waal Enquiry a year later, that 'Sergeant Arnold claimed to be the author of the present rules, and has acted with the idea of splitting the organisation ...'⁴⁰

The Durban meeting broke up with the fate of the ICU in the balance. The *Natal Witness* gave a somewhat flowery summation:

As the members left the hall, the stars were already paling with the dawn and many natives who had waited up all night went directly to work from the meeting ... It is felt among the natives that if Champion is not immediately brought back there will be a serious split in the Union.⁴¹

Kadalie did not brave the wrath of another meeting, and the split that would forever dismember the ICU became unavoidable. The Durban committee condemned 'the mean and cowardly attempt of Comrade Kadalie to avoid meeting the members of this branch ... and expresses its disgust at his running away from tonight's adjourned meeting ...'⁴² The outcome is summed up in Kadalie's memoir: 'Immediately on my return to Johannesburg the secession of Natal from the main body was dramatically proclaimed by Champion ...' This was the 'turning-point' for the ICU, says Kadalie, and its 'noble work of

unifying the African proletariat ... was now to suffer partial dismemberment ...'⁴³

The Beer Boycott: Class Division in the Working Class

There were, of course, other forces than those internal to the ICU that wrested from it the provenance that gave it its golden years. The Pact that kept Hertzog's nationalist government mindful of its socialist good manners was becoming more tenuous by the day. Walter Madeley, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs who was 'fired' by Hertzog because he promised his workers 8/- a day, told his Greyville supporters in May 1929 that the Labour Party had 'entered the Cabinet and gained no benefit whatever. Labour sank its principles and got lost in a welter of political filth. (Uproar, followed by a disturbance at the back of the hall.)'⁴⁴ In this climate, Kadalie and Champion must have realised that the technique of taunting white middle class sensibility was becoming counter-productive. Kadalie might acclaim Hertzog as 'one of the most deceitful people God ever created'⁴⁵; the fact was that Hertzog knew how to turn such a harangue to his own account and, in the build-up to the election, use it for his own gain. He would tell his miner audiences on the Rand that 'the tendency among the natives today was to try and get South Africa to be a tremendous native state ... Do not make a mistake. That is the ideal in the mind of nearly all the natives, whether agitators or not ...'⁴⁶ Thus did the discourse of the 1920s degenerate – through the Great Depression – to the much less tolerant discourse of the 1930s.

Champion was under pressure to prove that the split in the ICU had not damaged his cause and that the

Natal ICU *Ya Se* was a force to be reckoned with, especially now that white nationalism was beginning to take on the racial overtones that would be familiar in the 1930s. There was violence in the air, both on the national and international scale. Pre-election heckling on the reef degenerated to fisticuffs, Marwick of the SAP let loose physically at Labour's Thomas Boydell, the international press reported riots in Berlin with 25 dead, and gangster Al Capone controlled Chicago's city council. How could Champion find a *cause célèbre* that would unite his followers, disconcert smug officials, and yet at the same time demonstrate the discipline of a common sacrifice in the manner of Gandhi?

A spontaneous boycott of municipal beerhalls by the Point dockworkers gave him his opportunity. In his memoir Champion maintains that when he was first invited to a meeting organised by the stevedores, crowds gathered around his car but he did not side with their vote. 'I did not agree to a strike. I said it was not usual to go on strike if they had had not quarrelled with their employers ...'⁴⁷ Non beer-drinking Champion obviously wanted to fight a more idealistic battle than that which pertained to brewers' licences, and he hesitated before deciding to take up 'the beer grievance'. His mistake was, as it proved, that he took up the grievance in the language of prohibition rather than the language of protest. 'The beer halls put temptation in their way', he said of the workers, resulting in 'the squandering their wages ...'⁴⁸ True enough – but too respectable an agenda for dock-siders spoiling for a fight. In a giveaway formulation, he recalls that he decided

to support the boycott when he realised that 'uneducated supervisors' (referring to Makati, the municipal appointee) were placed in authority over people like himself. Makati was not educated, yet he supervised people with more education ...'⁴⁹

Champion's hesitation goes some way to explaining one of the most jarring and sudden turnabouts in ICU history, and the incident that permanently damaged his status as a liberation hero. Why did Wessel Albert George Champion, undisputed leader of the independent Natal ICU, give all his prestige and unifying endorsement to the beer boycott one day, and then side with the Borough Police and the forces of white civil order the next? We perhaps stretch a paradox too far if we argue that Champion, Durban's most noted leader of its black proletariat, espoused the boycott for 'middle class' reasons. Back in 1928 at his defamation trial Judge Tatham had called 'Mr Champion ... a remarkable person' but noted that he was at once 'Secretary for a Workers' Union' and also 'Managing Director of a Limited Liability Company carrying on a shoe business as well as an eating-house ...'⁵⁰ These burgherly pursuits were legal in themselves in the 1920s (that is, not yet threatened by a colour bar). What Champion wanted was 'middle class' permanence in the very city whose Chief of Native Affairs 'had ordered him out of his office and told him never to come back ...'⁵¹ The beer boycott must prove, then, not so much that workers should have rights to the brewing and selling of beer, but that blacks in Durban should have a 'location' subject to their own governance, wherein (so far as access to liquor was concerned)

'parents would be able to control their children'.⁵² This motivation for a residential and familial enclave was, of course, several steps removed from the outcry of the dockers, who simply wanted their shebeens not to be closed and not be subject to Indian middlemen who would profit from their revenues.

Durban was certainly not the only city where the morality of prohibition exacerbated the impasse on which Champion foundered. What might be acclaimed as state-enforced temperance on one hand proves to be an intolerable interference on the other, an invasion of domestic licence where, for example, women might have a decided grip on the economy. What is outlawed is the informal culture that gathers around a major city. In siding with 'temperance', middle-class, property-owning Champion lost sight of the spontaneous agitation whereby workers wanted to keep beer commerce for themselves in the greater city in which they actually lived.

Street Confrontation: the Beer Riot

Recognising that the boycott suited the mood of the hour, and that it might win considerable legal latitude for blacks in the borough, Champion not only put his weight behind it but tried to dictate the shape it should take. On Monday 17 June, the boycott – now centred on and organised by the ICU – started menacingly in the morning with ICU officials preventing workers from visiting municipal beerhalls or buying *utshwala* from Indian middlemen. What was supposed to be a picketing movement soon took on, however, the form of public harassment and street confrontation that Champion did not want. As he lost control of the forces he had unleashed he lost taste for the contest. By lunch-

time he seems to have done a complete *volte face*, with a rescinding of orders so dramatic that the evening press was to call it 'Champion's surrender'.⁵³ At 3.00 pm he accompanied two senior policemen to the Point to announce to the stevedores that he was calling off the boycott. From that point on spontaneous strike action continued not because of Champion but despite him.

At 5.00 pm a march of some 1 000 stevedores made its way through town to join the restless picketers, and the street patrol became a huge surge of 2 000 souls heading up Prince Albert Street to the city centre. The phalanx of workers was well disciplined; there was no looting. An incident occurred, however, that (as with the Greytown desecration) was a sufficient provocation for a white backlash. Apparently the workers' army espied a black man on the pavement who had not supported the boycott and, chasing him, knocked over an elderly white man, Mr Kincaid of Windermere Road. Mr Kincaid was so badly felled that he later died of his injury. By the time the evening news was on the stands, it was generally understood that there was an impi at large in the streets and that a white man had possibly been killed. Such news was quite sufficient to bring out those who styled themselves vigilantes in full force.

There now occurred what might well have been the biggest black/white street confrontation in South African history. The fact that vigilantes were seen disgorging from trucks in the area of Prince Albert Street shows that they were prepared for such an event. Brandishing firearms, they made no secret of their identity as a lynching mob. The police were too few and too helpless to control this eruption and

shots began to be fired. The sound of gunfire had the effect of stemming the first rush, and the phalanx fell back on the ICU buildings. The workers plucked up courage for another rush, and it was in confronting this second rush that gunshots became more than warning signals and the meleè degenerated into a violent battle. Four deaths occurred – of the 118 casualties treated at Addington hospital that night, 13 were whites.⁵⁴ The gunfire did eventually stop the workers and the phalanx began to melt away. The police gained control, cordoning off the area around the ICU offices by 7.30 pm. Appeals to the vigilantes to disperse came from the chief magistrate and mayor A.H.J. Eaton, but they had little effect, one or two turning on the mayor and declaring that they wanted 'blood for blood'. Eaton replied 'You can't do anything with your bare hands', and the reply came 'Yes we can – with this', producing a revolver ... One newspaper report makes it clear, however, that it would take more than a street fracas to disrupt bourgeois Durban. Although 'the centre of operations was only a few yards away from the main thoroughfares, Durban proper went on its way in entire indifference ... Bioscopes were as popular as ever, and the trams continued to run.' In fact, it was in distant Pietermaritzburg that a newsflash on cinema screens persuaded some of the citizenry to go home early.⁵⁵ At 10.30 pm there were still 300 vigilantes present 'in ugly mood', and police had to remove ICU officials 'one by one' to ensure their safety. (Champion himself was by this time ensconced in Edendale outside Pietermaritzburg.) Not until 1.00 am were the ICU buildings evacuated,

the streets emptied, and the police dispersed.

By Champion's own request, the officer appointed to head the subsequent Enquiry into the riot must come from outside Natal. He declared himself satisfied when the Hertzog government appointed the Judge President of the Transvaal for the task. Judge De Waal's subsequent Report, tabled on 6 August 1929,⁵⁶ has usually been congratulated for its fair and square blaming of the white mob for the violence that transpired. 'The natives were not solely or even primarily to blame ... It is quite clear that not only was the civilian mob not asked to come to the assistance of the police, but that they were directly responsible for the events of the evening.' His claim, however, that 'the Borough Police, re-inforced by the SAP, were fully competent to cope with any emergency' smacks of special pleading. On the witness stand, Durban's chief of police by no means censured the vigilante mob. 'Although the aid of the civilians was not invoked', he said, 'it was exceedingly helpful'.⁵⁷ It certainly suited the general reader's fancy to believe that Durban's police, 'armed only with pick handles', were able to handle the crisis, but some of the chief's underlings were a little more candid than their boss. Thus Sergeant Clements not only saw other police using firearms, but used his own, 'a small calibre pistol which he used for destroying dogs ...' Clements claimed that '... the advance of the native mob, with the natives crouching to the ground in typical Zulu war formation', seemed to him 'sufficiently dangerous to warrant his move ...'⁵⁸ One suspects that if the De Waal report had been a

little more candid, and the myth of an unarmed police force put to rest, the next round of street violence in Durban in 1930 would not have required the assistance of teargas and state troopers.

Another lacuna in the De Waal report regards the third and last incursion on the ICU buildings the day after the fight. The emptiness of the undefended building added provocation to a small group of incendiaries who, at midday, entered the ICU offices and wrecked the inside of the building. 'Furniture was broken, pictures were smashed, and bookcases and letter files were scattered over the floor.' A battered piano was found on the landing, and 'band instruments had been thrown out of the window.' It was as if a hostile vigilante patrol had been let loose on one of the jazz enclaves of 1920's Haarlem. Certainly the wrecked instruments were testimony to Champion's attempt to found a black metropolitan elite after the New York model.

Middle Class Champion and Durban's Labour Mayor

In later years Champion expressed himself satisfied with the De Waal report, especially since it spelt out the verdict that 'there would have been no damage done either to life or property, had the civilian mob not gathered and attacked the ICU Hall ...' A retrospective view, however, must find it a naïve document espousing the dated ethics of the prohibitionist era. 'Surely Champion realised', said the judge, that 'the main object the authorities had in view was the stamping out of drunkenness and lawlessness by sweeping out of existence the illicit brewer and the shebeener ...' Thus spoke the voice of prohibitionist rectitude – one wonders

if De Waal would read a news report of July 1930, revealing that the business of outlawing the shebeener – or its American equivalent – meant that Chicago paid \$5 000 000 a month 'in toll to racketeers', with 45 murders that year reaching no conviction.⁵⁹ 'Stamping out the shebeener' was the language that explained why the beer boycott lingered on as a folk movement, even when the ICU was no longer identified with it. In fact, Helen Bradford shows that there was a considerable feminist agenda lurking behind the continuing protest. One reason why the boycott proved so tenacious, and reduced municipal beer revenue from £32 000 to £2 000 in a year, was that women identified themselves as the injured party.⁶⁰ A month after the De Waal Enquiry *Witness* readers would read, for instance, of a march by 200 'native women' in Ladysmith who arrived 'in ugly mood' at the court house demanding that the magistrate 'prevent their menfolk from frequenting the beer house ...'⁶¹ The demonstration was but the first of many. As Bradford sums up: 'In a year when the depression was beginning to bite ... many women were only too willing to join a political struggle over the direction in which male wages flowed ...'

It must not, of course, be thought that Champion himself – he whose name was still revered by his supporters and loathed by his enemies – saw his turnabout on the June boycott as a 'surrender'. After all, at the end of his report the judge 'strongly recommended' that the borough of Durban 'should establish a native location'. If Champion now played along with this eminently more sober and unrevolutionary progress, he had gauged the change of attitude in bourgeois Durban. By July

1929 anyone reasonably well-read would have known something of the subterranean manner in which political attitudes could change. The British General Strike of 1926 had seemed a failure at the time, but the alteration in sentiment it caused could be observed graphically when, even as Durban's riot enquiry started on 4 July 1929, a full-spread photograph appeared in the press of Ramsay MacDonald and his Labour caucus (making it pictorially obvious, by the way, that there was now a larger female contingent in governance than ever before in British history). For all the reactionary King and Country sentiments of 1926, the middle class had heeded the king himself – 'Try living on their wages before you judge them ...' – and shifted its vote.

At the De Waal Enquiry municipal witnesses sought to prove that the ICU had communist affiliations. The Communist Party was not banned in 1929 – if the judge asked Champion directly 'what he understood communism to be' he was obviously asking for relevant clarification. Champion replied that it was a movement 'out to dispossess landed proprietors such as himself'.⁶² (His fellow ICU apologist Josiah Gumede also knew the lines on which to satisfy a middle-class judiciary and introduced himself as 'a landowner from Johannesburg'. He was one of the few in court to raise a laugh, revealing that he did not see 'eye to eye' with Champion on the subject of prohibition.⁶³ Detective Arnold announced, by the way, that the 'native' Communist Party in Durban had 89 members.)

Champion's surrender, then, might well have been a matter of tactics,



*Durban's first parson mayor,
the Rev Archibald Lamont (Photo:
The Natal Witness)*

a political acclimatisation. On July 11th he declared that 'if an advisory board were established, he would rest satisfied that his work was done, and would be resigned to the blotting out of the ICU ...'⁶⁴ In terms of the history of black liberation, an advisory board (with whites a small minority) must figure as a miniscule factor. But for bourgeois Durban in 1929, it required a radical mental adjustment. The change of attitude was confirmed by the succession to office in September of Durban's first parson mayor, the Rev Archibald Lamont.⁶⁵ By any estimate this was a surprise elevation. A Presbyterian minister who had done missionary work in Singapore, Lamont had taught at a theological college in Tarkastad, Eastern Cape, before taking up a ministry in Greyville, Durban. His cross-cultural calibre was shown by his founding and running a private school in Durban, Marine College, which produced several top Indian matriculants. His political affiliation was shown when, in the May elections, alongside Madeley

and Boydell, he called himself 'a centre forward in the Labour assault ...'⁶⁶ With his appointment Durban unexpectedly gained a Labour mayor on a Nationalist ticket.

By July 1930, the change was palpable. The ICU did not have to go cap-in-hand to the mayoral office; the mayor and his officers came to the ICU.

1 500 natives assembled in the ICU hall, Prince Edward Street, tonight to meet Mr J T Rawlins, the native welfare officer recently appointed by the Durban Town Council ... The outstanding feature of the meeting was the excellent feeling which prevailed ...⁶⁷

Chairman Macebo made it clear there was nothing subservient in the ICU's hosting of their white visitors, and even showed something of Kadalie's ironic sting when he introduced Mayor Lamont as 'The Big Boss who signs documents that repress you'. Lamont was quick to declare 'that he was anxious to know the wishes of the natives and to deal with them according to British Justice ... The time is coming', he added, 'when your race will be represented in the Government of this Country ...' (Lucky those 1930 idealists, who could not read the seeds of the time!) The vote of thanks being given, 'the hall was cleared, and some native couples waltzed in European fashion to the strains of jazz music played by a very creditable band ...'

Mayor Lamont proved to be as good as his word. A council report tabled in July 1930 announced the formation of a 'Native Advisory Board' of which the majority (it would include Champion) was black. It announced further 'one of the largest land deals

ever completed in Natal, the purchase for £220 000 of nearly 3 000 acres of Clairwood Estate ...'⁶⁸ This land would be 'used to establish a native village on thoroughly progressive and up-to-date lines ...' A council paper of September gave the death knell to the Durban System when it confessed publicly the social and physical damage done because at least 10 000 of 'Durban's commercially employed natives have no legal accommodation in the borough ...'⁶⁹

Mayor Lamont had only two more years to live, so it is good to record that the suburb he inspired came to be called Lamontville.

Champion as Machiavell or Martyr?

But would A.E.G. Champion – he who could command gatherings of thousands, and whose car alone raised a rapturous welcome – settle for the statutory role of advisory councillor? Adroit research by Shula Marks has suggested that by early 1930 Champion was testing a support-base in a milieu that had previously vilified him. To go back to Tuesday 18 June and the scene that awaited reporters in the ICU buildings the day after the riot: it seems that when the smoke cleared it was not only the wrecked piano and musical instruments that were discovered but, 'looking blandly down on the scene', a photograph of Solomon ka Dinizulu, scion of the Zulu royal family. That portrait would certainly not have adorned any office in the old Kadalie/Champion ICU. In fact, if we take a step even further back to August 1927, we discover that the personage thus honoured had once upon a time reserved for the ICU his fiercest contempt. This is revealed in a piece published by John Dube,

'Solomon's long-standing friend, and a fierce political opponent of the ICU ...'⁷⁰ Dube's paper being identified with the Zulu royal family, there was little doubt who it was who denounced, editorially, 'the militancy, corruption and non-Zulu nature of the Union' and ordered the chiefs to 'kill this thing in all your tribes ...' (We must bear in mind the cautioning of Shula Marks in *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* that, in those years, the air was thick with double agendas.⁷¹ Wealthy sugar barons like William Campbell might seek on one hand to boost Solomon, and fund the *Inkatha* movement, and on the other hand to ensure the king's financial dependency.)

Why, then, the lonely portrait of Solomon? Was Champion an unconfessed communist or a secret royalist? The debate as to whether the ICU leader was a 'sell-out' or a tough player in the game of political survival must certainly include the evidence of the extraordinary relationship between Champion and the character who 'saved' Clements Kadalie, Detective Sergeant Arnold. Who else, after all, made it clear to higher authority that it was not 'commie sniffing' they should be busy with, but king-watching? We might recall one incident at the De Waal Enquiry, when Arnold claimed that, though 'he had made a profound study of the native' he was not, in fact, a member of the ICU:

Mr Cowley: I think the witness has omitted to pay his own subscription.

Judge: Are you a member Sergeant Arnold?

Sergeant Arnold: I am not a member, but I have certainly wormed my way into the organisation for my own reasons ...

There seems to be a game within a game going on here. If this is infiltration the question arises whether Champion was its victim or its cunning manager.

Judge: Is Sergeant Arnold one of you ...?

Champion: Sergeant Arnold is our good friend. He is a member and on our standing committee. Our constitution was typed by him at the CID office. He also knows my house and has visited me in sickness and bought medicine at his own expense ... We know him for a detective, but have nothing to hide.⁷²

If there was 'nothing to hide' it is perhaps not surprising that, by early 1930, the police realised that it was not communists they should look for at ICU headquarters but emissaries from Solomon himself. Commissioner de Villiers concluded that Champion, 'with the assistance of Solomon', had gained 'a very considerable footing amongst the Zulu chiefs' and that, 'coincident with this, the meetings of the ICU [had] become inflammatory in nature ...'⁷³ With this new alliance he had 'greatly gained in prestige amongst the natives in Durban ...' Perhaps the police were as exasperated with Champion as the stevedores had been, and would agree with the Deputy Commissioner that he is '... very clever and a wonderful actor', one who 'adopts a most childlike innocence' when questioned as to the 'unrest he causes among the natives'.⁷⁴

The business of interpreting Champion was certainly needed when, three months after Lamont's visit to ICU headquarters, Oswald Pirow, Minister of Justice, issued his notorious banning order on the Natal ICU leader. Champion was expelled from the whole of Natal, bar a small territory around Vryheid. One imagines that for much of white

Natal their favourite whipping-boy had got his just deserts. But which of the heads of Janus had Minister Pirow grown nervous of? As was pointed out, then and thereafter, Champion could have been side-lined by the Hertzog government long before September 1930. Were there hidden texts and sub-texts to the ministerial move? The actual wording of Pirow's order was inept on a grand scale: Champion was expelled for 'promoting feelings of hostility between the European inhabitants of the Union on the one hand, and the native inhabitants of the Union on the other ...'⁷⁵ As both his supporters and his detractors pointed out, he had been doing that for years!

Champion himself, wearing his face of childlike innocence, gave no credence to the notion of promoting hostility and instead maintained that he had recently taken up the role of wise councillor. He had 'lately interviewed several of the Zulu chiefs' and indeed Solomon 'had come to Durban this month in order to consult him', a visit that had 'surprised everybody ...'⁷⁶ Needless to say, the symbolism of the visit was not lost on any observer: this was a matter not of the ICU visiting the prince, but the prince visiting the ICU. Perhaps Champion, a man of his time, felt that he had more chance of empowering his followers with a folk sentiment if he secured the goodwill of a populist monarch, free of the caste system of the chiefs. Had the time come for a workers' revision of hierarchical monarchy, with people and king united by worker adulation rather than rural deference?

I must here differ from the ICU's finest researcher, Helen Bradford, when she says that, in 1930, Champion, wary of diminishing support, 'turned to the

countryside ...' Her own key witness – the visiting Oxford academic Marjory Perham – discovered in Champion's ICU *Ya Se* a populist voice that differed from anything envisaged by Kadalie and was, in fact, not a rural voice at all. Thus her 'secret' attendance at a concert in the ICU Workers' Hall, featuring – so she reckoned – several thousand near-naked African men:

Now they advanced, singing with sticks levelled at me like spears. Champion shouted the translation in my ear:

Who has taken the country from us?/
Who has taken it?/ Come out! Let us fight...'⁷⁷

In attempting to tap the mood of the times, we might – without proposing any causal link – see some relevance in the fact that Solomon's visit to Champion occurred in the very same month that the Reichstag election results signalled that it was nationalism rather than socialism that swayed disaffected masses. By this reckoning, (and of course Champion's situation was very different from that of Germany) the once-despised ICU might use its proletarian voice to capture a national symbol, dispense with the caste system, and re-invent the king as folk leader. Solomon's Durban visit of 31 August, then, is the stuff that novels are made of.

Two very different versions are possible of this visit, but both confirm that Solomon had neither the mood nor the personality to grasp the offer of a *führer-prinzep*. In what we might call the ICU account, a rapturous audience waited to greet Solomon with an acclaim that he would certainly not have got back in ancestral Zululand. Champion's orchestrated reception failed, however, to woo the royal visitor. The 'claimant to the throne

backed off ... and lay in bed' even as Champion 'together with 3 000 supporters nearly smashed down the door to secure his appearance'.⁷⁸ Contrast this with Solomon's summary of events, obviously intended for official scrutiny. Solomon claimed that he was recognised 'quite by chance ... when he almost fortuitously entered the ICU Social Centre'. In this account it was he who summoned Champion, and not the other way round.

Champion ... said he was very pleased to see me, because they (the ICU) were despised, even by Dube ... I made no reply, but later I sent for Champion in his office and asked him why he had made enemies with the white people, why did he talk dirty? I told him I had just come to look, but was not pleased with the words he had spoken ...⁷⁹

Solomon slipped away from the ICU headquarters at the first chance, though not without first 'accepting ten pounds from Champion and the loan of the ICU car ...'

That extra ten pounds was a necessary compensation, perhaps, for his Durban consultation. His visit was taken by the state to confirm its worst fears (fears already roused by his sullen demeanour toward the retiring Governor General, the Earl of Athlone, a month earlier.) With a very paternal sigh ('the Government is not angry but grieved') the Native Commissioner reprimanded the monarch by cutting his stipend by half.⁸⁰

The months July to September 1930 are striking in their inadvertent demonstration of a change of political mood, in South Africa as elsewhere. On 2 July our exemplary news reader might have read of Mayor Lamont's visit to the ICU and on the same day of the opening, at Fort Hare, of

what was proclaimed to be South Africa's first multi-racial conference. Edgar Brookes was a main player in this landmark assembly (sponsored by the then multi-racial Students' Christian Association) and he was proud to record afterwards that the gathering had not flinched at mixed dormitories and mixed sports teams. His autobiography makes it clear that it was at this forum that he 'took the opportunity of standing up and publicly recanting – yes, I remember I used the word 'recant' – the doctrines of separate development set forth in my *History* ...'⁸¹

With the advantage of hindsight one might surmise that the Fort Hare conference triggered the birth of a more extreme nationalism than Hertzog envisaged. For those who spot incipient themes in a single moment of time, September 13th's paper makes grim reading. It has news of the amazing electoral success of the National Socialist Party in the German elections, but also of the Dutch Reformed Church's severe censure of the Fort Hare conference, and the social intimacy that was cultivated there.⁸² Four days later, at the National Party Congress in Pretoria, P.G.W. Grobler (chairing the meeting in Hertzog's absence) took the church's cue and proclaimed segregation as the party's policy in its discriminatory rather than its protective intention. 'We refuse to consider the equality of Europeans and natives ... we cannot think in terms of months or years, but of centuries ... Our positive belief is expressed in the word "segregation" ...'⁸³

Was it by co-incidence that, a week after the proclamation of this stiffened attitude, Champion's banishment was announced? The *Natal Advertiser*

warned its readers that, while 'we hold no brief for Champion ...'

it is not a good thing that any one man, even a man like Mr Pirow, should have autocratic power to send another man, even a man like Champion, into exile ... There may be – there doubtless are – thousands of people in Durban who will say "Good riddance" when they learn that a demagogue is no longer able to stir up trouble in our midst. But how many of those thousands ever stop to think how and where their liberties were won ...?⁸⁴

'Do I look a bad man?' asked Champion of the reporters who crowded around him on 25 September seeking reasons for the Minister's banning order. It had nothing to do with racial hostility, he said, but was the result of the visit of 'Chief Solomon ka Dinizulu', who came to Durban last month 'in order to consult him'. His interviews with Zulu dignitaries were obviously taken by the police to indicate 'some huge plot of native passive resistance ...'. The term 'passive resistance' was topical: Gandhi had, that month, called off talks with the British Viceroy, returned to jail, and continued his hunger strike. With that association, banishment took on the aura of martyrdom, and the ICU leader was obviously the victim of anti-democratic forces. Certainly the next decade would give fulsome context to that interpretation. Perhaps the most famous champion of Champion, George Bernard Shaw, consoled him, during his 1935 visit, with an international perspective. 'Bad as things are here', he said, 'they can easily be paralleled or outdone by events in Europe. Your exile was pretty hard; but you can claim as your companion in misfortune no less a person than Albert Einstein ...'⁸⁵

Champion returned to Natal after

some four years to find the ICU still a name but not a force to be reckoned with. During the thirties he shared platforms with Congress speakers and was for some years after the war chairman of the Natal ANC. It is generally reckoned that he did the noble thing in not blocking Albert Luthuli's accession to that position. As the thirties progressed it was as an ANC rather than an ICU spokesman (says Bradford) that he was known to his audiences. She adds, however, that 'this cordial relationship with Congress did little to infuse the older movement with any of the earlier energy and creativity of the 'I SEE YOU...'⁸⁶

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NW = *Natal Witness*

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