South African Investment in Southern Africa:

Trade Union Responses in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa

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Labour Research Service
2006

Acknowledgments

The writer would like to acknowledge the Centre for Civil Society based at the University of Kwazulu Natal for the grant that funded the research as well as their patience and support in the process of conducting it. The interviewees were very informative and gave their time and knowledge freely. The Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) provided collegiality and company in Namibia. Comments and insights from researchers at the LRS were both critical and encouraging.

> “This working class lives a social and political existence of its own, outside the direct grip of capital. It protests and submits, rebels or is integrated into bourgeois society, sees itself as a class or loses sight of its own existence, in accordance with the forces that act upon it and the moods, conjunctures, and conflicts of social and political life. But since, in its permanent existence, it is the living part of capital, its occupational structure, modes of work, and distribution through the industries of society are determined by the ongoing processes of the accumulation of capital. It is seized, released, flung into various parts of the social machinery and expelled by others, not in accord with its own will or self-activity, but in accord with the movement of capital.” (Harry Braverman 1974: 378)

Abstract:

This paper is the product of initial research that is ongoing at the Labour Research Service to understand the movement of capital in Southern Africa and the corresponding responses of working class organisations. This paper highlights the extent of South African investment in the region and the reasons for it, showing the grave implications of South African corporate expansion for the working class in the region. It argues that South African capital spurred on the movement towards a negotiated transition to end apartheid for securing its own long term interests in South Africa and through this, its interests in the region as a whole. In other words it did so not just for quick financial gain but for ensuring long term stability in the region for capital accumulation (capitalist exploitation). It therefore suggests that to ensure that cross-border investment generates benefits for workers and improves the socio-economic conditions in the region, trade unions and social justice organisations need to develop strategies and alliances to act as effective countervailing forces to South African capital which, in the process of expansion, is entrenching historical patterns of inequality and under-development in Southern Africa. Through interviews with trade unions in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, this paper highlights the ambiguous attitude that trade unions have towards South African capital – South African capital is welcomed as a source of jobs but there are concerns of how exploitative it can be. The interviews also show how unprepared trade unions are at present to confront the broader implications of South African corporate expansion. Recommendations, distilled from interviews with trade unionists, on how to overcome this status quo are provided in the last section.

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Introduction:

South African capital has been able to craft its image anew during the 1990s. It is one and all of these: liberator, reconciler, developer, protector and provider. Liberator of the majority from apartheid shackles, reconciler of racial and cultural differences, developer of the economy, protector of human rights and provider of employment and livelihoods. The changing of its image was no small task given South African capital's international isolation and pariah status together with the apartheid state, which it was associated with, during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact to talk of its association, let alone complicity, with the apartheid state today can easily be labelled as destructive, unpatriotic and even misinformed – note the negative responses to the recent attempt to sue multinationals including big South African companies for apartheid reparations in a US court.[1] The eulogies for arch capitalists by prominent promoters of sanctions against and isolation of South Africa shows how far South African capital has come in achieving its task of legitimising itself in South Africa (Mbeki for Harry Oppenheimer in 2000 and more recently for Anton Rupert in January 2006)[2]. Photographs and news articles in the media of liberation movement stalwarts wining and dining with captains

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[1] See Business Day articles: "Reparations will aid reconstruction" 16 April 2003; "Mbeki pans apartheid lawsuits" 16 April 2003; "New attempt to settle reparations lawsuits" 8 May 2003.

[2] The following two quotes are from Business Day articles. The first titled "Leaders pay tribute to his immense contribution to the political and economic development of SA" is on Harry Oppenheimer and the second titled "Rupert legacy 'a great spirit of enterprise' is on Anton Rupert."

"President Thabo Mbeki said it was with a deep sense of sadness that he learned of the passing away of one of the illustrious sons of SA. He said Oppenheimer had played a seminal role in the industrialisation of SA. He bequeathed to our country not only an industrial empire spanning the width and breadth of Africa and the world but also major legacies in the fields of education, arts and community development. It was not widely known that Oppenheimer played a pivotal role in reconciliation in the country, he said. The African National Congress described Oppenheimer as one of SAs outstanding businessmen and acknowledged his and Anglos contribution in building the economy of the country and in creating employment for hundreds of thousands of South Africans as well as citizens of our neighbouring countries. The ANC called on his business colleagues to continue with his good work.
http://www.businessday.co.za/Articles/TarkArticle.aspx?ID=336550;
Posted on 2000/08/21

"Rupert's philanthropic efforts included playing a leading role in creating cross-border parks and a life-long commitment to fostering Afrikaner culture and language. President Thabo Mbeki said Rupert was a pioneer in the establishment of SA's footprint in the global financial and commercial world. He would be remembered not only for his business acumen but for his devotion to nature and environmental conservation. Former president Nelson Mandela said Rupert had lived a full life in which he served his country, the world and humanity."
http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/article.aspx?ID=BD4A141423, Posted to the web on: 20 January 2006.

of industry adds to their new found legitimacy. Even within South African working class organisations, capital is viewed and courted to be part of struggles against poverty, HIV/Aids, violence, job losses, sexual discrimination and indeed the racial legacy of the past. In such a context it becomes easy to bury memories of the intense debates within the region's liberation movements and among its intellectuals about the link between apartheid and capitalism or the peculiarities of capitalist development in South Africa or the process of capital accumulation in South Africa and its impact on the southern African region or the role of monopoly capital in Southern Africa. And the task of getting people, organisations and movements to bury memories is most difficult and has been miraculously accomplished within such a short time span – maybe therein lies the South African exceptionalism that many were engrossed in discovering all those years!

Nevertheless, to remain true to itself, capital creates conditions for its own undoing.[3] The real effects that South African capital has on the South African and the regional economy are experienced daily as job losses, low wages, authoritarian management styles, bad working conditions and monopolistic tendencies. Questions and concerns are being raised again about the role of South African capital and while South African investment is now welcome throughout the region, this welcome is becoming more ambiguous. Blade Nzimande (2006), General Secretary of the South African Communist Party notes on his recent visit to Zambia:

> "A major concern from a number of African leaders and activists is the role of South African capital in the rest of the continent. As of now this is predominantly, though not exclusively, white capital, seeking to exploit weak labour legislation in the rest of the continent, making super profits from casualised labour and other extreme forms of exploitation…The question of South African investment on the continent, welcome as it might be, requires thorough analysis, as some of this investment, for instance in the commercial sector, is destroying black owned small enterprises in the continent. South African capital is seen as predatory in its operations. The issue that some of the Zambian leaders we met raised was that, irrespective of the subjective will of the ANC-led government, South African capital is objectively acting as a 'sub-imperialist' power, and NEPAD is now increasingly associated with this 'sub-imperialism'."

This ambiguity is also found in trade unions in the region. Their representatives are scathing about the low "apartheid" wages, poor working conditions, retrenchments,

[3] To paraphrase Marx who writes in the Communist Manifesto that "Capitalism creates its own gravediggers".

"baas-skap"[4] mentality, racist practices as well as precarious conditions of employment that South African companies dish out. These trade union representatives, however, are just as eager to play a role in creating a stable environment for South African capital to invest so as to mitigate deepening poverty and high unemployment levels in their respective countries.

This paper begins by summarising approaches to South African capital developed during the 1970s and 1980s and briefly outlines the analysis on which these approaches were based. It does so with the intention of restarting this debate as it is essential for providing a strategic vision for civil society organisations striving for greater political, economic and social justice. It also highlights findings of recent research that describes the expansion of South African corporations in southern Africa and the impact it is having. The findings of interviews to understand trade union responses to this expansion are then presented. Finally, recommendations are made on how to improve the strategic response of trade unions to South African corporate expansion.

It should be stated at the outset that South African capital is seen as neither worse nor better than capital from other countries. However, the focus on South African capital is due to its growing presence in the region, in many cases becoming a bigger investor than traditional foreign investors based in developed countries. What should also be clear is that the impact it is having in other countries is not the sole concern. That this investment has given South African capital more leverage over the working class in South Africa is just as much of a concern.

South African Capital and the Southern African Region

> "We are inextricably part of southern Africa and our destiny is linked to that of a region, which is much more than a mere geographical concept. The historical patterns of relations in southern Africa have, however, been highly uneven and inequitable. The regional economy that emerged under colonialism entrenched the domination of one country (South Africa) and incorporated other countries in subsidiary and

[4] The phrase "baas-skap" means authoritarian management but with racist overtones reflecting the racial division of labour in South Africa.

> dependent roles as labour reserves, markets for South African commodities, suppliers of certain services (such as transport) or providers of cheap and convenient resources (like water, electricity and some raw materials)." (Mandela 1993: 110)

The literature on South African companies investing in the region since the 1990s highlights the value of the investment, the sectors in which this investment is located and the reasons that underpin decisions of individual companies to invest. There are three broad concerns that can be discerned in this literature. The first is how the investment climate in the recipient countries has changed, specifically focussing on the introduction of new policies to attract foreign investment, and the effects of this on the economy and on business. The second area is on the socio-economic problems that South African companies are creating in the recipient countries. The third looks at what impact South African companies in the region are having on South Africa's political role in the region. What is absent in this literature, which was a burning concern in the 1980s, is the nature of South African capital and its role in the region. It is important to take up this debate as it provides strategic insight for trade unions and civil society organisations. This section sketches the main arguments in this debate before providing an overview of South African investment since 1990.

The nature of South African capital: Debates during the 1980s.

Much time was spent debating the nature of South African capital in the 1980s within liberation movements throughout the region. The possibility of a negotiated settlement strangled this debate as the more pressing issue of reaching agreement on the constitutional arrangements and form of government took precedence. Three main perspectives can be discerned, each with different strategic implications. The first two are premised on the existence of South African capital but differ on how it emerged, its significance in development and the role it plays. The third view argues that capital in South Africa is international rather than indigenous South African capital.

The analysis of Dan Nabudere and Yash Tandon is that there is no indigenous capital.[5] The evidence for this argument is that the major companies in South Africa were either subsidiaries of multinational companies based in developed countries or

[5] In Amir et al (1987: 15), Derrick Chitalia outlines this view held by Yash Tandon and Dan Nabudere, p15.

were financed by financiers based in the United Kingdom at first and over time banks and other financial institutions from Germany, the USA, Switzerland and other developed countries. Whites in South Africa were petty bourgeois and international capital allowed for this development through creating opportunities for social mobility through education and preserving management positions for them to divide and rule. The white petty bourgeoisie therefore served as perpetuating the interests of imperialism through regulating and oppressing black workers and the black population at large. The strategic implication of such a view was to break the system of white domination through which imperialism is maintained by the formation of a broad alliance of forces, including black petty bourgeois forces to develop a national strategy for development (and the creation of national developmental states as a primary vehicle for countering extractive and exploitative imperialist domination).

The other two views argue that South African capital does exist as an enormous power in South Africa and therefore in the region. It is tied to a processes of accumulation in the region, however, through its engagement with the forces of monopoly capital, mainly British in the early part of the century and then more and more with America and European capital, it has created certain patterns of accumulation that benefits both its own interest and that of the dominant forces of monopoly capital. In so doing it became highly integrated with these forces yet retained autonomy. There are however differences:

In the analyses of Lipton (1980), Terreblanche and Natrass (1990) and Yudelman (1983) the discovery of diamonds and then gold created certain needs in South Africa, viz. to supply the mines with labour, food, materials, and a range of services. In other words, manufacturing and services developed as a result of surpluses emanating from the mining industry. International factors, like world wars and economic crisis, stimulated local industry but this expansion soon hit the barrier of the limited market (an important limitation of the consumer market in South Africa is that workers' incomes were extremely low and to keep wages low, capital had to ensure the dispossession of land and a large pool of surplus labour). Furthermore, militant struggles to secure white privilege were waged by white workers due to attempts by the mining magnates to reduce expensive white labour and replace them with cheap black labour in the early 1920s. This seeds of apartheid was sewn as business, white workers and the state reached a compromise. Having compromised with white workers, black workers had to be super exploited to ensure high rates of return on investment. Another feature, given the inability of South African capital to compete in markets already sewn up by imperial forces, was that the region became the natural market for South African capital, not just for goods and services but for obtaining resources and inputs from and possibly establishing production sites in, thereby creating uneven and combined development in the region with relations of dependency on industrial South Africa.[6] The strategic implication of this view is that given the ties that bind South African capital to the region it is possible to persuade them to play a development role. By the 1970s already they appeared to be willing to service new needs (a growing black consumer market) and will be willing to compromise (or shift focus) to new, more humane and equitable forms, of accumulation if there is sufficient national and regional pressure on them.

The other view rejects what is seen as a linear trajectory of the development of South African capital from primary (mining) to secondary (manufacturing) and then to an increasingly tertiary economy (finance, telecoms, tourism, etc.). In fact it rejects the view that capital is merely an economic category devoid of political organisation and ideology. Furthermore, it rejects the view that racial capitalism emerges as a result of an Afrikaner ideology and homogeneity that existed since the beginning of time – at least since Great Trek - and the formation of the Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, with the outcome and end-goal being the rule of the National Party in South Africa that began in 1948.[7] The highly unequal regional relations were also not merely a result of the uneven development in the region where South Africa's industrial strength automatically secured or attracted surpluses which in turn gave it more power – a cycle that automatically created relations of dependency.

In the analyses of Bozzoli (1980), Innes (1984), O'Meara (1983), and Martin (1990) there is a focus on the how struggles gave rise to certain class forces. In other words these class forces were not mechanically created out of economic necessity but

[6] See works on the history of South Africa by Lipton (1986), Terreblanch and Natrass (1990), Yudelman (1983), Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman (1991).
[7] See Dan O'Meara's "Volkskapitalisme" which rejects the homogeneity of Afrikaners and argues that Afrikaner ideology emerged through political process in the 1930s and 40s. He provides a detailed analysis of how the National Party came to power in 1948.

rather were forged in struggles around the production and distribution of wealth. In short, struggles waged around production and distribution – the process of accumulation – determines the very form that it takes rather than being a naturally given process.

Martin (1990) and Bozolli (1980) argue that in so far as capitalist relations became dominant in South Africa through imperial imposition, and specifically to foster the growth of mining, a South African capitalist class did not emerge that was embedded in or tied to the economy of the country and the region. This form of capitalism (mining and also commercial) was extractive and restricted the development of inter industry linkages in the economy necessary for industrialisation. It was only through struggles around the accumulation process in South Africa that a South African capitalist class developed, and like other capitalist classes, realised itself as a class through developing political interests and an ideology based on economic interests. This process of class formation was driven by manufacturing economic interests, which were present in the country before the 1900s, however, lacked political and ideological cohesiveness and were still relatively small. In the early twenties conditions were created that allowed manufacturing interests to lead a process of altering the process of accumulation and to consolidate a South African capitalist class lead by their political and economic interests but incorporating mining, agriculture and commercial interests. These conditions were the acute social and political crisis in the country and the decline of British hegemony internationally. With the decline in prices of raw material, mining interests began to reduce labour costs resulting in a social crisis – the black workers strike of 1920 and the Rand Revolt of white workers in 1922. The political crisis was stimulated by the growth of white poverty and dissatisfaction of the white electorate with the ruling party's inability to deal with growing white unemployment. Given this crisis, the government was lost to anti-imperial parties (the Pact government of 1924), which was precisely what was required by manufacturing interests for their consolidation. The strength and consolidation of manufacturing interest can be seen by the adoption of protectionist policies by the state (which is what manufacturing interests were arguing the state should do) and the pervasive ideology of 'South Africanism' that was promoted by manufacturing interests.[8] Focusing on regulating trade, but also on the development of industry through establishing state owned companies (Iskor established

[8] For a discussion on "South Africanism" see Bozzoli (1980). She explains how this emerges at first to bring together small businesses against monopoly capital's control of the market but later becomes an ideology that seeks to unite different white strata including white labour.

in 1928 was the first) which also created jobs for unemployed whites had long lasting effects on industrial development in South Africa and broke the existing trajectory of South Africa being producer of mainly primary products. This anti-imperial government had ramifications for the region – existing relations with the territories under British colonial and settler rule in the region began to be fundamentally altered. South African capital, with a highly protective state, was able to industrialise because of the restrictions on goods from the home countries of the imperial forces as well as the territories in Southern Africa and cheap black labour in the country and from the Southern African region. Given the decline of British hegemony internationally and the economic crisis beginning in the late 1920s, South African capital was able to penetrate and restructure the markets of these neighbouring countries – creating "strongly interdependent and inherently unequal relationships…across the landscape of southern Africa for the first time".[9] This anti-imperial path, however, was short-lived, but left its mark on South African capital. It gave it a relative autonomy from monopoly capital based in developed countries even as monopoly capital began to invest more in the country's manufacturing sector after WWII thereby ensuring its integration. At the same time, although the growth of manufacturing was rapid, surpassing Agriculture in 1930 and Mining in 1943,[10] South African companies understood its limits of competing internationally against American and European capital. At best it could integrate with international capital negotiating its role in the accumulation process in South Africa and the Southern African region (an accumulation process based on low-wage black labour under extremely oppressive conditions).[11]

The strategic implication of this view is that an alliance of organisations of black workers and other oppressed classes in South Africa and the region is important to resist domination of both South African capital and monopoly capital from developed countries. A broad alliance, against South African and monopoly capital is necessary to

[9] Martin (1990) provides an account of the complex relations that emerged between the different territories in the region during the inter war years.

[10] See O'Meara (1983: 226)

[11] See Innes (1984) for a discussion on how South African capital and specifically Anglo American and the Oppenheimer family monopolised the economy, expanded and played an imperialist role in the region while integrating with monopoly capital in developed countries.

develop not just national but regional development strategies led by states backed up by counter-hegemonic social forces (that are regional in character).

The first and third view was most popular in the 1980s and strategies and tactics were often argued on this basis – and there were numerous differences about tactics and what constituted immediate or long term goals. It is ironic that today, however, the second view seems to be dominant, at least in so far as South African capital is viewed as a potential agent of equitable socio-economic transformation. Perhaps views are shaped purely by the level of struggle so that when there are intense upheavals (like in the 1970s and 1980s) more radical views are adopted and when struggles became more diffuse (as it did in the 1990s) more conciliatory views are adopted towards capital. However, there is very little research currently, compared to the 1980s, on the nature of ownership and control in South African companies and on how these companies have transformed during the 1990s.

In his detailed study of Anglo American, Innes argues that South African capital undergoes a major transformation after WWII – a transition to monopoly capital. He shows, through empirical and concrete examples of Anglo American's operations, how ownership and control of different companies operating in various sectors is concentrated in a few hands. Although, he questions the extent of the anti-imperial nature of the pact government in the 1920s, he shows how capital's ability to restructure itself in the interwar years through disciplining labour (and crushing fledgling unions organising black workers) puts in a position to expand and consolidate capitalist accumulation in manufacturing, despite international recessionary conditions, and develops financial institutions and mechanisms appropriate for this process – in the case of Anglo (and other major mining groups) the producer became banker. He sets out to:

> "…establish that South Africa's transition to monopoly capitalism has been accompanied by a corresponding drive towards imperialism. If this is indeed the case then it means that, even though its influence is as yet largely confined only to southern Africa, South Africa has become an active participant in forging the international network of economic and political relations which constitutes the modern system of imperialism." (Innes 1984: 240)

He does indeed conclude that South African society has evolved over a century, through the development of powerful multinational companies like Anglo American, “from an underdeveloped chattel of imperialism into an aggressive imperialist power which exhibits many characteristics of monopoly capitalist society.” (ibid: 241)

Reviewing the literature of the 1980s shows that debates were informed as much by research and analysis as it was by practice and experience of civil society organisations. This debate is important and begs conclusion, not just for its own sake but for ensuring coherent strategies of workers and community organisations in their struggles against inequality and exploitation. What is suggested is here is not that individuals need to simply clarify where they stand in this debate but how through taking it up again, expanding the empirical knowledge on contemporary developments and deepening the analysis through debate, a clearer vision and more appropriate strategies can be crafted for the labour movement and civil society organisations as they strive for greater political, economic and social justice. Perhaps the literature in the 1970s

Overview of Investments

South African companies (including state owned enterprises - SOE) collectively have made South Africa the biggest investor in many countries in the region – displacing the traditional big investor countries like the U.K., the USA and those from the EU. Between 1990 and 1996 more than 30 companies announced investment plans in SADC countries to the value of about R9 billion according to BusinessMap, a Johannesburg policy information and research group. This investment was located in various sectors – mining, agriculture, banking, retail, telecommunications, textiles, food processing, electricity, construction and tourism. Anglo American, Engen, Standard Bank, South African Breweries, Illovo Sugar, Sun International, Shopright Checkers, Billiton, Eskom, Steers are some of the familiar South African companies that invested.[12]

12 See article “SA Firms Investing in Southern Africa”, Business Day, 4 October 1996 and a recent Unctad study (2005) “Case study on outward foreign direct investment by South African enterprises”. http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/c3em26d2a5_en.pdf. For tables that provide a list of South African companies investing in various sectors in different African countries see Ahwireng-Obeng, F. and McGowan, P. (1998). For more recent lists see the UNCTAD (2005) as well as Daniel et al (2003).

The Unctad study prepared in 2005 on outward foreign direct investment by South African enterprises says that:

> "the number of South African companies doing business in Africa has more than doubled in a decade since 1994 and by the beginning of 2005, 34 of the top 100 JSE-listed companies had 232 investment projects in 27 African countries, employing 71,874 people…More than 22 per cent of FDI flows received by the Southern African Development community (SADC) in 1994-2004 were from South Africa, with the share in some years exceeding 40 per cent."[13]

An interesting point made in this study is how the value of South African investment in the continent pales in relation to the value of South Africa's investment in developed countries – 76.1% of FDI stock is located in the EU, 9.4% in the Americas and 8.8% in Africa. In 2003, the two African countries that made it on the top ten destination countries of South African FDI were Mozambique (ninth) and Mauritius (tenth). The United Kingdom (first on the list) received R44 billion while Mozambique received R5 billion in that year. Another pertinent point made is that recent foreign investment of State Owned Enterprises (SOE) is located in Africa especially in transport and communications infrastructure.

A paper in the annual publication, ***State of the Nation***, states that South African assets in Africa stood at R23 billion in 2000. "This reflected an increase of R3,3 billion over the 1999 figure which, in turn reflected an even larger increase of R6,1 billion over the 1998 figure".[14] The writers of this paper make two interesting points about the manner in which South African companies invest:

1. In order to expand business opportunities in Africa, South African companies either acquires a local company that it upgrades or it goes into partnership with local companies.
2. Companies in 6 primary sectors of South Africa's economy (mining, retail, construction/manufacturing, financial services, telecommunications, tourism/leisure) have worked hand in hand in securing South African investment throughout the continent.

[13] Although it is stated that this study was "prepared and edited by the UNCTAD secretariat" it was done so "with substantive inputs from Reg Rumney, Executive Director, BusinessMap Foundation, South Africa."

[14] See Daniel J. Naidoo, V and Naidu, S. (2003: 379)

Literature emanating from development organisations like Unctad and from business oriented research highlight the push and pull factors of South African investment on the continent. To explain the where, when and how of foreign direct investment, Dunning (1996) argues that the firm projects how it can "internalize" (I) the costs of operating in a foreign country by identifying its "ownership" (O) advantages as well as the "locational" (L) advantages of the foreign (host) country.[15] Among the pull factors are: exchange control relaxation, liberalisation, privatisation, government incentives, stable political environment, economic stability, natural resources, complimentary markets for goods and services. Of the push factors are: over capitalisation of South African market, increased competition in South Africa, liberalisation of trade and investment regulations, relaxation of South African exchange controls, government incentives to expand, and the need to control resources and inputs.

Reports from BusinessMap and other writers also outline the possible consequences that South African investment could have on the economy in other countries of the region:[16]

- Displacing local operations like small businesses, especially in retail/wholesale sectors where South African companies proved to be very aggressive, could be wiped out
- Undermining employment levels due to the capital-intensive nature of South African mining, manufacturing and retail investments.
- Entrenching economic instability as foreign investment flows mainly to extractive and primary sectors – prices in these sectors are volatile and do not bring in the necessary foreign exchange to purchase manufactured goods.

Trade unions and socioeconomic justice researchers highlight working conditions, incomes and rights of workers in South African companies in Africa. The African Labour Research Network published a collection of reports on the effects of South African companies on workers in a publication called the African Social Observatory. In the report by Anthony Baah, *Country Study 2: Ghana – Woolworths*, it is noted: "According to the workers we interviewed, management discourages workers

[15] see Dunning, J. H. and Narula, R. (1996). John Dunning has written extensively on FDI from a business angle and there is a range of issues that emerge in the various publications from Unctad, especially it's annul publication, **World Investment Report**, issued from 1991. Each issue has a section on Africa. www.unctad.org.

[16] See Businessmap (1998), UNCTAD Study (2005)

from forming or joining a trade union. Management-staff keep intimidating and reminding workers of the lack of jobs in Ghana with statements like 'you come begging for jobs' and, 'there are many people in the streets without jobs'". In the report *Country Study 3: Shopright – Zambia*, Austin Muneka writes: "The expatriates hold all the key and top management positions including that of General Manager and Finance Manager. The only Zambian in Key management position is the Human Resource Manager." He highlights other issues faced by unions:

> "Management was aware of expiry of current Collective Agreement and explained that negotiations to review and extend the Collective Agreement were in progress and will soon be concluded with the union. On disclosure of information on strategic company issues management maintained that this was the discretion of the Shoprite Checkers Head Office in Western Cape South Africa. This include information on company finances, investment, restructuring. Strategic information could only be availed with the express permission of the Head Office in South Africa." [17]

Darlene Miller (2005) has another take on the experience of workers at Shoprite in Zambia. She discusses the aspirations that workers develop when working in a South African company and how their struggle for parity in wages and conditions with South African workers reflects regional claims that can build trade union solidarity.

In literature with a politics focus the debate has been on the role of the South African state in the region with questions ranging from is it a hegemon or is it a regional power or is it sub-imperialist. This literature takes as its starting point the role that South Africa played in the region when it was governed by an Apartheid regime – military intervention and economic persuasion – and compares it to the role it is playing in the post-apartheid period. To a large degree there is consensus that despite a change in government and government policy, the South African State wields great power in the region allowing it to sway other States in the region politically. It also benefits from economic opportunities in the region created by privatisation initiatives. Here reference can be made to South Africa's leadership role in developing Nepad, the role it plays in multilateral organisations like the WTO, the growth of trade surpluses with countries in the region despite attempts at ensuring equity-based regional trade agreements (SADC

[17]. The full report of the African Social Observatory of the ALRN can be downloaded from: http://www.naledi.org.za/docs/mnc-socialobs.pdf . The quotes can be found on pages 67, 82, 86 respectively.

FTA and the SACU agreement) and the revenue coming back to South Africa generated by South African business operations in the region. [18]

South African investment: Development or entrenching historical forms of capitalist accumulation?

To understand the imperatives of South African investment is different from looking at abstract push-and-pull factors or the effects of this investment. The negative effects pointed out above could be regarded as unintended and therefore can easily be overcome through dialogue. However the imperatives driving this investment points to another conclusion – that these negative effects go hand in hand with the investment strategies of South African companies.

South African companies were faced with problems of accumulation before the political crisis became acute in the mid 1980s. As the world economy went into recession in the early 1970s, South African companies had to bear the rise in import costs, the decline in productivity and the high cost of borrowing as foreign investment declined. One way out was to expand the market for capital goods exports in the Southern African region but as Kaplan argued:

> "Many local producers are either subsidiaries of, or manufacture under licence from, overseas corporations and are restricted, in terms of these arrangements, to exporting to the Southern African region alone. The Southern African market has been growing only very slowly and South African companies have been increasingly encountering 'political obstacles' as neighbouring countries attempt to seek alternative sources of supply." (Kaplan 1991:185)

Aside from needing to find export markets, South African business had to deal with the rising cost of labour not just due to the decline in productivity, which gives wages more prominence in the overall cost structure of production, but due to the increasing resistance by black workers to low wages since 1973. A second imperative was, therefore, to depoliticise the working class in South Africa which linked every

[18] See Vale et al (2001) and more recently Schoeman (2003). On 3 May 2006 an article in Business Day asks: Why SA should rule regional roost? (by Adam Habib and Nthakeng Selinyane) - The overarching goal being political stability. Bond sums up his sub imperialism position succinctly in an article for **Counterpunch**, with a title "The George Bush of Africa: Pretoria Chooses Subimperialism" where he discuses South Africa's role in the African continent through Nepad and the African Union. Keet (1994) is concerned with political and economic imbalances and the intervention of the International Financial Institutions (World Bank and IMF) as well as the World Trade Organisation.

issue (from low wages to lack of housing) to the form of rule – apartheid – and in so doing began to put the entire system of accumulation under strain. Steven Freidman (1987: 3) describes this politicisation:

> "Once strikes by African workers had been so rare that each one was newsworthy. By 1984, they had become so common that, on average, more that 1000 were on strike each working day…Workers did not only strike – they formed organisations which helped them act together…The way these organisations are run is as important as the changes they have achieved…members control decisions and that leaders must obey the wishes of workers they represent…They have also given workers a chance to develop skills and talents…"

As long as business could not pursue these imperatives it had to continue to undermine the obstacles to them through defensive forms of restructuring. Cassim (1987: 536) states that:

> "In fact the current recession, which started in 1981, shows no sign of being followed by self-sustaining economic recovery. The only restructuring that has been achieved is negative – closing down of companies, retrenchment of labour and outflow of capital."

Towards the end of the 1980s conditions in the region and in South Africa were altered substantially and allowed business to overcome the 'political problems' it encountered in the region as well as the prospect of depoliticising the working class in South Africa which would allow for economic restructuring to increase productivity. These conditions were obviously fuelled by international developments, mainly the rise of neo-liberal orthodoxy in developed countries and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of socialist experiments internationally.

Intense repression of mass movements by the apartheid state in the latter half of the 1980s led the ANC to accept a negotiated settlement to apartheid in which there would be no alteration to the accumulation process.[19] By 1990 other countries in

[19] Ryklief (1996) argues that "the process of reform, resistance and repression weakened both the state and the black opposition sufficiently to allow for the emergence of a consensual solution to the political stalemate" reached in the 1980s. Also see Marias (1998) for an overview of the crisis in the 1980s and the outcome of the negotiated settlement. The title of the book "South Africa: Limits to change" aptly describes the constitutional nature of the transition as opposed to the change in the accumulation process but also provides insight on the social developments that shape the reforms.

Southern Africa already endorsed or were preparing to endorse structural adjustment programmes and began competing for foreign investment.[20]

The advantage that these conditions gave South African business is what allowed for their sudden embracing of democracy and development and crafting tales of their long "resistance" to apartheid.[21] In 1996, the SA Foundation (1996: 1), a business organisation representing business in the economic policy debate wrote:

> "South Africa has embarked on a great national project. We want to eradicate poverty whilst remaining true to the ideals of freedom and democracy. We want to become the first African country to play a leading role in the global economic society. And we want to be the economic engine that pulls Africa into a prosperous and exciting future."

The euphoric overtones in proposals for economic policy under the new government can be explained by the prospects for finally overcoming the crisis they were in. The economy had already shown signs of growth and profitability under the government of National Unity. Behind this new found South Africanism, however, lies the real business imperatives to secure regional markets and strategic resources and, where profitable, purchase and expand productive enterprises, like for example, SAB's (now SABMiller) acquisition of beer companies.

In the country, South African business wasted no time to restructure relations of productions – replacing workers and restructuring the workplace with machines and computers, the increase of contract and casual labour and increasing hours of work. Some companies even adopted ancient capitalist practices of piece work as in the clothing industry.[22] That capitalist accumulation in South Africa and by implication in the Southern African region is based on a cheap labour system is undeniable.[23]

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[20] See the impetus towards Structural adjustment programmes in the region and the effects it is having on selected countries in Mwanza (1992)

[21] Samir Amin (1987: 2) brushes this aside when he says simply that "If today Apartheid is being called into question in South Africa, it is not because this form constitutes an obstacle to capitalist expansion, but because the struggles of the black South Africans who are its victims, make it unworkable"

[22] For an overview of the labour market see Naledi (2004) and for a study on n contract and casual labour in the retail sector see LRS (2002).

[23] Ebrahim Patel says in a paper on the role of labour (1994: 14) "South Africa's history has been one of low wages, and low skills and increasing poverty for workers – ie the misery trap. During the low wage – high growth decade of the 1960s the benefits of economic growth did not accrue to workers." In this vein

These effects are necessary elements of this investment by private and South African state-owned-enterprises – they allowed companies to be profitable once again and to escape the crisis afflicting them since the 1970s. Capital accumulation is not the same as development. It is in fact a social, economic and political process of subordinating the working class and other classes in the region to the imperative of company profits. This is what South African capital is attempting to do with their new found legitimacy. In so doing is undermining gains that workers have made in South Africa and other countries in the region. It is heightening the levels of inequality between and within, and structurally enforcing unemployment and poverty throughout, the various countries of the region. In addition it is circumscribing existing spaces for the emergence of independent productive initiatives, whether by the state or small scale entrepreneurs. In other words South African investment in the region continues to be an obstacle to development and conforms to the general description by Marx (1983: 712) that "capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt".[24]

Interviews with Trade Unions in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa

> "Cosatu unions are very aware that weak unions in neighbouring states will ultimately undermine their own battles, undercutting wages and worker rights. Regional ties can also help strengthen workers' bargaining power. This becomes more important as more and more companies, both South African and multi-nationals, have operations in various countries in the region." (The Shopsteward 1995)

Liv Torres (1998: 89) points out that it is incorrect to measure the strength of trade unions by numbers alone. She also points out the erroneous method used in Southern Africa to determine union density by comparing union membership with general employment figures – as employment statistics include large numbers of non-unionised workers in the informal economy it undermines the actual union density in the formal economy. Measuring union density as the percentage of union membership

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one could ask how things have changed for South African workers as the country has experienced continuous growth for over a decade since 1994.

[24] This quote comes out of volume one of Marx's Capital where he discusses the genesis of the industrial capitalist.

to formal employment reveals that union density in Southern Africa is comparable to union density in Europe. She suggests, however, that "the strength of labour will depend in the first place upon the extent to which it has developed goals, norms, strategies and directions" (ibid: 86). This study relates to the latter point, that is, to what extent have unions begun to develop practices informed by positions and strategies on the growth of South African investment in the region? Interviews were conducted with trade union representatives to provide this insight. This section presents details of who was interviewed, the questions posed and what was said. It draws then draws out the general critical issues highlighted through these interviews.

The choice of countries needs to be clarified first. Zimbabwe and Namibia have extremely diverse historical relations with South Africa and the effects of South African investment are assumed to be different or at least have different nuances in the two countries. Namibia, or South West Africa as it was known until 1990 when it attained independence, became a colony of South Africa after the defeat of Germany in WWI and its economy was entirely integrated with South Africa's. Zimbabwe, or Southern Rhodesia as it was then called, was granted Responsible Government in 1923 after white settlers rejected unification with South Africa. Unlike South West Africa and other colonial territories in the region, Southern Rhodesia developed a relatively strong industrial base and internal market with independent settler interests in the country whose interests often clashed with those of South African business. Given this diversity in historical relations it is important to look at how unions perceive the impact of recent South African investment in their respective countries because these perceptions help to clarify the possibilities of trade union cooperation in the region with regard to engaging South African investors..[25]

The second issue in need of clarification is the sample of interviewees. Given the short time and resources available, the General Secretaries or someone nominated by the General Secretaries of trade unions were chosen for interviews as they would have a broader assessment of how the union as a whole is responding to South African investment. Ideally it would be important to interview organisers of trade unions that

[25] For a brief history of South Africa's colonisation of Namibia see Omer-Cooper (1987: 262-273) and for relations between Southern Rhodesia and South Africa between WWI and WWII see Martin (1990: 131-132).

organise in, as well as shop stewards that work for, South African companies. This would yield more detail about the effects of South African companies and how workers are responding. It is, nevertheless, important to consult the General Secretaries and get their consent for this research thereby allowing them to provide insight on how it can benefit the labour movement in the region.

Zimbabwe Interviews:

The table below indicates the unions and non union organisations that were chosen for interviews in Zimbabwe between the 11th and the 15th October 2005. The highlighted rows indicate that interviews did not materialise with these organisations. Ledriz (the Labour Economic Development and Research Institute of Zimbabwe), which is a labour based research institute aligned to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, was also chosen to be interviewed. In addition to the trade unions, SAPSN (Southern African Peoples Network), SEATINI (Southern and Eastern African Trade Initiative) and MWENGO (Mwelekeo wa NGO) were also chosen for interviews as these organisations are active social-justice organisations that focus on international economic relations.

Organisation	Position in Org.	Surname	Name
Associated Mineworkers Union	Education Officer	Ndlovu	Webster
Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe		Kanyenza	Godfrey
Federation of Food and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Kuzondishaya	Leonard
MWENGO	Project Officer	Deve	Thomas
SEATNI	Acting Director	Machemedze	Rangarirai
Southern African Peoples Network (SAPSN & Zimcodd)	Co-ordinator	Kasiamhuru	Patricia
Transport and General Workers Union	General Secretary Deputy G-S	Makanda Kanengoni	Farayi Mr.
ZCTU	General Secretary	Chibebe	Wellington
Zimbabwe Catering and Hotel Workers Union	National Organising Secretary	Murawo	Maxwell Munyaradzi
Zimbabwe Chemicals and Plastics	General Secretary	Emmanuel	George
Zimbabwe Construction and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Gumbo	Mr.

Of the unions that interviews were set with, two did not materialise due to unforeseen circumstances that the interviewees had to deal with. These were the Associated Mineworkers Union and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Also the person at Ledriz (the Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe) was in South Africa at the time interviews were being conducted so no interview was held. In addition, the General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Construction and Allied Workers Union granted an appointment but indicated at the time of the interview that he wished not to continue with the interview because he felt that the project was not relevant due to the countries in the region having different industrial relations frameworks and did not see how this research would contribute to strengthening the unions.

The key questions posed to the unions were:

1. Does the union collect information about South African companies in their sector and in their country?
2. How dominant are South African companies in the sector they organise in and in the economy generally?
3. What benefits do South African companies offer the sector they organise in or the country's economy generally?
4. Are there any negative effects of South African companies on the sector they organise in or on economy generally?
5. Do they organise at and have members working for South African companies?
6. What difficulties do they experience in their relations with South African companies?
7. What issues were they taking up in these companies?
8. Is the union working together with unions in other countries, the international trade secretariats and specifically South African unions regarding the issues they were taking up and what was the nature of this work?
9. Does the union see the need for unions in the region to monitor and engage South African companies on a regional level?
10. What ideas are they pursuing or would like to see being pursued regarding South African companies?
11. How has the political situation in the country affected the union's ability to organise and bargain?

The findings of the interviews are discussed under the headings below.

Collection of information and data on companies:

None of the unions collect information on companies in a systematic manner and clearly not about the ownership of companies. While some unions do not draw distinctions between companies that their members work in, others are able to distinguish between multi-national and indigenous companies. However, they do not distinguish between multinationals on the basis of the home countries of these companies. For this reason unions could not provide a list of South African companies that they have members in nor could they say how dominant South African companies were in the sector. The individuals interviewed, however, did indicate that multinationals were dominant in their sectors and the economy and shared their knowledge about grievances and industrial action in certain companies which they believed to be South African.

Impact of South African companies:

The interviewees also could not say what negative effects South African companies were having on their economy as the economy has been in decline for a number of years and is currently in a crisis due a range of political problems. They did indicate, however, that the conditions of employment were worse than in South Africa. An example was made by the Chemicals and Plastics union that Johnson & Johnson workers in Zimbabwe were not given the same benefits as those in South Africa. The Catering and Hotel union also made a similar point and said a survey needs to be carried out for the purpose of harmonising the conditions of work in the region. The Transport union indicated that companies were taking advantage of the declining value of the Zimbabwe Dollar and are using more Zimbabwean workers for transport in the region because they get paid in Zimbabwe Dollars rather than in the South African Rand.

There was general concern among the interviewees about the lack of investment in Zimbabwe. They felt that relations with South African and other multinational companies were cordial and companies did not try to undermine unions. Bargaining, however, takes place at a national sectoral level rather than at a company level in Zimbabwe and this can mask tensions with particular companies. It was felt that the low wages and conditions of work in indigenous companies puts pressure on raising wages and conditions in multinationals.

Issues being taken up by unions

Wage negotiations preoccupy all the unions as inflation in Zimbabwe is very high. Most unions bargain monthly to keep wage increases at inflation levels and the interviewees indicated that they are battling to attain wage increases on par with inflation. The interviewee from the Food Federation indicated that many workers are going back to the rural areas as they cannot survive on the wages they are receiving and this is having an effect on union numbers.

Another issue raised by unions is the increase in contract and casual labour. This has had the effect of making it difficult to monitor membership.

Regional cooperation:

The unions all belong to International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) and have relations with unions in the region and especially with South African unions. There are regional and international workshops around pertinent issues concerning their sector or on organisational development. The unions also share education materials with each other and from time to time have shop steward exchanges. There is, however, no relations regarding collective bargaining and even though many companies have operations in various countries in the region, issues are not taken up with these companies on a regional level. The unions felt that this is an area for improving relations between each other in the region. The Chemical and Plastic union interviewee said that cooperation is important because it is difficult to have legal strikes in Zimbabwe and that company decisions are made in South Africa. An example was made again about Johnson & Johnson – the decision to retrench workers came from South Africa and the union found that it was meaningless to talk to management in Zimbabwe. The Food Federation interviewee felt that unions have been preoccupied with organisational independence and development but have not started defining the role of unions. Conditions have changed through restructuring and companies are able to make huge profits by locating in different countries. For him regional cooperation needs to involve solidarity between the unions so that companies that operate throughout the region can be made to distribute the benefits equally between the countries and that those that work for the company are not divided and exploited as a result of the company taking advantage of different conditions (bargaining arrangements, political situation, etc.) that workers in the different countries find themselves in.

Political Situation

Unions indicated that the political situation in Zimbabwe is extremely polarised at the moment and while this makes it difficult for unions to operate, the economic conditions of workers has resulted in an increase in participation of members in the union. So unions are actually forced to be more active due to the economic crisis.

Interviews with non union organisations:

All the organisations felt that there is a lack of information on companies operating in the country and that there needs to be a systematic approach to ensuring that information is available to trade unions and civil society organisations.

A question they had regarding the research was how to define what a South African company is. Examples that highlight this question were:

1. Zimbabweans owning franchises of companies that exist in South Africa. If it is owned by a Zimbabwean then how South African is the company? An example of this is Nandos.
2. The financial and mining sectors (and probably in other sectors) in Zimbabwe have companies that are based in South Africa as well but the owners of these companies in South Africa are not all South African or the companies have head offices in Europe – for example Anglo American and Old Mutual. More recently Barclays Bank, a British company has acquired a controlling stake in ABSA.

In addition, the interviewee from Seatini raised the point that South African imports have really gone up and that in Zimbabwe the dependence on South Africa is growing in this sense rather than on new investment coming in.

The interviewee from SAPSN raised a similar point making the example of dairy products coming from South Africa beginning to take over the market that used to be dominated by products produced in Zimbabwe.

The interviewee from Mwengo spoke about the need for campaigns like "publish what you pay" given the growth in poverty and inequality.

Namibian Interviews

The organisations below were selected for interviews in Namibia between the 19th and 21st of October 2005. The highlighted rows indicate interviews that did not materialise and it is much higher than the interviews that did not materialise in Zimbabwe. The reasons for not materialising were that the interviewees were called away at the last minute for union business or previous engagements of the interviewee took longer than anticipated.

Organisation	Position in Org.	Surname	Name
Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI)	Director	Jauch	Herbert
Metal and Allied Workers Namibian Workers Union	Organiser	Jonas	Justina
Mine Workers Union of Namibia	General Secretary	Hengari	Joseph
Namibian Transport and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Kwedhi	John
Namibian Farmworkers Unions	General Secretary	Amupanda	Samson
Namibian Financial Institutions Union (Nafinu)	General Secretary		
Namibian Food And Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Zacharias	Kiros
National Society For Human Rights	Public Relations Officer	Phillemon	Dorkas
National Union of Namibian Workers	Deputy General Secretary	Kaaronda	Evilastus
Sister Namibia			
Trade Union Congress of Namibia	General Secretary	Mabuko	Mr.

The unions that were not interviewed were the Food Workers union, the Transport Workers union, the Farmworkers union and the Financial Institutions union. The General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) was spoken to on the phone but a full interview could not be conducted given his tight schedule. TUCNA is also a Namibian trade union federation, however, it is smaller than the NUNW and it is not aligned to SWAPO, the ruling party in government. In addition to the trade unions, the director of the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) was interviewed. This is a labour based NGO. The National Society for Human rights and Sister Namibia were also chosen for interviews to get a perspective from organisations that do not organise in the workplace. The interviewee from Sister Namibia, however, was not available. The questions posed to the trade unions in Namibia were the same as those posed in Zimbabwe (see pages 21-21). The responses are contained under the following headings:

Collection of data and information on companies:

The unions do not collect information on companies in a systematic manner although they do take this into account when they enter negations and they are able to identify South African companies from other multinational companies and local companies. The unions do see the need to be more systematic in collecting information that they can use for bargaining. One of the problems that the interviewee from the Mine Workers union spoke about is the difficulty of obtaining information on companies because the Companies Act is very limited when it comes to company disclosure of information. He indicated that a resolution was taken in the recent Congress (September 2005) for the Company Act to be revised to enforce transparency in the Mining and Energy Sector.

The unions agree with each other that South African companies dominate the Namibia economy and that this is due to the historical ties between the two countries. There has not been substantial new investment by South African companies in the past decade given the low rate of economic growth. South African companies invest due to the low wages and government incentives. The interviewee from the Metal union (which organises in the chemical, wood and furniture, construction and metal sectors) indicated that there has been an increase in Chinese investment in the country. The interviewee from the National Union of Namibian Workers, the largest federation in the country, indicated that the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) policy was a failure as it did not attract significant investment and has provided few jobs, however, companies benefited through a reduction of tax and more flexible labour regulation.

Impact of South African companies

All the unions feel that there has not been any change in the companies' attitude towards unions – most companies prefer non-unionised workplaces – and the unions have to struggle to get recognition agreements. The companies provide much needed jobs in the country, which has a high level of unemployment; however, there are no other benefits they can speak of. Furthermore, the companies take advantage of the tax incentives and low wages and now increasingly employ on a casual and contract basis. The interviewee from the Mine Workers' union felt that promotion in South African companies was limited as the head offices in South Africa make all decisions, reducing the management in Namibia to administrators. The interviewee of the Metal union also referred to the trend that management was appointed by the South African head office and were white South Africans or Germans and that there is a racial division of labour in companies.

Issues being taken up by unions

Unions take up issues like low wages, retrenchments, outsourcing, unfair dismissals, reduction of benefits and worsening conditions of employment, and the changing forms of employment (contract and casual labour). There is a feeling among the unions that the South African companies use the high unemployment rate as a stick to discipline workers and make them accept the worsening conditions. The interviewee from the Metal union indicated that Namibian workers have worse conditions of employment than South African workers working for the same company.

Regional cooperation

The unions belong to the International Trade Secretariats and are in touch with unions in the region but felt that there was insufficient regional cooperation between trade unions in the region. The interviewee from the NUNW indicated that South African unions helped form the unions in Namibia during the 1980s but over time the relations have become weaker. The interviewee from the Mine Workers union felt that the lack of regional cooperation was due to a lack of coordination and the interviewee from the Metal union felt that this was due to the lack of capacity of unions in the region and that the stronger unions in the region will have to take the lead.

The Metal and the Mining unions said that they receive little assistance from the global unions and often the Namibian unions do not have resources to attend events and training workshops hosted internationally.

The unions felt that there is a need for cooperation around conditions of employment and job security. Companies are benefiting from high unemployment not just in each country but in the region as a whole and if the unions work together they will be able to curtail the power of the companies. The interviewee from the NUNW said it was important for unions to begin to share information and develop mechanisms for monitoring companies so that unions know what is happening in other countries and solidarity can be built between unions in the region.

Political Situation

The unions felt that they had a good relationship with government and that they were not experiencing any problems. Having attained independence and democracy, the issue for the unions was the need to transform the economy and attitude of the employers.

Non trade union organisations

The National Society for Human rights (NSHR) focuses mainly on the effects of government policies on human rights but the interviewee indicated that it is important to monitor labour standards and companies that violate rights of workers. This, however, has not been a focus of the NSHR. She felt that Namibia was dominated by South African companies and many of these companies import goods from South Africa making it very difficult for Black Economic Empowerment to take off in the country. She said that South African companies have social responsibility programmes (funding sports teams, providing computers to some schools) but these do not have much of an impact on the broader socio-economic problems like poverty and unemployment. She indicated also that prices in Namibia were higher than in South Africa and there is a need to build the capacity of consumer protection organisations.

The Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) is the knowledge centre of the labour movement in Namibia and operates a resource centre for unions as well as providing research and information to the unions. The interviewee from LaRRI indicated that South African companies dominated the Namibian economy in all sectors. However, their role in the country limits economic development. This was so because they import goods and services from South Africa rather than stimulate production and develop skills in the country. They also set prices because they dominate the market. Furthermore, they set the trend for working conditions and forms of employment in the country followed by other enterprises – and the trend is low wages and casualisation. The interviewee indicated that LaRRI participates in a regional network of labour based organisations, the African Labour Research Network, that does research on multinationals with a focus on South African companies and they also assist the unions with company information during negotiations. He felt that it is important to ensure that experiences of the labour movement in other countries (strategies for bargaining, lobbying and campaigns) are shared in the region. This will build the capacity of unions and also build solidarity between them.

South African Interviews:

The unions selected for interviews are listed in the table below. The highlighted rows indicate unions that were not interviewed. The interviews were conducted between the 7th and 8th of March 2006 in Johannesburg.

Organisation	Position in Org.	Surname	Name
Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Moloto	Narius
Chemical, Paper, Pulp, Wood and Allied Workers Union	Head of Collective Bargaining		Nelson
Congress of South African Trade Unions	Deputy International Relations Secretary	Rametsi	Mandla
Food and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Masimula	Katishe
Metal and Electrical Workers union of South Africa	Deputy Secretary General	Thobejane	Edward Malometjie
National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa	2nd Deputy President Researcher		Cedric Neo
National Union of Mineworkers	Head of Collective Bargaining	Baleni	Frans
SASBO The Financial Union	Genera Secretary Deputy General Secretary	Oelschig Venter	Shaun Ben
Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union	Researcher	Vlok	Etienne
South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers union	Deputy General Secretary	Modige	Lee
South African Transport and Allied Workers Union	General Secretary	Howard	Randal

The union officials of the three unions, the National Union of Mine Workers; the Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union and the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union were not able to grant interviews due to work pressures on the days of the interviews. The Food Union and the Clothing union are based in Cape Town and the interviews were not scheduled by the time of writing this report. The questions posed to South African unions were slightly different given that they organise in the home country of South African investors in the region.

1. Does the union monitor the operations in Africa of companies in the sector?
2. Have the companies that the union organises in expanded into Africa and how significant is this expansion?
3. What are the reasons for expanding into Africa?
4. What bargaining arrangements do you have with these companies?
5. What impact has this expansion had on the company nationally as well as on the union and its members?
6. Does the union have relations with unions that organise in the company in other African countries?
7. What impact are South African companies having in other countries in the region?
8. Is there a need to develop a code of conduct for South African companies operating in Southern Africa/Africa?
9. Do you think that collective bargaining can occur on a regional level with companies that have operations in other countries of the region?
10. Is there a need to work closer with unions in the region or are there other more pressing priorities?

Collection of information and data on companies:

The unions interviewed do not collect information on the operations of companies in Africa and while they do obtain information on the companies when they bargain, this is restricted to financial information and is not collected in a systematic manner. Most of the interviewees indicated that they knew of companies that have invested in the region for some time or those that started operations recently in other countries in the region but the unions do not have mechanisms for collecting information. The interviewee of Mewusa said that the union organises smaller companies and these are not expanding into Africa. All the unions interviewed bargain at bargaining council level and company level. There are closed-shop agreements with big companies.

Impact of companies

The interviewees felt that there is no direct impact on their unions or the unions' members when companies invest in the region. The investments have mainly been for company expansion rather than relocating. Downsizing at companies are due to technological improvements and more efficient processes. Some unions indicated that investments in other countries have created work opportunities for South Africans in those countries (Sasbo, Numsa).

The interviewees were aware that unions in other countries have raised problems with the management style and conditions of employment of South African companies. They felt that South African companies were taking advantage of the fact that unions were weaker in other countries. On the other hand they felt that South African companies are providing services, improving skills and creating employment in countries that are poorly developed.

The interviewees felt that policies of governments in the region have facilitated and encouraged companies to invest, especially the adoption of the New Partnership For Africa's Development (Nepad). This has removed restrictions on companies and they are able to increase their revenue from operations in the region.

Issues being taken up by unions

The main issues taken up by unions were wage increases, retrenchments and conditions of work at bargaining council and company negotiations in the country.

Regional cooperation

The unions belong to the International Trade Secretariats and work with unions in the region on education and policy matters. Some examples are HIV/Aids policies, Gender rights, Globalisation and its impact on the sector. In addition they have assisted their sister unions in other countries: Sasbo assisted with the training of union members in Zimbabwe, Namibia and Lesotho; Numsa assisted unions in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania with education resources and training and in Swaziland was able to facilitate the merger of 5 unions in the sector.

There is no cooperation on collective bargaining although the unions share information when requested by sister unions in the region. This is something that the interviewees felt needed to be looked into but that the different strengths of the unions and the different conditions in the various countries of the region will have to be taken into account. The interviewees from Sasbo suggested that while it will not be possible to settle salaries on a regional basis, to win basic conditions would be favourable. The interviewee from Ceppwawu also raised the importance of conditions of work on a regional level because the giant paper and pulp companies take advantage of unorganised workers in other countries. Numsa has established an international department recently so that it can build stronger relations with unions in the region.

The interviewee from Cosatu stressed the need for a framework for companies regarding social responsibility and development. He said that companies have been very active on the continent and their image is not always good – there are examples of racism and super exploitation. It is important, therefore, that the union movement does not sit back and give the impression that it is condoning behaviour of South African companies, he said. The interviewee from Satawu also raised the need for a code of conduct given that South African parastatals, for example Spoornet, are taking advantage of privatisation in other countries of the region.

Political Situation

The unions agreed with each other that the political environment in the country is respectful of trade unions and trade unionism. This is entrenched in the constitution but another indication is the representation of unions in tripartite structures. There was also agreement that workers have basic rights to challenge exploitation, however, these rights are being undermined through unilateral decisions by companies and government on workplace restructuring, retrenchments, downsizing and black economic empowerment.

Critical issues raised through the Interviews;

These issues emerge from responses to the questions as well as general discussion in the interviews that took place.

1. Unions have a wealth of information on companies, their operations and their strategies. This information, however, is fragmented. Different fragments reside in different levels of the union and in different people and therefore does not become available to the union for use in developing recruitment and bargaining strategies. This fragmentation is apparent at a national level and more so at a regional level. This points to a lack of a mechanism that can systematically collect and synthesis this information for unions in the region.

2. Unions have strong links in the region that developed over decades. There is a lot of trust and respect for each other and representatives from sister unions in the region meet frequently in policy and education workshops. The representatives, however, do not get the chance to discuss strategic questions confronting their unions and their experiences in resisting company strategies that include relocation of production activities, changes to the nature of work and the form of employment and restructuring the workplace itself. If this happens it is on an informal level and does not become part of the knowledge base of the various unions in the region from which they can draw on to develop strategies for recruitment and bargaining. This points to the lack of structures or forums within unions that can bring together and synthesis the strategies of resistance employed by unions and workers in South African and other multinational companies operating throughout the region.

3. Unions in the region participate in regional (SADC) political structures. On a national level governments provide space for labour representatives in manpower commissions or tripartite economic development councils together with representatives of business. They are also included in government delegations to multilateral bodies like the World Trade Organisation. Unions participate to raise the profile of labour and to secure redistributive gains for workers and their families. However, unions are barely able to prepare for these engagements and do not have the opportunity to develop common positions among themselves to assert in discussions around policy matters. It is apparent that while business, and specifically South African business, intervenes on national, regional and global levels, unions have not been able to find the necessary capacity to do so as effectively.

4. There are no or very weak relations between unions and other organisations of civil society regarding multinationals and South African multinationals in particular. It points to a lack of common vision for and capacity to build a broad alliance of civil society organisations. While this cannot be crafted mechanistically, there is very little scope in the current form of organising to allow greater interaction and collaboration.

It should be noted that unions are trying to deal with some of these problems. A number of unions and federations have set up international departments or employ researchers to plug the information gap but they have few resources to do so fully. Also they are faced with a range of issues simultaneously and it is difficult to keep abreast. The big problem is that business organisations and governments develop fixed positions beforehand and set the terms of reference so that anything that appears to be outside the scope of these terms is not discussed or taken up. Most unions raised the point that when they are "consulted" by business or government it means that a decision has been made already and that all the union can do is discuss timing and mechanisms for implementing the position.

Recommendation to develop effective Trade Union Responses to South African Corporate Expansion in Southern Africa

> "In spite of the fact that we were very weak on the ground, we ensured that the rights of workers were still secured, and that the union was still recognised. We used that strategy to keep management busy and build the union." Charles Makola 1995 quoted in von Holdt (2003: 141)

The expansion of South African companies gives them more leverage during bargaining as they can threaten to shift production away from where workers are demanding improvements to areas where workers are less organised. Furthermore, now that they rely on accumulation processes that are spread across many countries, a temporary stop in one country, even in South Africa, is less damaging than when they were dependent on the accumulation process in one or only a couple of countries.

South African investment, however, is creating harsh conditions for people in the region in various ways:

- directly through precarious and low wage employment in South African companies;
- through trade that replaces goods produced locally by goods being imported from and by South African companies;
- through new South African operations displacing local entrepreneurial operations or self employed initiatives that affect incomes and livelihoods of numerous people.

The impression in the region that South African workers are better off than workers in other countries of the Southern African region is not necessarily true. Statistics on GDP per capita do not assist in revealing the socio-economic conditions of workers when inequality is very high like it is in South Africa and the region as a whole. In South Africa unemployment and poverty has grown in the last 15 years while real wages remain stagnant in a context of declining job security.[26] In other words, South African workers may have much in common with workers in the region, especially workers working for the same companies and that cooperation is needed to address these worsening conditions.

The interviews highlighted three areas for cooperation between unions and civil society organisations:

- A code of good practice to engage governments and companies on.
- Collective bargaining strategies between unions in the region working in the same sector and for the same company.
- Policies for equitable trade and investment within the Southern African region.

It is important, however, to take as a point of departure existing weaknesses that debilitate against the immediate attainment of these needs which can provide a unified strategic orientation for the labour movement in the region. The weaknesses include:

1. Unions do not collect and analyse information on South African companies that they organise in.

2. Unions do not share experiences of resistance to South African companies taking place in their countries.

3. There is a lack of preparation by unions for their participation in national and regional political structures which develop trade and investment policies.

[26] See LRS annual publication, Bargaining Indicators, for socio economic conditions, specifically incomes of workers in the formal sector.

This includes developing policy positions, education material, campaigns and lobbying.

These weaknesses form part of the broader context in which links between unions and the relationship between unions and other organisations of civil society are generally weak and that the unions in the region leave much of the politics and policy issues in the hands of the trade union federations rather than integrating these issues with the bargaining and organising strategies of the affiliated unions.

There are three broad recommendations that come to the fore through this research. These three recommendations attempt to provide the basis for meeting the needs identified in a sustainable manner.

1. Monitor South African companies:

Monitoring should entail collecting data and making it available.

Data should ideally be collected on a centralised database that is updated consistently with information on South African multinational in the region. There would need to be clarity beforehand among unions and other organisations of civil society as to what kind of information is needed and the methodology for obtaining this information.

This information should be published annually in a report that is accessible to organisations as well as put on the internet.

2. Establish a forum for dialogue

A forum that brings together trade unions and civil society organisations can deal with the following issues:

- Sharing experiences on resistance to South African companies
- Developing joint campaigns between organisations
- Identifying issues for solidarity and how to concretely build solidarity between organisations
- Share experiences on lobbying and developing joint lobbying strategies.
- Developing alternative perspectives and policies on trade and investment for addressing the impact that South African companies are having on the political economy of the Southern African region.

This forum will also stimulate networks and alliances between unions and between unions and other civil society organisations.

3. Education and Training

> Trade unions need to build capacity to collect, analyse and impart information to its members so that the union can develop strategies to counter the effects that South African companies are having in the region.
>
> This requires training union researchers that collect and analyse information on South African companies as well as developing education materials that provides information on South African companies, outlines experiences and lessons of resistance to South African companies; and serves as a resource for bargaining with or campaigning against bad policies and practices of these companies.

The effectiveness of these recommendations would depend to a large extent on improving the interaction between labour support organisations and trade unions in the Southern African region as a whole. The African Labour Research Network (ALRN) and the African Workers' Participation Development Programme (APADEP) network are good examples of this. There also needs to be more collaboration between trade unions and other social justice organisations of civil society. The Benchmarks Foundation hosts an annual round table, which brings together church organisations and trade unions, is a good example of how this can be done. A number of academic initiatives have shown interest in South African investment in the region and should also be part of the labour movement's attempt to develop coherent strategies. These include: The Centre for Civil Society based at the University of Kwazulu Natal; the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria) "South African in Africa" project based at Rhodes University; the Sociology of Work Programme at Wits University and the Institute for Development and Labour Law at the University of Cape Town.[27]

These three different levels need interlinking in a manner that develops more than what exists at present. There needs to be a theoretical and political engagement with a clearer programmatic vision. As long as this work remains output driven, tied to disparate project objectives and aloof from organising and bargaining strategies of trade unions and other social justice organisations it can yield no more than identifying the increasing negative effects of South African capital. The union movement has the

[27] Websites for the these organisations: African Labour Research Netwrok: http://www.alrn.org; Benchmarks Foundation: www.bensa.co.za; Centre for Civil Society: www.nu.ac.za/ccs; Sociology of Work Project: www.wits.ac.za/fac/arts/swop/home.htm; Codesria: www.codesria.org/index.htm; IDLL: web.uct.ac.za/depts/cml/dll/dll.htm (this site is not currently operational but information is also available at the department of Commercial Law website: http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/cml/resunits.htm#Institute)

credibility and the capacity to lead this process in the region and to ensure that the integration of different efforts does not merely do more of the same but yields knowledge on the nature of South African capital – its power and mode of operation – so that effective strategies can emerge that build unity and capacity across the region to resist and perhaps "wrest that power from them."[28]

Conclusion

This paper is more about presenting what exists than developing alternatives. This is a grave weakness given the implications of South African corporate expansion. The lack of effective resistance to the nature of South African investment and the manner in which it takes place allows South African companies to entrench historical patterns of inequality and processes of capital accumulation. Above all it deepens their grip over the region allowing corporations to restructure methods of production and distribution to secure their interests over the long term.

This paper has attempted, through interviews with representatives of unions as well as through reviewing literature on South African investment and the nature of South African capital, to provide recommendations for the union movement on how to develop effective responses to South African companies in the region. These recommendations need to be fleshed out in much more detail but there must be political will to embark on this path for any headway to be made. One of the most important shifts required of unions is to leap out of national frameworks – as companies have done – and to take on regional and global ones.

[28] Innes concludes his study of Anglo "Yet if over the past century Anglo American and South African capitalism have achieved an awesome degree of power it is as well to remember that in the process they have also created a countervailing force which may well have the potential to wrest that power from them. The capitalist class which developed the world's largest gold fields has also produced the largest proletariat in Africa." (1984: 241).

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