Industrial relations in the port of Durban: The implementation of the National Dock Labour Scheme

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis investigates South African industrial relations through a case study of the implementation of a pilot dock labour Scheme in the port of Durban which was part of the Transport and General Workers Union's (TGWU) proposed National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS). The case study is selected to examine dock workers in the port of Durban, Africa's largest container port. The NDLS reform sought to regulate the stevedoring industry's dock labour supply through establishing an industry wide port labour pool system for registered dock workers. This initiative reflects an attempt to address a wider malaise confronting organised labour post-apartheid, the prevalence of labour brokers supplying casual labour and the inadequacy of new labour regulations to address this increasing feature of the labour market. The NDLS implementation is an example of the effectiveness of the trade union federation the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), its affiliates' organising strategies, and its alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) government. Key ANC government policies for labour market flexibility and privatisation in the restructuring of Portnet's operations (the state owned port authority) are examined against the implementation of the NDLS. The dilemmas of Portnet's restructuring exacerbated the division between permanent and casual dock workers organised by COSATU affiliates. This led to the emergence of a splinter independent union in March 1998 that presided over a pilot dock labour Scheme in the port of Durban until its dissolution in March 2001 when the independent union effectively imploded due to the corruption of its leadership. This was followed by the ANC government's announcement to concession Durban's container terminal operations to the private sector in April 2002. However, dock workers in Durban remain both strategically located in the South African economy and strategically positioned if organised effectively. This is despite the contradictions between labour market reform and privatisation policies as pursued by the ANC government.