



# **Industrial Relations**

## Essay 2

written: June 2002  
by: Alexander Markowski  
# 13990047-2002

## Political processes and Industrial Relations development in South Africa until 1994

From an Industrial Relations point of view, the history of South Africa until 1994 can be divided into three sections. The very first beginnings in 1922, resulting in a very incomplete Industrial Relations Model in the Year 1924. The second area takes part from 1948 onwards, following the racial segregation policy of the nationalist party. The last part of this journey brings us to the years following 1960, when the exclusion of major parts of the population finally lead to bigger problems and it ends in 1994 when Apartheid disappeared and the Industrial Relations System was newly defined.

In 1910, South Africa became a republic under the British crown and neither an Industrial Relations System nor collective bargaining institutions were in place at this time. Since this place is very rich in mineral resources, mining seems to be a good idea. Almost 100% of the educated mineworkers have been 'imported' from Europe to build up the mines. After the construction job was done, they stayed as working force. The Employees were not able to employ other miners, since division of labour was based on colour. In 1922 many miners were dismissed and wages were cut on some others. Requests to the Chamber of Mines were rejected and the first strike in South Africa was initiated. The strikers refused to accept the conditions and the Chamber was also not willing to loosen up their conditions. This however, ended up in martial law and after more than two months, the conflict became settled, leaving 247 dead people behind.

When the strike ended, the conditions for the miners did not improve, and since the government supported the Chamber of Mines, the ruling party lost a lot of political support. In the elections of 1924, a coalition government between the national and the workers party formed the PACT government. This shows that the absence of an Industrial Relations System had a major impact in the political system. Government passed a legislation called the "Industrial Conciliation Act". The Act formed the very first and humble try of an Industrial Relations System. The population was officially divided in "Non-Black" like White, Coloured and Asians, and Black people. In the Industrial Conciliation Act however, only "Non-Black" workers

were seen as employees and the Black people were officially excluded from the definition of an employee. Applying this Act to the tripartite structure of Government, Employees and Employer in John Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958), shows in a very obvious way, that excluding a major part of the population makes this Industrial Relations System very incomplete. The "Non-Black" workers formed mixed unions at this point of time, making collective bargaining and industrial agreements possible, while the Black workers did not have any rights in the Industrial Relations as well as the political system.

The second part can be seen as the time following the 1948 election of the National party. After being elected, the National party institutionalised the racial segregation policy, preventing system linkage. This policy became internationally known as "Apartheid". Up to 1951 the government tried to define "who is who" and ended in the following acts:

- Population Legislation Act
- Group Areas Act
- Mixed Marriage Act

After investigating the position of the black workers, the Botha Commission released its report. They acknowledged the existence of Black worker organisations and recommended to provide separate laws concerning them. The investigation was transferred to another commission, handing in their report in 1955. Based on this report, the government released the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1956. Among other things, this act prohibited mixed unions and introduced job reservation for the different population groups in order to enforce segregation in the workplace. Black workers were still excluded from the definition of employee and Black unions were not recognised as collective bargaining institution. The major aim of the National party was racial exclusion of Blacks and their commercial and residential segregation to Coloured and Asians. In this time the political system of Apartheid had a major impact on the Industrial Relations System and aligned forcefully to reach the target of racial segregation. Further laws forced Blacks to carry passes and they were removed from certain areas. Black workers still had no rights in the political as well as in the Industrial Relations system.

The last part of the journey into the history up to 1994 begins somewhere around 1960, when South Africa became an independent republic. The “Sharpsville Crisis” shows that the protests hardened into resistance and the political leaders tried to maintain their position through modernisation of the political system. The ANC as well as the PAC wanted a revolutionary transformation, which ended in partly violent actions. All actions escalated in the 1976 “Soweto Revolt”, with the Youth Day reminding the public these days. These riots put an enormous pressure for change on the political as well as the Industrial Relations System. These pressures finally lead to the recognition of Black people as employees in the Industrial Relations System in 1980. With the Black people equal in the Industrial Relations System and not equal in the political system, an imbalance became visible. While the government tried hard to modernise the political system, the system of Apartheid was consequently on his way down. As we all know it was ended in 1994 with the first free elections for all parts of the population.

As seen in this example, the political system and the Industrial Relations System are connected to each other. One has to be adjusted to the other; in other words, they are maintaining a certain balance. This is a very good indication for the importance of an Industrial Relations System in a political system. Especially the South African example shows us that in the first hand, the Industrial Relations System was adopted to the political system in order to serve the purpose of segregation of races. When resistance got stronger, the Industrial Relations System was the first to be changed, by including Black people in the definition of employee. Having rights in the Industrial Relations System without having rights in the political system created an imbalance. Slowly ending Apartheid and having the first free elections in South Africa finally resolved this imbalance. The political as well as the Industrial Relations System was built completely in 1994, matching each other and building equilibrium.