

OSTROM WORKSHOP COLLOQUIUM SERIES

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“Consumption, Productivity, and Crisis:
Remaking South Africa’s Apartheid
Workplace in the 1970s”

Monday, October 24, 2016

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. • Ostrom Workshop, 513 N. Park



This paper explores the efforts of South African employers and the apartheid state to remake industrial relations during the 1970s in order to preserve racial capitalism. During the 1970s, South African manufacturers faced a new set of challenges. International economic pressures began to choke off their export markets, yet the domestic market remained severely limited because of employers’ dependence on Black labor paid a subsistence wage. Low productivity made it hard for manufacturers to compete globally, yet import substitution remained blocked by low consumption. Finally, in 1973, manufacturers faced mass strikes by underpaid African workers. Faced with this impasse, employers and the state sought to stabilize industrial relations by creating “communication” with Black workers, improving personnel relations, and even boosting some wages, but *without* promoting Black unionization. Despite these efforts to “reform” industrial apartheid, by the end of the decade Black workers succeeded in using the opening provided by these changes to lay the groundwork for an independent union movement.



Alex Lichtenstein is professor of history at IU Bloomington, where he teaches US and South African history. His research focuses on the intersection of labor history and the struggle for racial justice in societies shaped by white supremacy, particularly the US South (1865–1954) and twentieth-century South Africa. His first book, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, examined the role of prison labor in the American South. Subsequently, he has written extensively about race relations in the labor movement, interracial agrarian radicalism, early civil rights struggles, the impact of anticommunism on the labor and civil rights movements, and comparative US/South African history. His current project on the history of South African industrial relations is called “Making Apartheid Work” ([website](#)).

Presentations are open to the public and are live streamed (see our website for URL and papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855–3151).