

Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: A response to Legassick on the workers' movement

JABULANI SITHOLE

Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus

The key characteristic of the vast amount of literature on the South African workers' movement in the post-1973 period is the denial that the class and national struggles were closely intertwined. This denial is underpinned by a strong 'anti-nationalist current' which dismisses the national liberation struggle as 'populist and nationalist' and therefore antithetical to socialism. This article cautions against uncritical endorsement of these views. It argues that they are the work of partisan and intolerant commentators who have dominated the South African academy since the 1970s and who have a tendency to suppress all versions of labour history which highlight these linkages in favour of those which portray national liberation and socialism as antinomies. The article also points out that these commentators use history to mobilise support for their rigidly held ideological positions and to wage current political struggles under the pretext of advancing objective academic arguments.