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Scott Kloeck-Jenson Award

I left Madison for Johannesburg, South Africa on June 6th 2004. I boarded the plane full of excitement and curiosity as I was on my way to the place I had read and written so much about during my graduate studies, but had never seen. I was preparing to start an internship with the policy unit of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). I was especially grateful for the opportunity to work so closely with the organization that figured so centrally in my Master's thesis on the role of organized labor in South Africa's democratic transition during the 1990s. I started work within days of my arrival in Johannesburg.

My stay occurred against the backdrop of South Africa's ten year anniversary of democracy and the end of apartheid. It was within this context that all of my research and writing for COSATU was conceived and approached. While I worked on various projects, the common theme was an evaluation of the government's performance since 1994 from a labor perspective. This was often a tricky framework given COSATU's formal alliance with the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling political party in South Africa. While COSATU had become increasingly critical of government policies during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the formal alliance placed parameters around the acceptable forms of criticisms and recommendations that we made. While I had several different tasks during my 10 week internship, my time was largely devoted to two projects.

My first assignment was a joint project between COSATU and the Human Rights Commission (HRC). The HRC held its ten year anniversary celebration and conference shortly after my arrival. I attended the conference as a COSATU representative along with my supervisor Neva

Makgetla, the director of the policy unit. We were approached and asked by the HRC research director to conduct a study analyzing data from the South African censuses and LabourForce surveys to evaluate government provisions of basic services, including housing, water, housing, electricity, education, and health by “race,” sex, and income level. I was assigned primary responsibility for compiling and analyzing data and the write-up of the final report titled “Socio-Economic Rights and the Provision of Government Services in South Africa.” The breadth of this project afforded me with a far more comprehensive understanding of social issues and public policy than I had beforehand.

My other work for COSATU involved an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the relatively new Employment Equity legislation. This work involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, including interviews with shopstewards from a range of COSATU-affiliated trade unions across South Africa. I was asked to study the actual and potential role of labor in shaping the employment equity process whereby employers are required to submit reports to government identifying barriers to and outlining intended courses of action, such as affirmative action, to remove these barriers. Our stance at COSATU was that these reports are more of a bureaucratic exercise and distraction from more meaningful strategies for workplace transformation. My study confirmed these suspicions and highlighted areas in the equity process that needed reworking. This paper was made available as a base for future work on employment equity and a possible workshop with unionists to discuss ways to revamp the equity process this upcoming year.

My stay in Johannesburg was filled with new experiences as I navigated through a new culture and a city far larger than any I had ever lived in. One of my biggest frustrations was the lack of

public transportation available coupled with the sprawling layout of the city and the surrounding areas. I was surprised at how expensive things were in Johannesburg, except for food which is quite reasonable. Without the award there is no way that I would have been able to afford these costs and I am most grateful to have been selected for this honor.