

**The influence of the Canadian Auto Workers Union in debates on the South
African Qualifications Framework**

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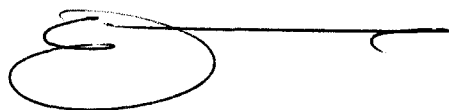
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A Masters Research Report submitted to the School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

DECLARATION

I declare that this Masters Research Report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I further declare that this Research Report has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line.

Signature

2018/03/15

Date

DEDICATION

The great Czech born novelist Milan Kundera (1999) cogently stated that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”.

We have a proud heritage of struggle, inherited from generations of worker struggles. This historical inheritance is (or was) squandered, lost and has emerged transformed into its opposite. This report attempts to understand the social forces that coalesced to produce a conception of education and skill far removed from notions of emancipation and progressive transformation. This short project is dedicated to the memory of millions of workers, men and women who gave us this rich inheritance. I and others owe it to them, to honor it by remembering.

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the paradox of COSATU and its unions supporting and promoting high skills within the framework of a competence-based skills system can only be understood by unearthing the hidden history of contestation within the unions over the system. These differences were rooted in much larger political and ideological contestations regarding the ideology of competitiveness and the future of struggle in the unions. In addition, it is necessary to take the totality of social, political and economic factors into account. It is rooted within Marxist methodology which takes as its point of departure the observation that human activity (and nature) is constituted by a complex array of actions, institutions and social entities with real class interests. It takes as its starting point the fact that social systems are best understood by understanding the multiple determinations and relationships that impact them. The paper thus argues that understanding the shift away from emancipatory notions of education required an understanding of various social forces together with their political, ideological and material interests. Based on this, it is argued that the political and class interests of black union leaders together with shifts by white intellectuals who previously held radical and largely Marxist positions coincided with changes in the local and international balance of forces. These shifts by these groups in themselves took place within a generalised retreat in progressive ideas and defeats of the union base by employers and retreats away from internal democratic traditions within unions. This confluence of factors allowed for shifts in the emancipatory ideas of education and the ascendance of ideas based on new ideas of work experience, accreditation of learning and work experience.

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This project would not have been possible without the help and support of my family. I thank my wife Melanie and my brother Jackie who sacrificed both time and comfort in supporting me through many difficulties.

Lastly, I thank my son Ethan who is my inspiration and love of my life, and the thousands of men and women who toil so that some of us could have the privilege and space to reflect in the academy.

I see them,

I see them every day, everywhere
non-people in transition
moving, shifting, going nowhere
trapped in twilight zones
of vacuous expectation
waiting between nothing and nothing

I see them, I know them
I am among them, seeking veracity,
but trapped on the periphery of foreign norms and values
and double-speak.

Find them not in boardrooms of decision-making.
nor in marble halls, nor in fine dineries
but in sanctuaries of prayer
protecting the name of Jesus!
calling on gods who are not here, there, nor anywhere

I see them, I know them, I am among them
seeking veracity, but trapped on the periphery
of foreign norms and values and double-speak.
Find them not in the boardrooms of decision-making
nor in marble halls, nor in fine dineries
but in sanctuaries of prayer
protecting the name of Jesus
calling on gods who are not here, there nor anywhere

I see them, I know them, I am among them
A people who have been lied to (Don Mattera, 2015).

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CEPPAWU	Chemical Paper, Pulp and Allied Workers' Union
CHIETA	Chemical Industry Education and Training Authority
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CWIU	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Macroeconomic Strategy
GFWBF	General Factory Workers Benefit Fund
ISP	Industrial Strategy Project
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MERG	Macroeconomic Research Group
MERSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
MICWU	Motor Industry Combined Workers Union
MITG	Motor Industry Task Group
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PRG	Participatory Research Group
RDG	Research and Development Group
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SBG	Skills Based Grading

SDA	Skills Development Act
SDLA	Skills Development Levy Act
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UAW	United Autoworkers
UMMAWOSA	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A Worker Reads History by Bertolt Brecht

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed.
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song.
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the seas rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet
was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War.
Who triumphed with him?

Each page a victory
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.
So many questions.

Brecht's poem "A Worker Reads History" powerfully brings to our attention the critical role of the working class in making history, and how this is hidden in history books that focus on individual great men. The same can be said of the literature on the forging of the South African post-Apartheid skills system. Although many scholars acknowledge the role of progressive trade unions, they take the hegemonic position put forward by the unions in negotiations with external parties as given, and do not explore the contestations that occurred within unions prior to that position being adopted (Allais, 2014b; Cooper, 1998; Simon McGrath & Badroodien, 2006; Ngcwangu, 2016). These histories also provide a one-

sided view of the linkages with international unions and scholars that contributed to these internal debates. International allies who supported defeated positions in the unions are ignored. This research report is rooted in the understanding that retrieving the hidden history of contestation over skills within South African unions can provide deeper insight into the broader issues at stake when skills were debated, and the politics congealed in the new system. The report therefore responds to Brecht's call to write history that focuses on, and critically interrogates the role of workers and their organizations in making history. Crucially, it also moves beyond homogenization of the working class, highlighting and interrogating divisions within unions and the forces and processes that led to one particular group and position emerging as hegemonic.

The research project examines the role of trade unions in the development of the South African skill system, with a specific focus on the role of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in the period of the 1990s. In order to do so it employs Gillian Hart's Marxist methodology of "critical ethnography" (Hart, 2006), which enables interrogation of the relationships and multiple determinations that constitute the formation of the hegemonic position on skills within the union. The specific methods employed include unstructured interviews with key participants in the history under examination and archival research to unearth relevant, hidden documents.

The following section of this introduction presents the rationale for the research project, the aim, the research question and sub-questions, and an overview of the remainder of the research report.

1.1 Rationale

A wide body of work by various researchers on the South African skill system takes as its point of departure that COSATU unions, and NUMSA in particular, had a common position and orientation on the nature of the skill system to be adopted. Even where contestation is noted (Ngcwangu, 2016), the contending views are neither stated nor theorized.

As an active participant in these processes and debates within the trade union movement when I served as regional and then national educator in the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Chemical Paper, Pulp and Allied Workers' Union (CEPPWAWU), I am, however, deeply familiar with the internal contestations inside NUMSA. Through my role as a union representative on a number of Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) boards, I was also involved in engagements with other parties. I am therefore intimately aware of the internal processes within the progressive trade union movement as it entered into discussions on the nature of the skill system with employers and government in the 1990's. Positions adopted by COSATU in particular were a product of contestation on the nature of society and the role of the union movement on the eve of democracy. This contestation was largely played out in debates on the economy, attitude to the labour flexibility in the Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995, and approaches to globalisation. These debates took place not only within NUMSA, but within affiliates such as CWIU. Some of these debates found their way into publications such as the South African Labour Bulletin. However, the history of this contestation within NUMSA is largely undocumented and has not been grappled with by academics.

Scholars often cite the role of Australian trade unions in the adoption of the skill system (Akoojee, Gewer, & McGrath, 2005; Allais, 2010; Cooper, 1998; S McGrath, 2007; Simon McGrath & Badroodien, 2006; Ngcwangu, 2016). However, the Australian unions were not the only international trade unions to actively engage South African unions as they developed their positions on the skills system. Although the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) was central to these debates, its role is often ignored. In analysing the contestation related to skills that shaped NUMSA's position it is therefore necessary to explore not only the contestations within NUMSA, but also the international dynamic as the South African unions engaged both Australian and Canadian unions.

Through my involvement in union debates, I am aware that Australian and Canadian unions took diametrically opposed positions on work re-organisation, co-determination, and its link to education. Within the South African trade union movement, these debates also raised the role of intellectuals and academics in the trade union movement. In their work, Ngcwangu (2016) and Buhlungu (2009) speak to some of these tensions and links the decline of the link between "sociology of work" in South Africa with the retreat of intellectuals from trade unions. While Buhlungu reveals debates within unions on the role of white intellectuals, their social location, and links to academia, the links between this debate and the adoption of the hegemonic position in NUMSA's positions have not been explored. In her work documenting the history of NUMSA, Forrest (2007) points to a period in the 1990's when there was a disjuncture between positions adopted by NUMSA on skills and the issues that workers were concerned with. However, she does not conduct an in-depth analysis of how this disjuncture emerged.

The history of these debates has yet to be documented properly, and researchers have taken the hegemonic position adopted by NUMSA, and subsequently COSATU as given. This research report is the first study to document debates on attitudes to work organization and skills within the trade union movement. While history is usually written by the victorious (perhaps explaining the focus on the Australian's role and neglect of that of the CAW), this research report is rooted in an understanding that it is critical to reflect on and hear other voices that argued for alternatives.

1.2 Aim

This research project sought to contribute to the literature by documenting how the contestations over skills unfolded within NUMSA, and how these contestations were shaped by contending views within the union, nationally and internationally. The study did so by examining the international context and the basis of the contestation and looking at factors that led to the hegemonic position on accepting skills-based grading (SBG) and outcomes-based education within NUMSA. The research report further contributes to existing scholarly work by examining literature that was not yet part of academic debates, interviewing silenced voices, and providing new insights on debates that preceded the acceptance of the framework.

1.3 Research Questions

The overall research question of the research project is:

- How did a hegemonic position on the South African Skill system emerge within NUMSA?

The sub-questions explored to assist in answering the question are:

- What were the historical, ideological, and material conditions that shaped the various positions?
- How did the dominant position on skills in NUMSA prevail?

During the course of the research it became apparent that fully answering the second sub-question would extend beyond the scope of a Masters Research Project. However, this report provides preliminary reflections that could be explored in further studies.

1.4 Argument

This report argues that union support in the 1990's for the new skills system, which marked a radical departure from its previous orientation, can only be understood by unearthing the hidden history of contestation within the unions over the system. These differences were rooted in much larger political and ideological contestations regarding the ideology of competitiveness and the future of struggle in the unions. These were underpinned by structural shifts within trade unions and the actions of various class interests that were emerging from within. Some of these shifts included alliances between white intellectuals, who had been a critical part of the modern South African trade Union movement and the black leadership, which had also emerged from the revival of the trade union movement in the 1970's. The alliance between these former political adversaries against the worker base, explains the shifts in policies, organisational culture and ideological orientations. However, unions still framed their policies in the old radical cloak. This in itself, speaks to the depth of historical memory within the working class, that homage had to be paid to old forms. This report argues that these complex relationships can only be understood within a Marxist framework.

1.5 Overview of the Report

The remainder of this report is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 presents the literature review, followed by the theoretical framework in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the methodology and methods, demonstrating how they are aligned to the theoretical framework and were designed to answer the research question. Chapter 5 provides a brief history of NUMSA. Chapters 6 and 7 respectively analyse the positions and approaches of proponents and opponents of the new approach to skills. Chapter 8 briefly reflects on some key reasons for the triumph of the neoliberal approach to skills and bargaining. The concluding chapter summarises the analysis and arguments and links the study to broader debates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to Rocco & Plakhotnik (2009), a literature review is an overview of writings by scholars assisting in determining if the topic is capable of being researched, to support the problem statement, or to make the case that the research project is important and contributes to the generation of knowledge. They also point out that the review needs to have a connection with the problem statement and research questions being posed. In addition, Creswell (2003) argues that the review should inform the reader who are major authors in the area of study. Given that the review provides insight on the state of knowledge in a particular area, according to Scott & Morrison (2006) it must be a critical reflection of existing literature.

This chapter reviews four bodies of literature that enabled exploration of the research question and to which this final research report contributes: 1) the dangers of patriotic history, 2) critical analysis of the South African skills system; 3) high skills and 4) trade unions and workplace change.

2.1 Dangers of Patriotic History

T.N Dhar, in his article on the representations of history in Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children*, quotes a character in *Shame*, who muses (to paraphrase) that history is natural selection. The weak, the anonymous, leave few marks. History loves those who dominate her¹. Dhar argues that such an understanding of history ignores the powerful role of the historian. Historians are not dispassionate observers of truth. They build a narrative from particular standpoints using fragments of the past and they create pictures that are a means to dominate and control the past (Dhar, 1993).

Martin Legassick points to the need for historians to be faithful to the historical method. He describes this as refusing to succumb to prevailing power relations. He argues that the method seeks to fight against influence of power relations and to discover how events actually happened (Legassick, 2008). It is instructive and pertinent to this research report that Legassick made this point to refute an attempt at distorting the history of forces that shaped the emergence of the new South African Trade union movement in the 1970's.

In his article on the emergence of 'Patriotic history' in Zimbabwe, Terence Ranger (2004) notes that such a history constitutes a reversal of attempts to introduce pluralism and to close down spaces for questions. He characterizes it as an attempt to label past lived experiences of the Zimbabwean struggle as 'unrevolutionary' and attempts to reach out to the youth over (and undermining) the experiences of their parents and teachers. Ranger highlights that it is notable that this doctrine is internally coherent and has been successful in mobilising young people in defence of the ruling party.

This literature concerns itself with the dangers of the role of the powerful in re-shaping historical narrative and the need for the role of Rushdie's weak and anonymous to have their voices recognised and their places in history recorded and considered. This research report also seeks to set the record, not by arguing that there have been attempts at falsification of history, but by focusing on hidden debates that took place before the

¹ The author is aware of the character's misogynistic assumptions about women and does not endorse this view.

adoption of the South African Skill system. It argues that this is crucially important in understanding how the dominant position on the skill system emerged, and how opposing views were defeated.

2.2 Critical Analysis of the South African Skills System

2.2.1 The Skills system in the early years

Racist constructions of knowledge and skills were central to the forging of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, as well as the construction of race itself. Swartz (2015) points out that attitudes to education and skills were part of a Calvinist ideology brought by missionaries. According to Swartz, particular political and social forces throughout British colonies shaped 'humanitarian' attitudes to education. Education was to serve the function of providing useful skills and bringing civilization to indigenous people in colonies or working-class children (in the case of England). Swartz shows that the development of agriculture in Natal resulted in increased demand for labour. However, local inhabitants (subsistence farmers) were not inclined to accept work in the plantations. Swartz argues that the resulting labour shortage reinforced prejudices about Africans and their lack of suitability for education.

In the mining sector, skills were also strongly associated with race, as capital imported skill, together with equipment and capital from England (Callinicos, 1993). In many ways, this foreshadowed the contemporary notion that both skills systems and ideas about skills should be imported from more advanced capitalist economies discussed below. Badroodien (2004) also points to emerging racial stratification in emerging skills systems. The process of industrialization resulted in patterns of concentration of ownership in agriculture, resulting in the migration of white men into newly established towns. Badroodien argues that before 1910, technical education was perceived as inferior training for lowly 'kaffir work'. However, the growing problem of white poverty and concerns about the need for the civilizing influence of education led to provision of technical and vocational education to white people. Thus, education was considered critical to improving prospects for employment. It was also important to facilitate poor whites' assimilation in society as productive citizens. Thus access to vocational education, and to certain skilled occupations, was determined by race.

2.2.2 Cheap labour, black labour

In his seminal book, 'Cast in a Racial Mould', Webster (1985) demonstrates the continued pattern of the racially segmented labour market. He also illustrates the precarious nature of employment for the bulk of black workers, whose security of tenure depended on their continued employment by firms. The 'racial mould' determined access to skills and jobs to be performed by black workers. Webster also explores the role of white skilled workers in controlling access to skills. Their unions used hierarchical workplace power, occupational exclusion, and the state to control black workers. This pattern of control was essential to ensuring a continuous supply of cheap labour. Various laws on security of tenure also ensured a constant supply of a reserve army and the suppression wages.

The development of the reserve army has continued in the democratic era, although it now takes a different, more complex form due to the arrival of large numbers of foreign

nationals (Hlatshwayo, 2011). While it is correct to note that this creates new divisions within the reserve army, it is important to note that such divisions, as well as employers' preference for migrants are not new. For example, in Webster's interviews with employers in the 1980s they spoke of their preference for the 'compliant and hard-working' nature of migrant workers from Natal, compared to township dwellers (Webster, 1985).

2.2.3 The Skill shortages discourse

In South Africa, the notion of 'skills shortages' has been part of the South African lexicon for generations. However, it found its most recent expression after the 1976 student uprisings. The state responded to the uprisings by setting up the de Lange Commission in 1980 to explore state control of education after the unprecedented uprisings in townships. At this point in time, the state had been the primary initiator and coordinator of vocational education. This is despite its conception of vocational education as a welfare intervention to resolve the poor white problem (Badroodien, 2004; Gamble, 2003). In addition, big business responded by intervening in vocational education (Chisholm, 1983).

Writing in the early 1980s, Chisholm (1983) points to an established body of literature on skills in South Africa that demonstrates progressive fragmentation of work and the de-skilling of large sections of workers. At the same time, there was up-skilling of technical and supervisory levels. However, Chisholm argues that responses to black revolt and education reform also contained an attempt at creating an upwardly mobile class of black people who accept and would defend 'free enterprise'. She argues that a key element of containment of black revolt also included an emphasis on skills that required the acceptance of the prevailing ideology of capital. Therefore, the skills debate needs to be placed not only in the context of the nature of industrial policy and black revolt, but also in the need to create a black middle class which accepted the 'separate but equal' apartheid education system.

2.2.4 Policy-makers turn to skill development

In the post-1994 democratic era, as policy-makers explored different paths towards economic growth they continued to link education with economic imperatives, but now within an emphasis on economic transformation and redressing apartheid inequality. Akoojee et al. (2005) point out that the failure of economic growth to keep up with the social and economic aspirations of the black majority led policy-makers to view skills development as both a possible solution and impediment. They argue that this vision of skills development was best expressed by Thabo Mbeki in various policy pronouncements. Key amongst these were Mbeki's famous 'Two Nations' speech, in which Mbeki argued that skills were to be the bridge between two supposedly separate economies that would allow individuals to transition from the marginalised and impoverished second economy into the formal, modern and globally integrated first economy. This notion of duality was challenged by scholars such as Wolpe, who showed the connections between cheap labour and the development of the South African economy (Freund, 2010).

2.2.5 The new skills system

In 1998 and 1999 South Africa adopted two pieces of legislation that established the new regulatory framework for promoting and developing skills in the economy. On October 20, 1998 the Skills Development Act (SDA) was passed, followed by the Skills Development Levy Act (SDLA) a year later. The SDA enacted the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) system, identified learnerships as the key mechanism for ensuring that both the unemployed and employed had access to education and training and outlined the basis for the expansion of employment services. Most of the provisions of the SDA came into effect in September 1999 while the key vehicle for implementation - the SETAs -were introduced in March 2000. The SDLA outlined the requirements for the levy/grant system. It indicated that employers would pay 1% of payroll to fund nationally recognized education and training. Of this 1% of payroll it was intended that 80% would fund priority training for the workplace (through the SETAs) and 20% would fund national training priorities (through the National Skills Fund - NSF). The system is anchored around a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), that was intended to replace all existing qualifications with a competence-based system was drafted by stakeholder structures set up for that purpose. The system was intended to create a regulated market for training, that is responsive to employers' needs and stakeholders would design learning outcomes that Learners needed to have. These learning outcomes, would be registered as unit standards and qualifications in the NQF. Training providers would apply to SETA's and other regulatory bodies for accreditation to enable them to offer registered qualifications or unit standards to learners. The system was also supposed to allow for learners to obtain qualifications based on existing knowledge and skills.

According to Allais, the qualifications framework embodied a great deal of hope for many South Africans. Waves of struggles against apartheid had convinced the black majority of the need to change the education system (Allais, 2014a). Allais argues that ideas about the outcome-based system coincided with the negotiated political settlement in the country. For trade unions, it held the promise of recognition of informal knowledge, for progressive educationists, it promised to shift the education system from its authoritarian roots. She speculates that for apartheid educationalists, it allowed for the continuation of their model of education, where they could define the content of education. Allais shows that there was a remarkable degree of agreement between trade union and business over the introduction of an outcome-based framework. Samson and Vally (1996) note that debates within the labour movement showed that there was a strong push by COSATU through its Participatory Research Project (PRP) for a unified education system that would take both formal and informal learning into account and be 'outcome-based' (Samson & Vally, 1996). The system therefore promised progression in which a lowly cleaner could become an engineer by following a rational path with multiple points of entry. As Allais (2014) argues, the outcomes-based system and the national qualifications framework therefore promised to be everything to all.

However, Samson and Vally (1996) demonstrate that there was contestation within trade unions about the shift towards outcome-based model due to its ideological bias. Samson and Vally (1996) expressed fears that the competence-based system would result in the fragmentation of knowledge. There was also resistance within other sectors, as older established educational institutions ignored the exhortations to adopt unit standards that were to replace traditional qualifications. By 2006, these attempts at enforcing a complete

shift to unit standards had been abandoned and there was effective recognition of old order learnerships (Allais, 2014b).

As Allais (2012) argues, the adoption of a neoliberal model of development in the form of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, was complemented by the competence-based skills system. The system borrows heavily from England, New Zealand, and Australia, which are defined as 'liberal markets' in the literature of the varieties of capitalism scholars. Scholars such as (Bowles & Gintis, 1975) raise numerous pertinent criticisms of human capital theory that can be extended to competence based skills systems linked to liberal market approaches, such as their failure to account for social reproduction. Nevertheless, Allais (2012) argues that the typologies of the varieties of capitalism provide crucial insights. Key amongst these (for Allais) is the identification of links between successful skill formation systems, social welfare provision, and well defined occupational categories.

Other critical literature points to the similarities between the South African approach to vocational education and its counter parts in Anglo Saxon countries, which have adopted supply side economic policies and are defined as 'liberal markets' in the literature of the varieties of capitalism scholars (Allais, 2012). Allais (2014b) also argues that the skill system borrowed in particular from England, New Zealand and Australia. Critical literature points to the fact that some of the most successful systems in coordinated market economies are in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany. They also point out that these systems are usually accompanied by social protection measures and also have defined processes of entry to the labour market, which ensure that workers are acculturated and trained in their particular field (Allais, 2014a; Ashton, Green, Sung, & James, 2002; Bosch & Charest, 2008; Frommberger & Reinisch, 2004).

In contrast to Germany and other coordinated market economies, South Africa adopted a 'market qualification model' of skills development. This model assumes that skills 'mismatches' are a given in economies and that the purpose of education is to improve 'employability'. Thus, it prescribes narrow definitions of 'skills' as a series of discrete tasks that can be packaged (Allais 2012). McGrath (2012) agrees and argues that the orthodox treatment of vocational skills is based on an incomplete understanding of development that ignores social relations and context.

2.2.6 From promise to disappointment

Kallaway (1984) also points to the need to unearth the connections between education systems and economic systems. He states that the central questions for apartheid education were to ensure that there was no political challenge and to produce 'manpower' with appropriate skills. In her work, Allais (2012) points to a number of key contradictions produced by the skills system. Firstly, it has fragmented qualifications and allows for the retention of apartheid curricula by focusing on systems rather than knowledge. Second, it has weakened qualifications by focusing on short-term employer needs. Third, there has been a weakening links between knowledge and practice. Thus, the system has largely contradicted its mission statements and objectives. In her book, 'Selling out Education', Allais (2014a) argues that evidence shows that competence-based systems have failed or collapsed in all the advanced capitalist countries. However, the system is still being pushed onto developing countries. She speculates that the logic of competence system ties neatly

into current economic orthodoxy and the promise neatly packages skills that respond to flexible modes of production.

2.3 High Skills

2.3.1 High skills and Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Competence based skill systems have become extremely popular, since their innovation in the UK (Allais, 2014b, p. 25). Countries that adopt them however, generally do not have defined industrial policies. However it is generally argued that the skill systems would lead to the growth of technology intensive industries, which will need highly developed labour. The theoretical basis for this position is based on an acceptance of Human Capital Theory.

In her PhD thesis, Languille (2014, p. 43) sets out a useful overview of the evolution of the human capital school. She argues that the theory originated from classical economists of the 17th and 18th century, who even then were starting to concern themselves with issues of education for the workforce. She argues, however, that it is since the 1958 work of Jacob Mincer that there was a more systematic theorisation of the link between 'human capital' and economic growth. She further shows that the theory has since evolved from Mincer to other scholars who tried to incorporate criticisms of shortcomings, such as expanding the notion human capital by linking skills and productivity to investment in physical capital, which in turn enhances and promotes economic growth. Nonetheless, she argues that the basic tenets of the theory have remained the same, including: an essentially utilitarian approach to education; faith in individual's 'rational choice'; and investment in education driven by the notion of rates of return in education investment.

According to Languille, (2014, p. 48), there are three general criticisms of human capital theory in education. These are: its utilitarian approach to education; its failure to clearly demonstrate the link between education and economic growth; and finally, its non-variated approach to institutional models, where 'one size fits all'. She argues that in making these arguments, human capital theory has had a profound influence over education policy by purporting direct links between investment in education and employment. It's prescripts have shaped both education spend and its allocation. In her specific research area (secondary education in Tanzania), she argues that human capital theory has led to the neglect of secondary education. This argument is similar to Kraak's observations regarding the neglect of intermediate skills in South African policy (Kraak, 2008, p. 200).

Similarly, Brown (1999, p. 240) also points to the weaknesses of the technicist approach to education employed by practitioners of the theory. He points to the neglect of context, its definition of what actually constitutes a 'skill' and gives examples of the importance of skills such as emotional intelligence, motivation, and others which are not taken into consideration but are key to any economy that is based on 'knowledge'. He defines skills formation as social capacity to learn and innovate and insist that skills need to be understood in terms of their social purpose and whether they exclude sections of society from the fruits of prosperity. He therefore argues that given that intelligence, creativity and ability are central to knowledge, an economy that seeks to build on those capacities needs to actively address issues of inequality, opportunity and democracy as well. He argues that countries such as Singapore have found it difficult to transition, widening their base of creative and thinking skills, moving away from 'technicist' rote learning. Singapore has

struggled with the possible impact of encouraging creativity, whilst the UK is constrained by an exclusively employer driven model of skill formation, which distrusts workers and has ensured that a substantial portion of the population cannot be part of the high skills economy dreamt of by policy-makers.

Brown's (1999) definition of skill formation systems, as complex social processes that should unleash the potential for human intelligence is critical. He also argues for the need to define who is excluded from the fruits of the economy, which is a useful concept to apply to South Africa as well. There is agreement amongst scholars opposed to high skills and human capital theory, on the importance of coordinated, joined up policy between economic policy, education and the development of human capacities.

2.3.2 Debates on High Skills

According to Brown, Ashton, Lauder, & Tholen (2008) the nature of economic development, and the effects of globalization have had the effect of changing the relationship between upgrading workforce skills and jobs and rewards. They argue that policies that promote high skills and 'knowledge' work can only succeed when accompanied by comprehensive industrial policy aligned to this goal. Countries such as China and India have expanded their pools of skilled labour and multinational corporations are responding by 'offshoring' their operations in pursuit of these good but cheaper skills. Therefore, Brown et. al. argue that the old idea that investment in human capital means greater economic growth and jobs is no longer true. They conclude that investment in high skills does not lead to increased employment opportunities, and that instead the new reality is that increased demands for high skills depends on both the quality of labour and the price of that labour.

In South Africa, arguments related to the disjuncture between skills and employment have taken a different dimension. Kraak (2008) argues that the apartheid labour market had produced structured apprenticeship systems for whites that had strong linkages with the labour market, and thus employers. According to Kraak, the post-apartheid labour market, with changes in skills policy, the qualifications framework, and a reduction in funding by state owned enterprises and private employers, have led to the decline in the apprenticeship system.

Kraak (2008) further observes that currently, the three pathways to vocational training are the weakened apprenticeship system, technical colleges, and learnerships. Whilst traditional apprenticeships are in decline, greater numbers of black students have taken up courses in Technical Colleges. However, Kraak argues that most of these courses have no direct links with the labour market and thus no employer sponsorships or prospects of employment after training. The situation is compounded by lack of trust by employers on the quality of the courses offered and thus the quality of labour trained in them. Learnerships were meant to be hybrid systems which combined employer led provision with state support. However government political imperatives emphasised the training of unemployed youth over upskilling the existing workforce.

All of these changes have meant that there is very little coherence in the provision of intermediate skills in the labour market. The result has been increasing levels of unemployment amongst graduates. Kraak (2008) argues that this 'qualification inflation' is of a different nature to that of the UK; while the UK has a problem of matching available

skills to jobs, in South Africa, the problem arises from scepticism about the integrity of the post school training in intermediate skills.

Noting the increased focus in growth as key to political stability and employment, governments have focused on increasing high skills within their societies. Ha-Joon (2002) and Lauder (1999) examine the path taken by Asian tigers in achieving high skill economies that provided growth and employment. The path towards competitiveness was achieved through tight state directed policies that attracted investment by multinational companies, a focus on key sectors of the economy and the creation of home-grown corporations. Lauder also compares higher levels of intermediate skills within the Asian tigers and contrasts this with the UK which has a lower rate of workers at those levels. He also argues that the UK's political commitment to de-regulation and cheapening labour, which stands in contradiction to measures needed to achieve high-skill, high-wage path.

2.3.3 High Skills in South Africa

In South Africa's case, Kraak (2004) points to policy documents being produced by ruling party and its allies, promising unified skill formation system and the need to link these to industrial policy. These were never implemented and the government preferred to pursue a structural adjustment policy, with its emphasis on fiscal stability to the detriment of a coherent industrial policy and a focus on intermediate and low skill parts of the economy.

Kraak (2008) argues that the high skill thesis does not account for developments in developing countries and also ignores the existence of low-skill jobs that co-exist within developed economies. In fact, countries such as Singapore had policies that developed intermediate sectors of their economies. He proposes that South Africa needed to follow a policy that promoted both high-skills in certain sectors and low skills which cover the majority of the employed.

Kraak's argument on the need for policies that develop intermediate sectors has been echoed by commentators such as Natrass & Seekings (2015) who argue that an exclusive focus on developing high skills and a knowledge based economy to the exclusion of intermediate sectors has proven ineffective in raising levels of employment. However, unlike Kraak, they also argue for state intervention to limit wage growth in order to encourage companies to invest in these sectors.

2.4 Debates on Trade Unions and Workplace Change

There is extensive literature on the role of trade unions in workplace change and there is also literature that explores how trade unions have approached the issue of workplace change. In South Africa, commentators such as (S. Friedman, 1987; Lehulere, 1995; von Holdt, 1995, n.d.) have argued for specific forms of engagement with workplace change. Their interventions generally argue for the need for unions to transform themselves to embrace the challenges brought about by South Africa's formal insertion into the global capitalist economy. Some of these arguments were also part of the debate that led to the eventual adoption of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

However, Hlatshwayo (2014) argues that there has been very little academic literature on trade union responses to technological change in the post-apartheid era. In a series of

articles based on his detailed study of two trade unions in Arcelor Mittal, he argues that unions in Germany and Australia decided on a dual strategy of engaging in traditional bargaining and technological change. The COSATU affiliated Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) also proposed a similar strategy in dealing with work organisation and technological change. This approach was devised by its most radical region, which pushed for its adoption by the union nationally. The approach adopted by the union contrasted sharply with approaches by unions such as Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU) (Buhlungu, 1999) that decided to participate in work organisation processes in the form of participatory management, which claimed it sought to consult workers on production issues at PG Bison and Nampak. This approach was supported by scholars such as Eddie Webster, Glen Adler and other prominent labour sociologists (von Holdt, 1995; Webster and Adler, 1999). They argued that it is important for trade unions to adopt a corporatist approach to industrial relations. This entailed embracing joint 'decision-making' on work organisation within companies. Some union activists and labour support organisations contested this view. They argued against the social and political foundations of post-Fordism and rejected co-determination (Lehulere, 1995). Some of these debates led to the wholesale rejection of workplace forums as provided for in the Labour Relations Act, but the post-fordists won through their use of institutional power. The research project will seek to understand the modalities of this power, its exercise and reasons for its success.

These difference in approaches focus not only on issues of work organisation, but also on a range of questions on the nature of the transition to democracy, attitudes to the adoption of the ground-breaking Labour Relations Act of 1995, to attitudes to skills. However, whilst labour sociologists who were part of the debate on the role of unions in the transition, published their views in various academic journals, the opposing views held by activists remain largely unpublished. Ngcwangu (2016) points to some of these contestations, which emerged during interviews and occasional articles in the South African Labour Bulletin. These debates, where written, are in various activist oriented publications, unpublished papers and in memories of participants. Some of them argue that the road to the changes in the militant traditions of South African unions even predates these debates (Beresford, 2006; Hlatshwayo, 2014; Lehulere, 1995; van Driel, 2005). The research project draws on these activist writings and interviews theorise them and bring them into academic debates.

2.5 Conclusion

The preceding literature review examined literature that critiques versions of history that intentionally close spaces for examination of events, and that emphasise the importance of recognising hidden voices. This research report is inspired by and contributes to this literature by focusing on left positions within NUMSA on the skills debate that have been excluded from the historical record. The second section of the literature review engaged literature that critically assesses the history of skills in South Africa from the colonial period to the present day. It foregrounded the ways in which the very meaning of skill is deeply political, as it is bound up with the forging of race, colonial and apartheid domination, and the development of South Africa's form of racial capitalism. This section of the literature review revealed a further way in which the history of skills in South Africa is political by establishing that both skills and skills systems do not exist in isolation but are developed and defined as part of broader political positions on the economy, the economic and industrial policy.

The literature on the post-apartheid skills system establishes that South Africa's qualification framework is rooted in neoliberalism and a commitment to a 'high skills' approach. Given the centrality of high skills to struggles over skills in South Africa, the next section of the literature review focused on the meaning, history and ideological roots of high skills. Throughout this research report it is argued that the hidden debates about the new skills system can only be understood by analysing how they related to deep contestation within NUMSA and COSATU regarding union positions on the political direction of the unions (particularly in relation to the alliance), neoliberalism, workplace change and corporatism. The final section of the literature review therefore focused on the crucially important debates within unions on workplace change within which debates on skills were located. The literature review therefore provides a foundation for the building of the intellectual arguments in the report regarding the political stakes at play in the development and institutionalization of the skills system. It also adds a new dimension to left debates on the politics of the transition by adding the largely overlooked realm of skills to the debate.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Why a framework? According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the aim of a conceptual framework is to categorize and describe concepts relevant to the study and map relationships among them.

This research project conducts an examination of the historically contested relationships that shaped NUMSA's position on skills as it played a key role in the development of the post-apartheid skills system. The NUMSA position was adopted by COSATU as labour's position on the Skills System. As pointed out in Chapter 1, although some scholars point to contestation within unions on their attitude to the Qualifications Framework, these observations do not explore the basis of these differences. The theoretical approach employed in this report aims to address this gap and is rooted in a Marxist perspective. Daniel Little (1982) makes the observation that the social world is constituted by activities of billions of men and women. He points out that the world embodies within it institutions, organizations, and structures that propel and constrain individual action, and that these social entities give rise to processes that are neither law-governed nor random. The social world gives rise to relations of power, domination, exploitation, and resistance. It is a world that produces outcomes that advantage some and disadvantage others. The Marxist method takes, as its point of departure, the view that social systems are best understood through a study of patterns of relationships and conflicts inherent in them. It rejects simple summations of discrete elements as separate entities (Dobb, 2001). In his work on Marxist historiography, Gyorgy Lukacs (1989) argues that ideas based on classical German philosophy and economic theory of Adam Smith and Ricardo, start from an acceptance of the "rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions". He states that for these theories, history unfolds within grounds laid by social institutions and tends to reinforce perceptions that they constitute the natural order of the world. In this conception, history becomes fossilised in formalism that fails to grasp that institutions are socio-historical and consist of social relations. He argues that from this stance, history can be rationalised as being driven by blind forces that cannot be understood rationally.

The dominant approach in the field of education sociology is currently centred on concepts of borrowing, varieties of capitalism and human capital theory, all of which are based on functionalism and structural functionalism (Sever, 2012). These approaches mostly follow the same track of either accepting institutions as they are or comparing similar models without exploring the underlying socio-historical forces that shaped them (institutions). An understanding of relations embedded in these institutions would alert policy-makers as to their limitations, underlying principles and their political and social orientation. The limitations of these approaches can be seen in numerous studies conducted on Qualifications Frameworks adopted by many countries notwithstanding their numerous deficiencies, the attendant problems of borrowing and a failure to account for differences in histories, context and social relations (Allais, 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Young & Allais, 2013). Functional theory scholars in particular, tend to rely on theoretical frameworks that are ahistorical and fail to examine social relations that shaped their formation. As stated above, this project will draw upon the Marxist historical approach, which insists on the essence of social phenomena being understood in the context of their multiple determinations.

Unions are institutions within capitalism, and thus they have their own set of social relations and they are by nature constantly forced to adapt to capitalism, at times becoming agents

for radical change. However, unions are not monoliths with perfect agreement on strategy, understanding of the context, or tactics to be used in confronting problems. In commenting on the varieties of capitalism approach, Albo (2005) develops a Marxist approach for theorizing institutions that sees them as produced through contested social relations. Drawing on Albo, my theoretical framework is shaped by the understanding that as social institutions, unions are constituted through and inhibited by contestation between various social forces, involving social, economic, political and ideological aspects. Adopting this theoretical framework will allow me to understand the social forces underpinning NUMSA's (and COSATU's) adoption and promotion of skills-based grading and the new skills system, as well as why other options that failed to win support. This question is important because the skill system exhibits many problems of bureaucratisation and chasing of targets without any meaningful change (Kraak, 2008). Thus, understanding alternatives that were debated and the reasons for their defeat serves both historical memory and also provides a basis for the formulation of alternatives.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

This section provides an overview of the methodology and methods employed in the research project. Clough and Nutbrown (2012) differentiate between methodology and methods by noting that methodology demonstrates how the questions asked in the field articulate with the overall research question, while methods are the ways that the field research is conducted. The methodology that guides this research project is Hart's (2006) Marxist methodology of 'critical ethnography'. The methods employed, which align with the methodology, are unstructured interviews and archival research. The remainder of this section elaborates the methodology; provides an overview of the research methods employed; identifies limitations; and presents a brief conclusion.

4.1 Methodology

Neither ordinary 'common-sense' nor methods of the natural sciences are sufficient for us to understand complex interrelations of systems, structures, casual processes that are embodied in the social world. Marxist scholar David Harvey (1996) argues that systems, things and structures do not exist in isolation, they exist with prior relations and processes that create and undermine them. Marxist methodology is broadly rooted within the assumption that relations and the multiple determinations that act on them are fundamental in the analysis of social phenomena. In this vein, Gillian Hart (2004) argues for a non-positivist approach to research that goes beyond both the study of the impact of external forces to relations and beyond an approach that looks at varieties of a system with a view to determining similarities or differences. She argues for 'Critical Ethnography', which generates new insights by understanding relations of power that constitute alliances, retreats, connections and disconnections in studying places and spaces (Hart, 2006). She also points out that peculiarities of situations can emerge from relationships between processes, identities, and objects; understanding how these relations are produced and mediated is the key to new understandings.

Employing the methodology of critical ethnography enabled this research project to unearth and theorise the constitutive processes underpinning the establishment of the hegemonic approach to training within NUMSA as the leading union in skills debates. In conducting a critical ethnography, the union was taken as a social institution, inhibited by various social forces that have distinct social, economic, political, and ideological orientations mediated through multiple relations within themselves and in broader society. This has assisted in understanding the processes and power relations that shaped NUMSA's specific choices and approaches to education and skills.

4.2 Methods

Research methods must be selected and designed in order to ensure that the overall research question can be answered (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research question for this research project demanded an understanding of historical debates; the experiences of the protagonists and attempted to give voice to opinions that are not part of the historical

record. Qualitative methods allowed for a focus on experiences and perceptions of various actors and their assessment of the final outcome of the debate and perceptions and assessment of the outcome of the skill system (Marvasti, 2004).

The methods table below indicates the three sub-questions for which evidence was sought. It sets out the evidence required, methods used to collect the evidence and the participants who were best able to provide answers. The methods were unstructured interviews and analysis of archival documents. The nature of the question required research to unearth undocumented artefacts and interviews with various actors who were on different sides of the debate of the skills system. Given the undocumented nature of some of the debates, unstructured interviews were essential in accessing the memories of activists and intellectuals within and outside the academy. In addition to existing academic literature relevant to the research (Allais, 2014a; Badroodien, 2004) the research reviewed policy documents, and primary documents that resided in private papers, union policy resolutions, activist journals.

4.2.1 Methods table

<u>Sub-question</u>	<u>Evidence required</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Informants</u>
1 What were the historical, ideological, and material conditions that shaped the various positions?	• Factors that influenced political choices • Underlying reasons for positions held • Reasons behind success or lack thereof of contesting positions	• In depth interviews • Analysis of Resolutions and policy papers • Analysis of non-academic literature • Analysis of Union reports	• Research Officer and other officers of Canadian Auto Workers • Academics and Canadian Auto Workers • allies Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin • NUMSA Officials • COSATU Official
2 How did the dominant position on skills in NUMSA prevail?	• Structural, ideological factors that led to the adoption of the pro-NQF • The extent of the impact of academics and union intellectuals in the debate • The extent and impact of relations with Canadian and Australian unions in the debate	• In depth interviews • Analysis of Resolutions and policy papers • Analysis of non-academic literature • Analysis of Union reports	• Academics and Canadian Auto Workers • allies and Sam Gindin • NUMSA Officials • COSATU Official

4.2.2 Archival Research

Scott and Morrison (2006) point to the historical neglect of documentary research by social scientists and argue that documents could provide source data in their own right or be used to evaluate new data in conjunction with other data garnered through other sources. Ventresca and Mohr (2002) define archival research as encompassing a wide range of methods, whose primary purpose is to facilitate the investigation of documents produced by and for organisations. The project accessed policy documents, resolutions, position papers, and activist journals that reflected the debates. The sources included union resolutions; workshop reports, minutes of union meetings, position papers by activists and unions. The undocumented sources were located primarily in the following locations: the NUMSA Archives at the Cullen Library and the private papers of former Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) officials. Most of these documents were in physical form and there was only one electronic copy. Copies of relevant documents were scanned, and form part of the evidence analysed in this report.

4.2.3 Unstructured interviews

The method of unstructured interviews allowed for fluid interactions between the researcher and the participant, as participants were not answering from a strict range of questions. It allowed participants to speak about a range of relevant experiences. According to Marvasti (2004), there are two types of unstructured interviews: in-depth and ethnographic interviews. Although he warns that the terminology is often used interchangeably, there are differences in the two. Ethnographic interviews assume the importance of space and that the social context guides that researcher. In-depth interviews do not necessarily rely on space or physical locality as critical to the research process. In this project, in-depth interviews were conducted, and this method allowed for revelation of deep insights.

Interviews were conducted with three categories of informants – Canadian academics involved in the skills debates in NUMSA, a former Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union official, a former COSATU official, and current and former NUMSA officials. During a research trip to Canada in April 2017 in-depth interviews were conducted with Sam Gindin, the former research officer of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and two Canadian academics with a special interest in South Africa. The CAW was actively engaged in debates within NUMSA on the qualifications framework, attitudes to labour flexibility and the nature of the economy. The officer and the academics concerned visited South Africa in the course of the debates and continue to have a fraternal relationship with the union. The CAW also intervened by meeting with NUMSA's Training Team, who went on to become the core of the union's delegation to various structures of the skill system. In-depth interviews were also conducted with Canadian academics Leo Panitch and John Saul who all played a key role in the Canadian debates and engagements with NUMSA.

Interviews also took place with a former national COSATU official who was part of the team responsible for making proposals on the skills system. Interviews were also conducted with a current NUMSA officer, who was active in the debates and has been in the union for over 20 years.

Ethical clearance was obtained, and all participants completed the consent form. An information form was also submitted to participants, describing the purpose of the research project, the duration of the interview and agreement on confidentiality. Participants were informed that there was no financial incentive from participating in the interview, and there was no discomfort arising from their participation (Babbie, 2013). The interview consisted of eight questions of which three were a minimum needed to provide adequate information. The interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes each, but some ran for an hour and were recorded, using a digital recorder, as recommended by Corbetta (2003). Participants were requested to give permission for the use of an audio recording device and they were informed that the data will remain confidential and kept in a secure place.

4.3 Limitations

The research depended on access to documents held by organisations and individuals. Documents were accessed through the Cullen Library, but were incomplete. The supervisor Dr Kraak, was eventually able to facilitate permission required for me to access the NUMSA archives at the Cullen Library. These archives do not include a complete record and some documents sought could not be found.

Accessing documents held in the CAW archives was not possible due to organisational changes that were taking place at the time of my visit to Canada. Several former CAW officials did, however, generously share their personal archives with me. As a result of the relative paucity of documents from CAW this report relies heavily on interviews conducted with key informants.

The key challenge encountered in this study was that those who opposed elements of the bargaining strategy were mostly organic intellectuals who did not write about their positions. Even today there is reluctance by serving Union officers to speak on these issues, with some declining the invitation to be interviewed or simply never committed to a time for the interview. The limited time available for a Masters research report did not permit me to conduct a search for workers (many of whom are retired or no longer in the sector) who were actively involved in these contestations. In his PhD thesis, Ngcwangu (2016) captures some of these voices, as well as reflections from academics who were sympathetic to the left position. These are used to supplement the interviews conducted and archival evidence gathered.

4.4 Conclusion

This section has outlined the methodology of critical ethnography and methods of archival research and unstructured interviews that were employed in the study, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations. The selected methods ensured that information that could be obtained, was suitable to answer the research question.

Chapter 5 – A Brief History of NUMSA

5.1 NUMSA's Formation

NUMSA was formed in 1987 as a result of a merger of four trade unions: the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (MICWU), the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), and the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa (UMMAWOSA). The largest union within the merging parties was MAWU, which had 80 000 members at the time. The new union was the second largest affiliate within COSATU with 130 000 paid up members (Forrest, 2007).

In the 1980's, the three unions had taken up battles against the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), which was establishing 'parallel unions' for black workers. The state did not allow black trade unions to be registered, thus they could not access certain organisational rights such as stop order facilities and the right to bargain for wages and other conditions of employment. After the 1976 uprising, unions had been weakened by state repression, however workers had continued to join unions, organise and attempt to negotiate with employers using a variety of strategies. Simultaneously, employers were also clamouring for access to skilled black workers. The state set up the Wiehann Commission, which proceeded to propose limited rights for black unions, on condition that they register and become part of the industrial relations system. The unions that went on to form NUMSA were opposed to the exclusion of African workers from unions, and together with other unions, MAWU succeeded in overturning racially divided registration. The unions were also largely in agreement on the need for political and organisational independence from political parties. Their merger into NUMSA was preceded by some of the constituent unions merging with others and voting out their conservative leadership and orienting towards building strong shop floor structures (Forrest, 2007, p. 328; S. Friedman, 1987, pp. 57, 121–152).

Each founding union brought something unique to the new union. MICWU organised in the Motor sector, manufacturing, body building, components and petrol attendants. It had initially been part of Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), which only accepted registered trade unions as affiliates, thus excluding black unions who were not allowed to register. It organised mostly coloured workers. MAWU was one of the unions formed by the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF) after the 1973 Durban strikes. Its founding had been preceded by careful study of the fortunes of general unions such as the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), which was a social movement union, with a mass base in townships, but was weak in factories (Friedman, 1987, p. 244). NAAWU, on the other hand, was the result of a merger of three unions in the Motor Assembly industry. Its constituent unions had been formed as early as the 1960's. NAAWU's membership was primarily based in the Eastern Cape, having organised in companies such as Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen.

The four unions drew on their varied traditions to build NUMSA. In the first ten years of its existence, many of the worker leaders who emerged to lead NUMSA were drawn from the activists across these unions. Most came from MAWU, which was the largest component of the new union. Its political and organisational traditions were influenced by a strong belief

in the importance of worker control, strong factory based organisation and political independence. MAWU also had a much clearer political orientation and positions on strategies to build strong shop floor structures. Some unions came in with strong administrative systems, others had started building strong shop stewards committees and some had learnt a lot of lessons on winning recognition from employers.

5.2 Joe Foster Speech and FOSATU political orientation

Two of NUMSA's constituent unions (MAWU and NAAWU), were also founder members of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). They had thus developed a close working relationship and also later went on to be founder members of COSATU in 1985. In April 1982, at FOSATU's second national conference, its General Secretary Joe Foster had set out an approach to politics and unity that became FOSATU policy, until the emergence of COSATU. At the time FOSATU was three years old and had grown from 20 000 to 100 000 workers. The Joe Foster speech was an important political and organisational statement that committed FOSATU as a working class organisation to struggle for political change through building an independent worker movement based in factories (Friedman 1987, p. 286). Delegates who were gathered in the conference listened to one of the most important statements on the future of independent trade unions since the 1973 Durban strikes. The speech was also the most explicit statement of what 'Workerism' meant for its proponents. As discussed further below, workerism was a political tendency within the trade union movement that argued for the political independence of the working class and the building of strong, accountable and democratic factory-based committees. Most of their ideas drew on various strands of European Marxism. The speech was a repudiation of the ANC's and SACP's position (through their Union ally SACTU) that organizing trade unions under conditions of apartheid was impossible. The fact that FOSATU was a federation composed of militant and radical unions was an important statement. The speech also characterised the ANC as opportunistic in its relations with workers who were struggling in the country. Foster argued that:

"to reinforce its international position it (the ANC) has to claim credit for all forms of internal resistance, no matter what the political nature of such resistance. There is, therefore, a tendency to encourage undirected opportunistic political activity; it has to locate itself between the major international interests. To the major Western powers it has to appear as anti-racism but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to be at least neutral in the super power struggle and certainly it could not appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries as the response to Solidarity illustrates. These factors must seriously affect its relationship to workers...(Foster, 1982, p. 20)

Based on this analysis he argued that:

It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters (Foster, 1982, p. 24).

The speech was a clear, powerful and unambiguous statement on the future direction of the trade Union movement and its role in broader struggles for liberation. The speech helped to

clarify and crystallise the positions of the contending political factions in the Union movement into the 'Populist' vs 'Workerist' sections. These debates were to reverberate across the labour movement and are finally being settled with the current disintegration of COSATU. The debates provide an important framework within which to understand key debates that later took place on the role of trade unions in the new political dispensation in 1994. How various actors perceived the role of trade unions 10 years later led to the eventual adoption of the National Qualifications Framework. In the next section, these debates are unpacked and their political and strategic implications laid out.

5.3 Workersim as a tendency in unions

In a volume dedicated to uncovering the left during apartheid, Byrne, Ulrich and van der Walt (Byrne, Ulrich, & van der Walt, 2017) argue that within South African unions there was a political tendency of 'workerism' that rejected both the politics of nationalism as espoused by the ANC and Marxist Leninism of the South African Communist party. As noted above, in the 1980's, this tendency was found mostly within FOSATU unions. It emphasised strong workplace organisations and internal democracy as critical to fighting against apartheid and capitalism.

FOSATU itself was composed of trade unions that had been formed from various initiatives in the 1970's. There were unions that had been formed by industrial aid societies such as the Urban Training Project (UTP), unions that broke away from the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) due to its conservatism and exclusion of black workers and unions formed by University based intellectuals, Benefit Funds and Industrial aid societies (Friedman, 2011, p. 27). Unions that had broken away from TUCSA such as the National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMROSA), organised mostly coloured workers, were propagating ideas such as the need for tight coordination of struggles and the need to unite with African workers. Others, who were part of Industrial Aid Societies were heavily influenced by Marxists who believed in independent, factory-based unions. Therefore, these unions were in agreement on key issues such as unity and worker control and this allowed for the emergence and practice of ideas that became 'Workerism'.

Part of the criticism levelled at workerists by their opponents was that they represented white voices that advocated against the involvement of black unions in community struggles and that they were mostly white university educated intellectuals (Byrne, 2012, p. 199; Byrne et al., 2017, p. 267). However, Byrne et al argue that not only was 'workerism' not homogenous, but that there existed within it a range of influences including Euro communism, Syndicalism and even European Social Democratic fractions that were attracted to corporatism and co-determination as practiced by European unions. While the critiques of the racial and class character of workerists is correct, it is important to note that the workerist principles of workers control, democratic mandates, strong shopfloor structures and political independence were supported by thousands of black union members and became entrenched in defined traditions and political practices. These were eventually supplanted by a victorious Congress tendency, in the form of a resurgent ANC and SACP, which had consolidated themselves through the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF).

As a political tendency, workerists led the union movement through some of its key political and organizational moments. These included winning the great Registration debate (where unions had to decide if they would boycott the newly reformed labour relations regime proposed by the Wiehann Commission), the establishment of industrial unions as the most appropriate organisational form, the establishment of strong shop floor structures and workers control. The fact that many workers agreed with notions of worker control and independence of trade unions was demonstrated during the funeral service of Neil Aggett in February 1982, when ANC activists unfurled an ANC banner and thousands of workers were forced to march behind it. After the funeral service, workers wanted to know whose leader Neil Aggett was, and emphasised that he died because of his union activities. Workers felt their struggle and platform had been stolen from them (Friedman, 1987, p. 284). This incident showed that there was a very strong current within the black trade union movement, that believed in their political and organizational independence. These notions about struggle and working-class independence were part of important political, ideological and organizational conquests that laid the basis for sustained levels of struggle by workers in South Africa.

However, two broad strands characterised as populists against workerists emerged within the trade unions on issues of strategy, orientation and politics. Populists referred to the strand within unions and popular movements arguing for the primacy of nationalist struggle and the need for an orientation towards the liberation movement (and the ANC in particular). Workerists argued for the political independence of the working class and the need to build strong organisations based on principles of worker control. The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) marked the beginning of the defeat of workerism and by 1985, FOSATU merged with congress aligned unions to form COSATU. It also marked the end of 10 years of the dominance of workerism and the eventual solidification of organizational models it had helped found (Buhlungu, 2006b, p. 447).

5.4 NUMSA and COSATU in the Transition

The period preceding the first democratic elections in 1994 was accompanied by much debate and activity within the unions on the future direction and nature of the South African state. NUMSA started off with a strong position on the need for the political and organisational independence of the working class, and the Special Congress in 1993 called for the alliance between COSATU, the ANC and the Communist Party to end immediately after the ANC is elected in 1994 (Raditladi Matabane, 2014). However, by 1994, the union had moved towards greater support for the alliance.

The transition period was a time political ferment in South Africa, with workers and communities being called out to support demonstrations in support of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). CODESA was the formal platform for discussion between the anti-apartheid forces and the Nationalist party and its allies, and the first meeting was in October 1991. The talks were characterised by periodic marches called in support of deadlocks and political disagreements and workers in trade unions, closely followed events that were unfolding there.

Within unions, debates on labour market flexibility and work re-organisation were just starting, particularly after the Labour Relations Bill was announced by the new government. The introduction of the proposed Labour Relations Act (LRA) led to its rejection by shop

stewards, due to its provisions on labour market flexibility, loss of historical rights such as the duty to bargain and the notion of codetermination through workplace forums Lehlere (1995). COSATU and its unions were also at the centre of efforts to re-establish the ANC as a functioning organisation within the country. Lehlere notes the fact that it was the unions who had the organisational and strategic capacity to anchor the establishment of the ANC. He argues that unions had the experience and intellectual capacity for policy formulation that the ANC lacked, despite their decades in exile:

Without Cosatu the liberation movements would have been at sea both politically and organisationally. Firstly, organisationally, Cosatu was the only organisation that was truly national in character. Between Cosatu and its affiliates there was a trade union office in almost every town – large and small (Lehlere, 1995, p. vi).

The promulgation of the Labour Relations Bill and its accompanying green paper in 1994, was meant to represent the summation of victories that workers had won since 1973. Workers had hoped that Bill would finally represent the codification of all those gains and the consolidation of new ones. On the contrary, workers were faced with new concepts that threatened to wipe their gains and introduce neoliberalism in the workplace. Hundreds of shop stewards gathered in the Johannesburg City Hall and rejected the agreements that COSATU leaders had made in negotiations with the state and employers. These provisions were based on the need for 'international markets', improved productivity, value chains, workplace restructuring and codetermination. These agreements led to one of the last strikes in defence of fundamental labour rights since 1973, which was held on the 6th June 1995. Over 250 000 thousand workers marched in defiance of agreements made by their leaders (at the time I was education officer in the WITS Region of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and was one of the organisers of this march).

As Lehlere explains, in addition to the issues mentioned above, the key clauses that were disputed included:

...the fact that the act did not impose a duty to bargain on the part of employers; that the act did not allow workers to strike against retrenchments (and this notwithstanding its professed commitment to a 'balance of forces' approach to industrial relations); and that the act sought to introduce new shop floor structures which would compete with shop steward committees...(Lehlere, 1995, p. vii).

The 1995 strike did not end in victory for workers and there is very little public record of it, even in newspapers, except for internal union reports and photographs taken by William Matlala (William Matlala, 2014). The reversal of long held positions had, in fact, started well before the 1995 LRA strike. For instance, in 1992 Enoch Godongwana, who became General Secretary of NUMSA, advocated the need for a social compact with capital, arguing that unions needed to reject both social democracy and 'dogmatic adherence to Marxism'. He argued for the need to reform capitalism in a manner that incorporated socialism and social democracy (Godongwana, 1992). Indeed, it could be argued that the seeds of the reversal of key positions held by MAWU and other unions were already being sown during the formation of NUMSA in 1987. For instance, the political resolution in the founding congress of 1987 accepted the Freedom Charter and the need for political alliances with the mass democratic movement (Labour Bulletin, 1989).

5.5 The Early Democratic Era

In 1995, workers had made their rejection of codetermination and labour market flexibility known to their leaders and intellectuals, who were supporting these changes. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the issues outlined above illustrate that the arrival of a democratic government and co-operation with capital allowed union leaders to shift from long help positions towards accommodation with government and capital. However, the union base did not allow this shift without a fight. As discussed above, workers organised strikes and marched against some of the key components of the new economic policy and corporatist ideas which were not in their class interest. Yet, many of these positions were adopted by unions anyway.

Hirschsohn (2011, p. 7) notes that COSATU retreated substantially from its heights of direct participation and direct control by members. He notes that these traditions were entrenched in unions because they mirrored the broader struggle against apartheid. He further observes that, although the establishment of shop stewards moved workers a step away from the direct democracy of the 1970's, unions as institutions maintained the political importance of worker control and absolute accountability of shop stewards and office bearers. However, by the 1990's, these traditions were beginning to wane and democratic structures increasingly became means of transmitting decisions from above. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that the formal institutions remain, the context and nature of participants changed. Other commentators (Forrest, 2007, p. 28; Keet, 1992) also noted declines in democratic traditions in the 1990's including bureaucratic tendencies, organisers taking control of issues, lower attendance of local shop stewards committees, too many meetings and other organisational weaknesses.

The ideological shift within the leading blocks within the unions also coincided with unprecedented violence unleashed by apartheid para-military forces against township residents before the 1994 elections (TRC, 1998, p. 476). The effects of prolonged violence, inability to get their leaders to listen together with the failure of democracy means that leaders simply continued with their policies through various tripartite structures. Buhlungu (2010) also notes the paradox of the weakening of COSATU unions and the range of problems they experienced, at the cusp of their victorious struggle that started in 1973.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a political history of the formation of NUMSA, locating it within broader political debates of the period. It has clarified both the core debates, the proponents of different positions, and the ideological and political basis for their positions. It has also documented the dominance of workerism in FOSATU, discussed its social base, before detailing the rise of the alliance in COSATU. Through the discussion of contestation over the LRA, the chapter revealed both the shift towards accommodation of neoliberalism by union leaders, as well as the ways in which members mobilised in opposition. It is within this political context that debates around skills emerged, and it is of crucial importance that analysis of skills debates in the unions be rooted in critical interrogation of how different positions on skills were part of this broader political contestation. It is to the conducting of such analysis that this report now turns.

Chapter 6 – The Development of the High Skills Position in NUMSA

How it is that one of the most militant unions in South Africa proposed the NQF and Skills Based Grading. It was not that crude and it was so easily appealing to comrades. It was framed in such a way that people were divorcing the ideological debate from the positive aspects of this type of system (ex Numsa leader 2013, as cited in Ngcwangu, 2016, p. 170).

The quote above captures the paradox that NUMSA and COSATU, with strong socialist histories, proposed and endorsed an outcomes-based skills system which, as per the literature review, is in itself neoliberal and bound up with neoliberal approaches to workplace organisation. This chapter and the following two seek to resolve this paradox. This chapter critically analyses the ways in which the proposals for the new system were developed, promoted and accepted. Chapter 7 elaborates the critiques and alternative proposals put forward by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). Chapter 8 presents tentative reasons why the CAW's critical perspective, which was deeply aligned with NUMSA's official positions on capitalism and workplace reorganisation, was defeated.

Chapter 5 ended with a brief discussion on changes in the political orientation of union leadership and their increasing ideological distance from union members. Prior to presenting and analysing NUMSA's bargaining strategy and adoption of a high skills approach and skills-based grading, it is necessary to understand the multiple determinations of these broader shifts which the new approaches to bargaining and skills formed part of.

6.1 The broader context shaping NUMSA's adoption of high skills

6.1.1 Economic changes

The dawn of democracy brought with it many new questions for the trade union movement. In NUMSA, employers in the motor and auto sectors had raised the possibility of wide ranging job losses due to potential competitors that were supposedly waiting to enter South African markets. In 1992, the then Minister of Finance proposed the establishment of a Motor Industry Task Group (MITG) to negotiate tariff reductions from 115% over time in line with demands from the General Agreement in Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Hirschsohn, Shane, & Maree (2000, p. 55). NUMSA was part of the team and there was eventual agreement to reduce tariffs at a faster rate than provided for in GATT. The union's entry into new tripartite arrangements spurred discussions for new positions to deal with the new terrain. Forrest (2007) points out that the union found itself becoming very popular; it was invited to a wide range of forums, where discussions on overcoming various crises was discussed. These invitations to participate in policy formulation helped solidify some of the incipient ideological changes that were taking place and placed them out in the open. These changes can be seen in the processes the union initiated to conduct research on various aspects of issues that affect workers discussed below.

These new openings for NUMSA were linked to the well documented rapprochement between big business, the ANC and its allies during the transition. Such a relationship would have been unthinkable in an earlier period. For example, John Saul notes that in his

discussions with Steve Biko, he (Biko) believed that if Capital wanted stability, they would make a deal with the ANC and capitalism would be saved in South Africa. However:

Biko felt that the whites were too racist to consider that. Biko was a student of Fanon, he admired him but disagreed with him. He felt that in South Africa, the race issue was too raw to permit whites to back off it. Ironically that is exactly what happened later. Capitalists changed sides, Oppenheimers, Zach De Beer and others were clear about the need to get away from under this apartheid curse. There were discussions within capital about the dangers of the anti-apartheid movement being transformed into a left, revolutionary movement. Therefore, capital began to change and goes over to the ANC's side. Fortunately for them, but not accidentally, the ANC side was moving over to them. That link between capital and the ANC meant that capital deracialised, and the ANC became inheritors of that tradition (John Saul, Interviewed on 13 April 2017).

These closer relations between capital, the ANC and the unions helped to shape the way that they analysed the changing economic context and developed positions towards it.

6.1.2 Shifts in union and ANC economic policy and positions

Freund (2013) notes that in the early 1990s a number of alternative economic policy approaches were available to the ANC and the unions. Webster & Adler (1998) highlight the ANC's own policy proposals crafted by progressive economists in the Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG) in the 1980's, as well as its own electoral platform in the form of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). COSATU had also produced the Social Equity and Job Creation document in 1996 that was adopted by labour in National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). However, Marais argues that elements of the path towards economic orthodoxy that were later entrenched in the ANC government's neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) were established within COSATU policies at that time. He traces much of this shift to the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) that investigated the country's poor manufacturing performance that advocated post-fordist production and progressive competitiveness. As discussed in Chapter 7 the ISP had a strong influence on the development of the high skills position in NUMSA and COSATU.

The archives show that the earliest proposal in the direction of competitiveness in NUMSA was made in 1989 (Bird, 1989). Black Union leaders, many of whom had historically opposed workerism and some of those who were in the workerist faction started supporting the new orientation. Leaders such as Enoch Godongwana actually wrote articles propagating these views (Godongwana, 1992). This raises the issue of the underlying factors that shaped these shifts.

6.1.3 Class formation and the emerging black elites in within trade unions

While it is clear that in the early 1990s there were important changes in the economy in general and NUMSA's sectors in particular, these structural changes are not sufficient to explain why unions fundamentally transformed their positions on key economic issues. Here, it is argued that there was simultaneously a process of class formation underway in

the unions as they became a ladder for leaders from shopfloor to national level into government and industry.

6.1.3.1 Full time shop stewards and change in social composition of unions.

The changed in the ideology of union leaders and the political repositioning of the union was accompanied by changes in union practice. Hirschsohn (2011) argues that the growth in complexities of issues facing unions forced institutional changes that weakened democratic controls within unions. These included the establishment of what were effectively Executive Presidents who were now a full-time shop stewards, even though they remained employed by companies. This was significant because of the longstanding organisational and political practice that worker leaders must be workers themselves and they were required to maintain strong links with the shop floor. The rise of full time shop stewards in unions, meant that unions had available, large layers of workers who could attend meetings. However, being a shop steward was also a possible career path and was richly rewarded in unions such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Even where there were no changes in wages, shop stewards were accorded other benefits, such as travel, hotel accommodation, car hires and best of all; not being accountable to employers and being removed from the pressures of the shop floor. This meant that there were structural changes in the social composition of trade unions. These problems continue to plague the unions in the current period. For example, after the Marikana massacre, workers repeatedly cited the fact that wage agreements allowed shop stewards to be paid at the level of artisans and they were effectively removed from shafts. The lack of trust in the shop stewards was one of the key reasons, Rock Drill Operators (RDO's) decided to demand improvements in wages directly without going through the unions Sinwell & Mbatha (2016, p. 36).

6.1.3.2 Union investment companies and class formation

Another key development was the establishment on union investment companies and the opening of avenues for career advancement and promotion for shop stewards and union officials. In the late 1980's, unions had fought for the right to have a say in pension funds and had also led the charge for the establishment of Provident Funds (Labour Research Service (LRS), (2002). The Chemical Industrial Workers Union (CWIU) had won the right to join the boards of Pension funds in 1987, whilst NUMSA won this in 1981. The LRS report points out that unions did not use these funds strategically, to change their investment patterns. However, the report fails to deal with a more fundamental change that took place in the 1990's, with the emergence of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This crucial history has not been properly documented. However, in the writer's experience, the early 1990's saw an emerging alliance between Trustees and sections of black capital. Companies such as Alexander Forbes were able beat their rivals in winning contracts to administer Union controlled funds. These companies sponsored many union conferences, paying for venues, accommodation and marketing paraphernalia. Trustees were also wined and dined. In some unions, the funds provided seed capital to establish trade union investment companies. The establishment of CEPPWAWU investment is an illustration (and cautionary tale) on the connection between social formation and investment companies.

A case in point; CEPPWAWU Investments

The story of CWPPWAWU Investments is yet to be written. The Union's total stake is now worth over R3.8 Billion. Having used workers' (and mine, as a union official!) provident funds for seed capital, the funds were invested in companies organised by the union (such as Astra Zeneca, Aspen Pharmacare). Office Bearers in the union fell out with BEE partners, which led to a battle over this fortune. CEPPWAWU's General Secretary (Muzi Buthelezi) had resigned and joined the company as Chairperson. He was removed in a boardroom coup, after a fight with the BEE 'investors'. Muzi Buthelezi had been in CWIU since its formation and was part of the National executive of FOSATU. He was a radical workerist, who had agreed with Joe Foster on the need for strong and radical unions. By 1999, he had led the dissolution of CWIU and its merger with PPWAWU. The only resolutions passed in the merging congress were to confirm support for the alliance and to form an investment company. These resolutions had been preceded by attempts by the CWIU and COSATU leadership to subdue the left in CWIU, which had opposed both the alliance and the adoption of the ideology of competitiveness. The relationship between union investment companies and the emergence of the black middle class is not covered in literature. Iheduru (2001), argues that the role of trade union investment companies is not explored. The writer agrees, but also points out that a more fundamental point is the relationship between these union investment companies and class formation. A number of former trade union officials and workers have used these companies to accumulate vast amounts of wealth.

6.1.3.4 Class formation and the state

The political settlement opened new avenues for advancement for union activists in government. In 1994 NUMSA proudly announced all of its officials and worker leaders who had joined the ANC in Parliament. This list excluded those that went into government, taking up senior positions in the civil service. The list contained 18 names and included a General Secretary, a President, organisers, administrators, organizing secretary, bargaining secretary etc. The list excludes those that left a few months later including one of the key architects of skills based grading (NUMSA, 1994). The parliamentarians occupied key positions in government, Alec Erwin became Deputy Finance minister and others became MP's. Enoch Godongwana was to become a deputy minister twice – first in Economic Development and then in Public Enterprises. A number of key officials went on to join the Department of labour, where they were key to driving the Qualifications Framework forward.

The emergence of black elites from trade unions required the re-configuration of the unions structures and alignment with the emerging BEE elites. It also required the acceptance by unions that it was acceptable for officials and workers to be 'deployed' into various areas of government. This was justified in terms of spreading workers' influence into the policy space. However, these deployments did not result in any significant shifts in economic policy in labour's direction. In fact, many still pursued policies that were hostile to emancipatory policies held by unions.

6.2 The development of the high skills approach

According to Forrest (2006), in February 1990, NUMSA held its first National Bargaining Conference to map out common wage demands across the many sectors it organised. It's levels of confidence were high and there was a feeling that the union was ready to make industry-wide demands. Some of the resolutions taken included demands on training, job security and job creation. Serious job losses in many of its sectors spurred NUMSA to find ways of extending their control over the production process. In 1988, the union had identified the need to set up worker-based groups to deal with a range of areas where research was needed. The Education and Training Research group was one of them. Coincidentally, the union had also started thinking about worker training. Research and Development Groups (RDGs) were made up of 10 to 15 people and were composed of academic researchers, worker leaders and service organisations. Different RDG's were established to deal with a range of issues, such as housing, collective bargaining, training etc. COSATU borrowed this model and established Participatory Research Groups (PRG). According to Forrest (2007, p. 373), NUMSA's Education Secretary Alec Erwin pushed for RDG's to move quickly and for them to suggest proposals to structures. Congresses and conferences started making resolutions based on recommendations from the RDG's (Forrest, 2006). Over time, tensions with elected structures started emerging because most workers could not understand what the RDGs were communicating about the issues.

In engaging in the need for workers to control or at least understand industry, the union leadership arrived at a political view that they must embrace a post-Fordist position in the form of wider macro-economic framework and prepare industry for the coming period of competition (Forrest, 2007, p. 416). The issue of the development of skills for industries was developed in the context of that positioning and conformed to the deeper shifts in the political orientation of leadership discussed above who argued that in the long term, job security meant being involved in reforming capital and ensuring that companies are internationally competitive.

In 1989, the Education and Training RDG developed a set of principles to guide its engagements on training. These were eventually condensed in the NUMSA Vocational Training Project, launched in 1991 (NUMSA 1991, p. 2). An internal discussion paper published in 1989 locates the issue of training and education in history. It then proceeds to state that capital and the state are interested in creating a small black elite through training interventions. It argued, however, that if the union did not engage, members would be lost to the union forever, Bird (1989, p. 8). It proposed the following as guiding principles for engagement:

- Address all forms of inequality
- Workers need access to general education
- Education and training must be linked to economic transformation
- Workers must have paid leave for training and education
- Free formal, compulsory education
- Free formal education to highest affordable level
- Clear links between formal education and industrial training systems

In 1990, NUMSA published its proposal in a simplified form for workers. The proposal was no longer just a statement of principles. It now promised a clear path for workers to move from being unskilled, to semi-skilled, then artisan, followed by a technician and ending up in an engineer. Workers were informed that the system would do away with all the unfairness of the apartheid training system. The document also listed a clear set of demands to employers;

1. Workers who work as an artisan must be allowed to train and qualify as artisans
2. A new Operator upgrading course must be introduced.
3. Employers must end segregated training (NUMSA, 1990).

By 1992 COSATU formally adopted the NUMSA position. The early policy conceptualisation took into account the demands of the labour movement, including the imperative for redress, mobility, progression in the labour market as well as access to lifelong learning. This in turn resulted in the development of a framework for skills development that included: a national training levy, adult basic education and training (ABET), recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the development of national standards for skills across the economy. NUMSA had by then also secured funding for intensive training of the RDG, through funding from Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA). In 1992, COSATU formally adopted NUMSA's position on skills including the concept of a training authority. From this point onwards, the NUMSA team took the lead on behalf of COSATU, in formulating and implementing policy around skills development (Marock, 2017, n.d.)

6.3 The three-year bargaining strategy

The new endorsement of the ideology of competitiveness and NUMSA's related position on skills found expression in the launch of a new Bargaining strategy in 1993. The proponents of the strategy argued that it would simultaneously allow the union to bargain for wages, deal with issues of restructuring whilst improving working conditions by reducing the number of grades and link grades to training. The strategy would also define levels of bargaining by defining issues to be discussed at plant and national levels, and ensure the gradual reduction of working hours. The aims of the strategy were to intervene on some of the fundamental problems that faced sectors that NUMSA organised, ensure that workers got decent wages and conditions of employment, eliminate the apartheid wage gap and finally stop officials and workers from embarking on frantic preparations for negotiations every few months.

The key architects of the new bargaining strategy and the new approach to skills were white former workerists who shifted away from this orientation and towards the ANC and corporatism during the transition. This change is quite remarkable, given that white intellectuals in the union had previously held very firm Socialist ideas. As discussed further in Chapter 8, critical analysis of the history of the white left has not yet been conducted. This shift in their political orientation is important to union history and deserves further attention.

As noted in Chapter 2, scholars often cite the role of Australian trade unions in the adoption of the skill system (Akoojee, Gewer, & McGrath, 2005; Allais, 2010; Cooper, 1998; S McGrath, 2007; Simon McGrath & Badroodien, 2006; Ngcwangu, 2016). In 1991, the

NUMSA RDG had called for an Australian expert to be invited to a workshop to help them to prepare to lead discussions in COSATU (Bird, 1991, p. 7). According to Forrest (2007), the Australian trade unionist Chris Lloyd joined NUMSA from Australia in 1992. Lloyd went on to play a central role in the development of the 3 Year Bargaining Strategy and SBG.

As discussed, the union had already adopted key aspects of high skills. Rather than introducing the ideas of competitiveness and high skills to the union, Lloyd's contribution was to place the orientation into a framework. His ideas were firmly based on a belief that training would resolve all problems of competition. Ngcwangu (2016) shows how suspicious union activists were about his positions on competitiveness, bargaining and training. Some of Lloyd's political attitudes towards the union are made clear in a report to a donor, Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA); where he claims that;

Cultivating a strong relationship with the emerging black leadership can only serve to assist both responsible unionism and economic cooperation (Lloyd, 1993).

It is clear that the Australian expert entered South Africa with a very defined plan and a colonialist political attitude that was in keeping with that plan. NUMSA leaders were clearly taken with him and he was credited with providing a framework for the ideas that they had already committed to (Forrest, 2007, p. 460). Importantly, Lloyd provided a theoretical framework that could help them explain the shifts in their political positions. Their praise of Lloyd, shows how far they had travelled since the formation of NUMSA. Relations between Australian and NUMSA officials were forged over the same ideological and political orientation towards issues such as work reorganisation, corporatism, outcomes based education and skill formation systems.

6.3.1 Overview of the Strategy

In a ten year review of the strategy, Forrest (2006) outlined the key features of the strategy as follows; the union borrowed the Australian model of Skill Based grades. The idea was that the union would challenge existing grading systems which were all based on tasks and responsibilities. The Skill Based Grading System (SBGS) proposed that workers be remunerated based on the skills they possessed rather than just purely the tasks they performed. This strategy (it was hoped), would encourage the training of black workers and allow them to be remunerated better. To make this possible, the union demanded the establishment of career paths for black workers. These career paths would be based on the introduction of new grading systems, which would reduce the number of grades. The reduction of grades would result in workers in lower grades receiving higher wages, as the grades would be linked to the Artisan's hourly rate. The reduction of grades was also intended to address the apartheid wage gap, by moving workers closer to the artisan rate of pay. A critical demand in this scenario was the demand that employers remunerate workers according to their qualifications and not their tasks and responsibilities at work. The union also demanded the reduction of grades from 13 to 5 grades, with two new grades added above the Artisan level, to allow for career pathing for artisans. It was also demanded that the gap between these new grades must not be more than 10%, and that the difference between the lowest and highest grade should not be more than 60%. The strategy also included demands on the establishment of a single Industry Education Training Board (IETB), a reduction in working hours, higher increases for lower grades in the first three years, the

amalgamation of pension funds, improvement in benefits, increased maternity leave and paid time off for shop stewards to attend negotiations and training.

The strategy was aimed at providing the union with space to introduce demands over a period of time, improve the productivity and the competitive position of companies whilst addressing the legacy of the apartheid wage gap and ensuring that workers receive higher wages. In other words, it was based on the belief that this was a 'win-win' scenario for workers and industry. The union also demanded paid time off for shop stewards to attend to negotiations, training and other preparatory work that is needed for the strategy to work (Forrest, 2006, p. 15).

The union's embrace of the ideology of competitiveness, acceptance of codetermination, and its related position on skills therefore coalesced in the bargaining strategy which sought complete transformation of the industry and NUMSA's role in it. Forrest, quotes NUMSA's Bobby Marie as stating;

The restructuring [of industry] was the three year bargaining programme. It went beyond having the power to strike at the IC [Nicisemi]. It shifted from that, to the power to transform the IC and the industry. What Adrienne [Bird] was presenting was a complete transforming of the industry and Numsa was going to take this and transform it (Forrest 2007, p. 416).

6.4 Arguments put forward and promises to workers

In the context of the weakening of their organisations and the political confusion that prevailed, there was a certain attraction to the ideas of linking grading to skills and payment. The issue of the apartheid wage gap was a continuing source of conflict between workers and companies (Edward Webster & Omar, 2003). The proposal appeared to resolve this key political issue by proposing a technical solution. The solution was to be trained and then paid according to your skills and not to work that you were hired to perform. This also spoke to the recognition that workers would finally receive after decades of working under conditions of apartheid and capitalism. The proposals would also eliminate the apartheid grading system that discriminated black against workers. The position also promised to overcome the colonial and apartheid constructions of knowledge, skills and that the true worth of the person would finally be revealed. As noted in previous sections, workers had been engaged in battles against the Labour Relations Bill and lost. Many were also affected by the on-going apartheid state sponsored violence in townships and there had been many marches to protest the adoption of the new constitution. In addition, conditions of democracy and worker control were also weakened. In this context, the SBGS promised to be the solution to many woes.

6.5 Building support for the new ideological orientation

Ngcwangu (2016) points to the fact that NUMSA's the Research and Development Groups (RDG) were sent to various countries on study tours, some of which were funded by the Australians (Erwin, 1989, p. 5). However, he also notes that many of the workers who were part of the RDG's felt marginalised when the outcomes of the study tours were written up. In the next chapter, we will refer in more detail to the institutional power that the white

intellectuals possessed. This power was used to ensure that their preferred positions are reflected in all the Union's documents. A detailed programme of workshops was drawn up and organised to speak about the new strategy. A very detailed training manual for week-long course was also developed by Chris Lloyd, which contained simulations for shop stewards on the kinds of demands they must make when bargaining with employers (Lloyd, undated). Union correspondence shows that organisers were trained to assist in facilitating workshops and there was a budget set aside for workshops and all the attendant logistics. Therefore, considerable resources were mobilised to ensure that these ideas were spread and accepted within the union.

In a project Report to Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA), Lloyd outlines his activities. They range from designing manuals, facilitating workshops, writing papers for the (then General Secretary) Bernie Fanaroff, presentations to various government and employer forums, meetings with various shop stewards committees in engineering, Motor, Auto, meetings with the Economic Trends Group etc. In the report Lloyd notes that NUMSA looked similar to what Australian unions looked like in the 1970's and was hopeful that changes he proposed would bring prosperity. The report also motivates for continued funding, noting that Australia can only benefit from the creation 'responsible unionism' and economic cooperation. Therefore, considerable institutional resources were garnered in support of the bargaining strategy and skills based grading.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter it was argued that NUMSA adopted a bargaining strategy that tied it to the implementation of Skills Based Grading, promising workers the development of a career ladder that would carry them from being a sweeper to engineer. These positions in effect promised to address historic injustices through clever technical solutions. The strategy was also based on the union buying time for industrial peace for three years. The strategy also promised to address conditions of employment.

However, the Bargaining strategy was a radical departure from the union's history of engagement with employers. It was intended to bring stability in the relationship with industry. It consciously took away the spontaneity of the bargaining process, which traditionally allowed for collective action, reflection and solidarity whenever workers bargained with employers. It also encapsulated and advanced the union's embrace of the ideology of competitiveness. The strategy raised a question of how a radical union adopted positions that were not emancipatory. It was argued that this happened in the context of unions losing policy battles within the ANC, which accepted orthodox solutions as the most appropriate direction for economic policy. At the same time, the state had unleashed waves of violence against townships, which destabilised workers. There were also institutional changes within unions that led to weakening of democratic control. At the at the same time, opportunities for the creation of black elites were emerging with control over pension funds. The decision of unions to create investment companies also opened new avenues for class formation in alliance with BEE entrepreneurs. Union leaders were increasingly supporting a range of policies that would allow for the creation of opportunities for advancement such as the investment companies and in NUMSA's case, support for the three-year bargaining strategy and all its implications. Therefore, there were multiple

determinations that explain the emergence of new positions and ideologies that seemed to change or contradict long-held positions on a range of issues.

Chapter 7 - The CAW and the Left Position on Skills

In the previous chapter it was shown that debates and positions on skills were actually a central part of a broader position on globalisation, neoliberalism, co-determination and social compacts. As with the protests over co-determination, the new position on bargaining and skills was also deeply contested because of the ideology of competitiveness that was being crystallized into the new conception of skills and the skills system. As history is written by the winners this contestation is not documented. White intellectuals who supported the new bargaining strategy and skills-based grading (SBG) were writing their version of history as it was in the process of becoming. By contrast, key black officials in union opposing it were located in bargaining, much closer to workers. They dealt with the issues on the ground on a daily basis, in contrast to intellectuals who were more distant in term of their organisational location. However, many lacked the ability or confidence to write about their experiences and were not necessarily in charge of resources to run workshops or do systematic ideological work.

This chapter provides an overview of left opposition to the bargaining strategy and SGB. It then discusses how and why the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) came to be involved in the skills and grading debates in NUMSA. It explains the roots of the CAW's political positions and proposals, and then elaborates their critiques of the dominant NUMSA position on competitiveness. The chapter concludes by focusing specifically on the CAW's proposals on skills.

7.1 Opposition in NUMSA to the Australian approach

Ngcwangu (2016, p. 293) highlights that there was strong left opposition within NUMSA to the dominant position on training. Evidence garnered from his interviews shows that there was a strong current of black officials that were unhappy with the adoption of Australian proposals. The ten year review of NUMSA's bargaining strategy by Forrest (2006) also reports that there was opposition from officials and workers in the Auto Sector (Forrest, 2006, p. 9). This opposition was based both on fears of the new orientation and loss of direct control over negotiations.

There is very little written record of the positions taken by left forces on NUMSA's proposed Skills Based Grading System and the broader stance on industrial policy and workplace reorganisation it was embedded within. The literature on trade unions is replete with positions of those (both black and white) who pushed for cooperation with capital and proposed skill based grading. Some of the written record of opposition within unions includes resolutions and discussion papers adopted by the WITS Region of Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) where the writer was regional educator, that argued for a radically different approach to issues of labour market flexibility, co-determination and even rejection of the political basis of the alliance with the ANC. Ndlozi (2010), notes this existence of an alternative approach to competitiveness within CWIU. Aspects of these resolutions were eventually adopted by the whole union, sans controversial proposals on breaking the alliance (CWIU WITS Branch, 1995).

The CWIU WITS Region resolution was based on discussions held by workers as part of their campaign against the then proposed Labour Relations Bill in 1995 and lessons from the failed implementation of workplace reorganisation in companies such as PG Bison and Nampak. Some of these experiments are documented by Buhlungu (1999). CWIU's positions were similar in approach to the ones taken by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). One of the participants interviewed by Ngcwangu argues that;

The skills development debate in Numsa absorbed and played into the dominant politics of the time. The retreat of socialist forces globally with the collapse of the USSR in 1990 - the ultra-left forces within Numsa were weakened. The skills development ideas brought by the likes of Adrienne Bird made sense to workers and appealed because of the seeming practicality. The dream of "sweeper to engineer" was quite appealing. Questions that arose were: who is going to train? Can capital forfeit profit to pursue training? The logic of competitiveness dominated the ideas of skills. Some of these ideas contrasted the union strategy which was about the pursuit of socialism (ex Numsa leader 2013, as cited in Ngcwangu, 2016, p. 170).

Ngcwangu notes that those that were opposed to the new direction that the Union was embarking upon were clear about the need for reinforcements, because the ideas that were being introduced were alien to Union traditions and long held beliefs. He quotes another NUMSA leader as stating that, they started to look to the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) to provide an alternative perspective on whether there was a progressive alternative to the position being pushed by intellectuals in the Union and expressed admiration for the CAW's approach to similar issues:

'The Canadians Sam Gindin, of the CAW have a critical approach to the skills development issue. The researchers had academic grounding and could put these things together. We were not able to engage as we didn't have the tools. (ex Numsa leader 2013, as cited in Ngcwangu, 2016, p. 171).

7.2 Political links between the left in NUMSA and the CAW

The left in NUMSA had long standing links and relationships with Canadian unions and the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) in particular. The CAW had consistently taken progressive positions on South Africa and provided solidarity and support during the anti-apartheid struggle. These links were strongest with a group of radical intellectuals who were located within and associated with the CAW, such as Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch. The two unions developed ties over a shared political vision and the Canadians could be relied upon to provide progressive insight on a range of issues facing the labour movement. Over time, NUMSA invited CAW to South Africa to run workshops and give advice and also sent NUMSA officials and shop stewards to CAW and York University, where Leo Panitch was based.

7.3 CAW and the emergence of a progressive politics

The CAW intervened in debates within NUMSA on the implications of Skill Based Grading and its political and economic sources. Their intervention was based on their experience in the American and Canadian Auto industry, where there has been a long history and experience in dealing with issues of competition, world class manufacturing and

restructuring of work, as well as attempts to introduce Japanese manufacturing methods, which include joint decision-making, productivity, skills and other issues. In examining the CAW intervention, it is important to briefly examine why the CAW had a different approach to these issues compared to the Australians. This can be traced back to its differences with the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the USA, which had actually started organizing Canadian auto workers across the border.

Yanarella (1996) argues that the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) split from their American brethren the United Auto Workers (UAW) due to differences in responding to the collapse of Fordist production regimes and the entry of Japanese companies that were investing in production facilities in the USA and Canada (transplants). In an interview with Sam Gindin (who was CAW's Director of Research from 1974 to 2000), he confirmed the differences in approaches adopted by the two unions.

The Canadian left within the UAW used Canadian nationalism to protect workers against the Auto companies. We also had a very Canadian structure called the Council, which met six times a year and it was apart from Union structures. The Council would have delegates from all over who would debate and discuss issues. The idea was to make the Union accountable to its members. There were reports from all staff members up for discussion and it became an important space for the left to meet (Interview with Sam Gindin, 11 April 2017).

In their book *Building Other People's Cars*, Yanarella and Green (1996) argue that the UAW leadership was already predisposed towards finding accommodation with Auto bosses along co-determinationist lines, even before the Japanese started production in the US and Canada. American Unions had dealt with the collapse of wage deals that were concluded in the 1940's with the rise Fordism. The unions responded to the crisis in the Auto industry by agreeing to additional cut-backs in working conditions previously agreed to and making additional commitments in areas for joint decision-making with management. The entry of Japanese manufacturers in the USA brought with it new manufacturing techniques that tried to combine the flexibility of craft production and mass product, within an intense Taylorist framework. Gindin (1989) also references the tendency of the American brethren to seek accommodation with auto bosses. He however points to difficult conditions faced by the UAW in the 1980's, such as plant closures, the outbreak of various wars, the rise of Jingoism with Japanese imports putting pressure on the auto industry and finally the appeal for patriotism amongst American workers. He also points out that compromises on established rights by the UAW were informed by the leadership's drift away from its base. He traces the circumstances of the Canadian auto workers' break with their American compatriots and argues that the existence of political mobilisation of local shop stewards was key to the vibrancy within the CAW. The Canadian leadership had been politically opposed to attempts at wage moderation by Canadian governments and the extension of such agreements from America through collective bargaining agreements. The opposition also allowed for the establishment of left-leaning research capacity within the Union and the building of political education committees to strengthen workers' resolve. These initiatives also led to CAW's exploration of solidarity work particularly in Latin America and South Africa.

Greg Albo agreed with this position, however he expressed fears on whether the CAW at present would be able to maintain its opposition to competitiveness for long. He explained

that Canadian unions had sustained the ideological opposition to competitiveness based on an alliance with public sector workers over elements of the welfare state;

What held together for a period, was the public, private sector alliance, which constrained the competitiveness doctrine, because the public sector was being defended all the time and redistribution was happening through it and that imposed an ideological limit. However, this alliance has broken down and I'm not so sure that in the absence of a larger political movement, a class wide response against competitiveness could be sustained. (Interview with Greg Albo, 12 April 2017).

7.4 CAW positions on industrial restructuring debates in South Africa

Within NUMSA, CAW argued that South African capital was setting up narrow limits on policy that would be open for contestation by popular forces. These limits would be based on 'realities' of the local economy and global competition and any alternatives would need to be based on the imperatives of that competitiveness. The terms of engagement would not be based on principles of egalitarianism and the need to address past inequalities (Economic Trends Group, 1993).

In his interview, Sam Gindin spoke of a workshop he was invited to in South Africa where he met with NUMSA officials and a number of intellectuals propagating the idea that as apartheid was over and South Africa was part of the global economy, workers must adopt ideas of competitiveness. Reflecting on their political position, Gindin stated:

The trouble with what Chris Lloyd was saying, was that, he was trying to get people to stop the struggle and what he proposed was not much of a strategy. It was the same myth that we had here in Canada, which is that training will solve everything. The argument we developed was that black workers had been doing the same work as white workers and that there should be demand for equal wages. We agreed that there must be training as well. However, we felt that the emphasis on training could become a trap. Workers would have to wait for the training, before being paid equal wages. Therefore, there should have been an immediate demand for equal wages (Sam Gindin, interviewed on 11 April 2017).

Gindin argued that South Africa could never compete on equal footing with many of the developed countries. If the strategy was based on international competition, South African industries would be wiped out. He argued that the CAMI plant in Ontario produced more cars than all the plants in South Africa combined. Therefore, a strategy based on what was being proposed would lead to job losses. He also went on to argue that South African workers were actually more skilled than in most developed countries. He noted that the reality is that South African workers were more skilled, even if there were lower levels of literacy:

The irony is that the labour market in South Africa had better skills than we did in North America. In South Africa one plant was making trucks, cars, different models of cars because, South Africa did not have economies of scale. All the plants, were not just making one thing, they had to make whatever was asked of them and they were like 'Jobbing shops' that manufactured whatever was asked of them. Workers on the assembly line were more skilled, because they were working more jobs and the component plants could make anything. I argued with Alec Erwin and said these

plants can make anything and South Africa should have technology centers linked to Universities which could study what needs to be made, as an import substitution strategy not only for local consumption, but for Africa as well (Sam Gindin, interviewed on 11 April 2017).

CAW argued that their experience of competitiveness through the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) held valuable lessons for South Africa, the most important being to offer political resistance to notions of competitiveness and struggle for progressive alternatives. Leo Panitch also agreed with Gindin, stating that some of the leading South African labour intellectuals were pushing for policies that would not work and were anti working class;

In 1993, we brought a whole lot of leaders including Enoch Godongwana, Tito Mboweni and others. David Lewis was their guru at that point. It was a very contradictory situation. We were, as with the 1989 workshops, advancing an anti-Australia line, saying that you didn't have to succumb to the competitive line. Trying to pick holes on the social contract position that the Union should focus on wage restraint and concentrate on growth, competitiveness to promote growth and so on (Interview with Leo Panitch, 11 April 2017)

Gindin also stated that he was invited to a workshop by the COSATU Industrial Strategy Project (ISP), where he disagreed with their approach to industrialisation and promotion of codetermination. On his return from the workshop, Gindin gave an interview on these debates in the *Southern Africa Report*:

I think the Canadian labour movement does have some things to be proud of. It's one of the few labour movements in the world that hasn't lost members, and it's one of the few labour movements in which the absolute hegemony of this ideology - that says you have to be competitive and make this profound compromise with capital - hasn't really overwhelmed it (SAR, 1993).

He also reported that he was surprised by the lack of resistance to ideas of competitiveness amongst leading intellectuals in COSATU's ISP, given COSATU's anti-capitalist history and support for socialism. It was clear (to him), that this (militant) history did not translate itself into progressive policies. This interview sparked a debate with Avril Joffe from the ISP that was documented in the *Southern Africa Report*.

Joffe argued that Gindin's criticism was patronising and that he failed to recognise the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) had the following approach:

- The proposals were focused on sectors that could provide more growth, including housing, electrical goods, food and clothing. These sectors would be able to expand and grow
- The ISP and the Trends group recognised that the state had an important role to play in the economy and there was a push to establish forums on issues such as Training and skills
- Finally, she argued unions and intellectuals recognise that the problem was not just apartheid, but capitalism as well. The only difference was that the ISP was pushing for engagement

Gindin responded by stating that;

- The points he made were a contribution to a debate and was not sure why they aroused such anger
- CAW is not opposed to engagement, it's terms need to be clear
- The ISP strategy fails to answer key fundamental questions such as; what is the overall broader context analysis of the ISP? How do sectoral studies fit into the broader context?
- What is the problem that is being resolved. Is it about competition or is it about integrating the poor? What happens if there is conflict between these two strands? Are they related or not?
- ISP argues that changes in production have opened spaces for cooperation with capital and that there's a win-win scenario in that. Finding a win-win solution in one factory, does not mean that this solution applies to all of capitalism. Empirical evidence from Canada, Japan and other places show that the win-win scenario does not exist.
- How are questions of power and the ANC's decision to accommodate capital going to affect the proposed strategy? (SAR, 1993)

This and other debates reflect the fact that the contending positions were informed by very different ideological orientations. The report of the workshop mentions that it was attended by many luminaries such as Alec Erwin, Tito Mboweni, Dave Lewis, Ralph Kaplinsky, Adrienne Bird, Enoch Godongwana. There was fundamental disagreement on whether South African capital had an interest in the welfare of the country and whether they could be 'persuaded' to be both efficient and productive. Some Canadians, such as Canadian Steel Workers, supported the ISP position on competitiveness (Economic Trends Group, 1993).

When asked about his understanding of the reasons behind the shifts in orientation by left intellectuals, Panitch explained that the 1990's were characterised by a search for alternatives to communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He argued that this search continues for European parties such as Syriza, that he has worked with:

I felt that they (intellectuals in South Africa) were the South African variant of what was happening generally to communist intellectuals and leaders in that period. I have to be as critical of them as I would be of Slovo. And you see the trend continuing with Euro communist parties such as Syriza. It was more complicated in South Africa because there was a military wing and an admiration for Stalinism. Those that were looking to keep communism going, were looking for Social Democracy and looked to Sweden. They were very naive, because, Sweden was no longer Sweden by the time they wanted to become Sweden (Interview with Leo Panitch, 11 April 2017).

Having laid out some of the key differences on broader issues, we will now examine the left position on skills elaborated by CAW.

7.5 CAW Position on Skills

In 1995, CAW summarised their position on skills to NUMSA in a short paper which argued that NUMSA's adoption of a Skill based grading system was inappropriate. The paper pointed out that none of the workplaces visited showed an absence of skills amongst workers. In fact, he stated that in operations such as Toyota, the workforce demonstrated skill and capacity to build a range of products from the high-end Toyota Camry to the Corolla at the other end. This suggested a skilled workforce. On a similar note, they had visited and viewed an operation in the MB Plant which involved a worker building an Instrument Panel on an off-line fixture. Gindin noted:

The worker had a job cycle of 7-10 minutes and was required to do a number of operations to complete the Instrument Panel. This was in contrast with IP builds in many so-called world class plants; where the operation is short cycle (1 minute) and by design is very limited. For instance, the job at the first work station on the IP line at CAMI requires a worker to turn 17 clips to the left using a screwdriver-like tool and this is a complete job. The question to be asked is, who is the more skilled worker? The South Africa worker building an entire IP or a world class worker with a very short cycle, repetitive job? (Interview with Sam Gindin, 11 April 2017).

The paper also argued that this example was not just confined to the Auto industry. They had spoken to a manager at an Appliance plant who was pointing out the complexity of the jobs and skills required by workers to take variation into account. They thus argued that NUMSA's Skill based acquisition system was based on the assumption that South African workers were not skilled and reinforced what they characterize as a questionable link between skill acquisition and productivity. The CAW pointed out that the entire (proposed) design of the skill acquisition system from fundamental, core and specialty modules was based on that problematic assumption.

The CAW position was subsequently summarised in a document called Ten Problems with the Skill Based Grading System (SBGS) written by the CAW's David Robertson (1995) for a workshop with NUMSA. The ten problems were:

1. South African workers are highly skilled compared to their 'world class compatriots'. Therefore, the SBGS moves from an incorrect starting point.
2. The SBGS promotion of career paths within the workplace when workplaces are not constructed on the basis a skills and knowledge hierarchy. The proposal replaces the apartheid grading system with an individualistic and privatised one.
3. The SBGS ignores the need for comprehensive literacy and basic skills programs, given the large numbers of workers with little formal education. The document points out that management will soon make demands for higher literacy rates in the cold winds of international completion. The SBGS ironically reinforces this by focusing on workplace skills instead of basic literacy and the potential for workers to develop.
4. The issue of grading is a political rather than a technical issue. Grades develop over time given technical developments and class struggles in the workplace. Therefore, grades can only be understood historically and are a product of social developments. They proposed that the traditional apprenticeship model be retained, but that companies are forced to take on black journey-men.

5. The SBGS commits NUMSA to a particular view on issues of work organisation. The document argues that the SBGS accepts and promotes certain practices on work organisation that are against the interests of workers. The SBGS moves on the false premise that promoting flexible work places, payment for skills and team work are a win-win for workers and employers.
6. The SBGS creates a complex training scheme, that fails to address changes to the base. They point out that this is one of the key weaknesses of the Australian training system, which "can end up with complex paper castles in the sky and very little actually happening on the ground". The training regime will create elaborate accreditation and design infrastructure that will be cumbersome. The real question to be answered is; What is the point to all that? Why bother?
7. Not only will the SBGS leave the base underdeveloped, it would of necessity benefit a few workers for the following reasons;
 - a. Workers' career progression will be dependent on production requirements and work organisation
 - b. Progression will depend on workers committing to too much personal time, in that training will take place on the employee's own time.
 - c. Workers will be overwhelmed by the amount of training required to progress and it is likely to take a long time for people to progress through the various grades. They argued that NUMSA should have taken a political position and just declared that most jobs are by nature grade 3 (in the then proposed progression system). This would remove the onerous time required to move to higher levels.
 - d. The requirement for workers to train in their own time will reinforce divisions amongst workers and discriminate against women, who have the burden on social reproduction.
8. The SBGS will lead to a system that focuses on narrow efficiency and will sacrifice pedagogy and content. They argued that the promotion of competency-based system is antithetical to principles of adult education which emphasise social and collective activity of workers. This approach is different to the approach that defines training as mere acquisition of skills.
9. The SBGS will divert attention away from a focus on literacy and education and towards workplace skills. It would also cede control of workplace literacy programmes away from Union control.
10. The difficulties in the implementation of the SBGS will mean more time spent away from shop floor issues. At the same time, the Union will not be able to ensure the training of Black apprentices.

The document concluded by proposing three areas of focus for NUMSA: a campaign for full literacy for every worker by a certain time, secure paid time off for training and finally an apprenticeship programme to promote black artisans.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the left position within NUMSA was explored. It was pointed out that there are no articles, letters and other documents that explain its position and the reasons for opposing the competitiveness position. This chapter will briefly examine some of these reasons. Because the NUMSA left felt the necessity to call in other intellectual voices, from the CAW to reinforce its position, the CAW and NUMSA left positions are synonymous with each other. The position argued that there is no need for NUMSA to adopt skill-based grading. Skills based grading was rejected as a technical solution to political issues, and the left argued that grading was the result of historical factors and struggle rather than a technical or objective process. They also argued that SBG would fail to address the apartheid wage gap, even while it was promising workers remuneration based on skills rather than the work they do. Whilst promising clear career progression from sweeper to engineer, it would also fail to address problems of literacy and numeracy resulting from the apartheid education system. Finally, it was argued that the system would fail to train significant numbers of black artisans and that the existing apprenticeship system should be retained with quotas introduced to force companies to take on black artisans.

According to Forrest's report (2006), many of these criticisms of skill-based grading actually came to pass. NUMSA's Ten Year review of its bargaining strategy listed the fact that many older black workers had been left behind, that a bureaucratic competence-based skill system was not producing enough artisans, and recognition of prior knowledge was difficult to obtain. There was partial success in some sectors in the reduction of the number of grades, however the apartheid wage gap remained in place and the dream of workers moving from being sweepers to engineers was just that; a dream deferred.

Chapter 8 – Some Preliminary Reflections on the Triumph of High Skills

Chapters 6 and 7 respectively presented the high skills and left positions on training in NUMSA during the period in which the union spearheaded the development of COSATU's policy on the post-apartheid education and training system. Literature on NUMSA's position and the final form of the post-apartheid skills system critiques their neoliberal nature and notes the irony that such a militant union adopted a neoliberal position on skills. It is generally noted that NUMSA's position on skills was linked to its position on grading, with Ngcwangu (2016) providing the most attentive and insightful analysis. Nevertheless, their analysis is primarily focused on debates on education and training, with discussion related to workplace reorganisation and industrial policy relegated to background. In contrast, the preceding chapters were rooted in the Marxist understanding that skills, workplace reorganization, and industrial and economic policy constitute a complex whole. Introducing discussion on and analysis of the alternative left position (previously granted scant if any attention in existing literature) brought into sharp relief the ways both the high skills and left positions can only be understood when analysed as part of the much larger debates over the future of the economic and political dispensation in the country of which they were a part.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the methodology for this paper draws on the interrelated approaches of Marxist history and Gillian Hart's (2006) Marxist method of critical ethnography. As per Hart's method, the previous chapters identified multiple determinations of both the high skill and left positions on skills. It is beyond the scope of this research report to conduct a full analysis of how and why the high skills position was triumphant. This chapter provides some preliminary reflections on two key determinations: 1) the broader retreat and defeat of the left, and 2) the race, class and institutional power underpinning the different positions within NUMSA.

8.1 Broader Defeat and Retreat of the Left

Chapters 5 and 6 discussed the broader defeat and retreat of the left during the transition. Workers had also been subjected to waves of retrenchments and para military violence, particularly in Natal and the East Rand. The ANC disbanded the UDF and there was a generalised retreat of left ideas with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chapter 6 discussed the changes in the economy and factors that led union leaders to endorse international competitiveness. It argued that NUMSA's endorsement of high skills needs to be understood in that context.

The general defeat suffered by workers in the period plays an important role in explaining why the left did not succeed in mobilising support for its position. In this section, it is argued that there are several dimensions to the defeat that was suffered by workers in the mid 1990's. The first was an ideological loss, when leaders of working class organisations started internalising the kinds of ideas that they used to fight against. A case in point was in at the end of May 1995, when there was the spectacle of the then General Secretary of COSATU, Sam Shilowa, trying to justify why provisions of labour market flexibility were in the Labour Relations Bill. Shilowa was addressing hundreds of shop stewards at the Johannesburg city

hall and was trying to present some of the clauses that would eventually facilitate the explosion of casualised labour and the reduction of permanent employment.

The second was the weakening of democratic cultures within trade unions as pointed by Buhlungu (2010, Forrest (2007) and Hirschsohn (2011). Workers' inability to hold their leaders to account and their decision to march against the Bill, without the support of their unions is a case in point. The process of workplace organisation and the promotion of codetermination was often accompanied by assertions that there are no alternatives and thus there is no need for workers to struggle. In the East Rand, many of the workers who marched against the labour bill still bore the both physical and psychological scars of violence that was unleashed against working class organisations in the East Rand. The loss of control over their unions was deeply disturbing. In this context, anyone who promises to get rid of the apartheid wage gap, ensure recognition of their skills and get them a substantial raise without struggle meant that this was an attractive proposition.

The generalised retreat of the working class also meant that there was very little political opposition from below, notwithstanding the fact that workers in the WITS Region of COSATU had rejected aspects of the Labour Relations Bill, that introduced notions of competitiveness and workplace forums. It is also important to note that the political atmosphere was in favor of a drift to the right, compared to the heady days of the 1980's, when unions were focused on struggle and resistance. In the context of the strikes against the LRA and codetermination and the upsurge in worker struggles, it is clear that the Union leadership and the intellectuals felt sufficiently insulated from popular pressure to proceed with implementation of the skill-based grading system.

8.2 Race, Class and Institutional Power

In order to understand how the high skills position was formally adopted in NUMSA it is also necessary to understand how decisions are made within the union as an institution. Such an investigation goes beyond analysing formal union procedures and processes. As discussed in Chapter Four, in a Marxist conceptualisation of institutions it is understood that institutions are produced through contested social relations, facilitate and constrain actions, and entrench power relations (Albo, 2005; Little, 1982).

Chapter 6 highlighted that the key architects of the high skills position were white former workerists who shifted away from this orientation and towards the ANC and corporatism during the transition. Chris Lloyd, who played a critical role in developing and promoting the new bargaining strategy and the skills-based grading system arrived from Australia already supporting corporatism and the high skills thesis and worked closely with the former workerists. Chapter 6 detailed the high skills position which resonated with the deeply felt desires of black workers to be respected for their knowledge. The chapter also noted the appeal of the promise of higher wages without struggle to union members, whose entire lives had been consumed by struggle. It also promised that jobs could be retained and improved while companies became competitive. The chapter also elaborated how the proponents used their location in strategic positions to engage with members and advocate their positions.

8.2.1 Ideological shift and institutional power of by black union leaders

In Chapter 6, we explored the exodus of Union leaders from unions for government, as politicians or senior civil servants and some into business, including Union investment companies. As noted, 18 union activists left NUMSA to become parliamentarians and civil servants. At the same time, Union investment companies and provident fund boards provided avenues for career or social advancement as well. Given that a sizable number of them had been in the trade Union movement since the 1970's, they would have taken distinct positions on the workerism and populism debate. In NUMSA's case, leaders such as Moses Mayekiso had moved politically from fervent support of all the principles contained in Joe Foster's speech, to serving as members of parliament for the ANC. There were clear political shifts that had taken place.

In fact, in her study of NUMSA, Forrest notes that there were three distinct currents in NUMSA; the Charterists (ANC and SACP), Workerists / Syndicalists and Trotskyists (Forrest 2007, p. 719). The last two were clearly socialist in their orientation. As discussed in Chapter 6, the class position of many of the leaders changed as unions become more stable and acquired large bureaucracies. Issues of remuneration of officials were beginning to make themselves felt in the early 1990's. Some black union leaders had, therefore, developed positions in opposition to their base.

It should be noted that these shifts have only intensified in the ensuing period. By the beginning of the 2000's, most Union organisers were decidedly moving towards the middle class in their income. It is the black leadership that led many of the purges of political opponents from the union movement. By the late 1990's, there was class affinity and ideological cohesion within workerists and populists. Other left forces who remained were often purged from unions. I was part of left forces that were forced out of CEPWWAU in 2003, for supporting a resolution to break the alliance between COSATU and ANC. A full exploration and account of these different political factions and their influence on policy is beyond the scope of this report.

8.2.2 The power of the white intellectuals

Chapter 6 observed that white former workerist intellectuals together with Chris Lloyd played the leading role in developing the high skills position. This section argues that the fact that it was white intellectuals who had a history of struggling for left positions who promoted the 3-year bargaining strategy and skills-based grading was important; this was because of the ways in which their political position, racial privileged, class location and institutional power converged.

Despite the importance of the white left in the formation of the South African trade union movement, there are no academic studies focusing specifically on them. Very little has been written on their class formation, ideological orientation or their integration into black unions and working-class culture. In a 2006 a debate between Maree (Maree, 2006a, 2006b), Buhlungu (Buhlungu, 2006b, 2006c, 2009) presents the most sustained analysis of this issue, highlighting the contradictory location of white intellectuals in black working class organisations. Using Erik Olin Wright's concept of 'contradictory location' Buhlungu argues that white intellectuals had to overcome both their class locations and racial privileges in order to work with black unions. Yet Cooper (1998, p. 150) highlights how the

different race and class positions of white intellectuals shaped union policy, noting that the discourse of professionalisation, recognition of individual effort, co-management, and other features of corporatism were drawn from a different social base to that which dominated union practice in the 1970's and 1980's.

Buhlungu also argues that the class and racial locations of white intellectuals prevented their full integration into the Black working class organisations that they led. Due to the inability of most white intellectuals to speak African languages, black officials and shop stewards became mediators between workers and white intellectuals. The absence of white intellectuals from spaces where ideas were interpreted, vocalised and then transmitted to workers discussed above extended their distance from the members they were meant to serve (Forrest, 2007, p. 719). As a union activist at the time, I can affirm the importance of social spaces outside formal Union structures where debates on union decisions were taken forward. These spaces included cultural spaces, shebeens, people's homes, canteens, football matches, funerals and weddings. Activists thrashed out interpretations of ideas and concepts learnt in meetings. They were tested within these spaces before being proselytised to the broader membership. Access to these spaces required a willingness to engage beyond the formalities of the Union office and to be integrated into the intimate lives of the activists. It also required the desire and ability to speak in the languages spoken by workers. Maree (2006a) rightly observes that there were white intellectuals who spoke a number of African languages. However (I argue that) racial, class and cultural differences limited the extent to which white intellectuals could engage in these processes.

Given this closer relationship of black officials and organic intellectuals to the membership base, the question arises as to how the positions of white officials which were so fundamentally opposed to NUMSA's political orientation gained dominance. Here institutional location is of crucial importance.

Buhlungu argues that given the levels of skills the white left possessed due to their class backgrounds, white intellectuals occupied strategic positions as researchers, educators, media and legal officers. He further argues that this division of labour accorded them a special status and privilege within unions, which actually mirrored the class and racial dynamics within the broader South African society. This division of labour allowed white intellectuals to craft strategy for the unions and take over the organizational and administrative apparatus of the emergent unions (Buhlungu, 2006b, 2006c, 2009). As discussed in detail in Chapter 6, it also gave them access to and control over union resources and programmes which were strategically deployed to build support for their positions on skills-based grading, work reorganisation, industrial policy and the union's new orientation to the global economy.

8.2.3 Organic Intellectuals

As Forrest (2007) and Ngwangu (2016) note, a strong layer of organic intellectuals had emerged in the unions and particularly in NUMSA. Forrest observes that as Unions established themselves, through strong shop floor structures, new organisers were being drawn from the ranks of dismissed militant workers. She argues that these organisers became organic intellectuals within the unions who challenged the dominance of white intellectuals. Due to their class affinities with workers, they forged strong links with members (Forrest, 2007, p. 68).

Yet, the ways in which debates on skills and grading were framed and the terrain on which they were fought made it difficult for most organic intellectuals to challenge the proponents of high skills. Ngcwangu (2016) correctly notes that debates on skills were couched in new, complex terms that were difficult to grapple with. The intellectuals wrote long papers as well as popular articles and released workshop materials in support of their positions. A former NUMSA leader interviewed by Ngcwangu explained the challenges this created for the left:

There was a tension on the matter of traditional intellectuals while organisers like ourselves were on the ground fighting for workers. The traditional intellectuals were on the “production line” of ideas. Many of the organic intellectuals were self-taught. It was mostly textbook stuff from the “other guys”. We were critical to the congress politics, as a result some called us Trotskyists or workerists. What was good was that everyone was reading. If one looks at our own history there were many organic intellectuals who just didn’t have the power to write (ex Numsa leader 2013, as cited in Ngcwangu, 2016, p. 172).

8.2.4 Contradictory Relations to White Intellectuals

Through interviews with participants at the time, Buhlungu correctly observes that the racialised division of labour in the unions was both accepted and resented:

Among some black officials and leaders in the unions, the terms ‘intellectual’ or ‘academic’ were used as pejorative references to white officials who had administrative skills and possessed analytical skills that enabled them to ‘theorize’ about the suffering of black workers. Many of these black leaders and officials resented the power of these intellectuals that derived from their privileged background in the middle class of white society. Thus the term ‘intellectual’ had the connotation of ‘privileged fellow-traveller’ for whom the struggle was not a life-and-death issue (Buhlungu, 2006b, p. 436).

Several interviewees commented on how the institutional and social power of white intellectuals led many workers to silence themselves in debates. Reflecting on the workshop in Johannesburg, Gindin observed that while workers would privately express support for the views he was presenting, they did not do so publicly in the workshop:

black workers were quiet generally and were not as confident in the debates. The argument was that, now that apartheid is over, they are now part of the global economy, and the workshop was an attempt to get them to buy into that. The argument was that apartheid is over...they kept coming over to speak privately, saying that they were sympathetic to what I was saying (Sam Gindin, Interviewed on 11 April 2017).

Despite the critiques of white intellectuals discussed above, respect for the skills and knowledge of the intellectuals led some on the left to eventually support them. This was clearly articulated by a current NUMSA Sector Coordinator who rose within the ranks of the union from being a worker, to a shop steward and finally an official. He joined the union before the birth of COSATU and was also a member of several NUMSA Research Development Groups. He was therefore an active participant in many of these debates.

Reflecting on why the Canadian proposals, which he had supported, were not adopted he explained:

You must understand that these [high skills] positions were being proposed by people that have been in the trenches with us. Who are we supposed to believe? We had no idea what was waiting for us once international competitors start impacting on us. We hoped that our comrades were correct, even though, privately we had a lot of misgivings about the direction in which things were going. The people that were advocating these changes were academic and long-standing activists in the movement and always had workers' best interest at heart in the past and they had clearly studied these questions. However, the Union leadership was also in favor of many of these proposals and with many other political battles to fight, these proposals were simply adopted in the end (Interview with NUMSA official, 15 August 2017).

This official's explanation of his acceptance of the positions advocated by white intellectuals within NUMSA and union leadership shows the levels of disempowerment felt by many activists. Citing a former NUMSA leader who supported the left position, Ngcwangu (2016, p. 170) argues that it was precisely because the left felt that they did not have the academic skills and expertise to counter the proponents of the white intellectuals, that they called in the CAW to bolster their arguments and positions.

The CAW representatives and left academics from Canada did, indeed, provide the incisive critiques and proposals in line with NUMSA's historical left orientation that the comrades had sought. Ironically, as expressed in the quote above, it was the white NUMSA officials' history of supporting militant struggle prior to shifting their political position that led the leader quoted above and some of his comrades to support them over Canadian intellectuals who shared their politics.

It is crucial to note that it was not just a sense of disempowerment that led workers and black officials on the left to hesitate to express their positions in public fora. At the time, I was employed as an educator in CEPPWAWU and was involved in these debates and contestations in both CEPPWAWU and COSATU. I experienced the tremendous pressure comrades on the left were subjected to. When many intellectuals and workerists of various strands who had previously supported worker control and political independence found political accommodation with populists, other comrades and I maintained our commitments to these principles and to left politics. I was (and remain) positioned to the left of the workerists and SACP, and together with comrades from CEPPWAWU's Wits region we succeeded in winning left positions on the alliance and workplace re-organisation referred to in Chapter 7. Our ability as organic intellectuals to write about our positions, win debates and organize worker support were extremely threatening to the right. We were harassed and attacked and eventually expelled from the union in 2003. In addition to speaking to the challenges of sustaining left positions, this also reveals the hostility in some unions to left organic intellectuals who had the actual ability to write about our positions.

8.2.5 The Power to Frame the Debate

The framing of both the problem and the solution also undermined the left analysis of the problems and dismissed their proposed solutions. The 2007 review of the bargaining strategy states that officials and workers in the Auto Sector were opposed to the new direction of the union but had finally agreed in the face of challenges posed by restructuring. In other words, it was said that they fell in line because they had not developed an alternative to the position that was pushed for by the Union leadership and intellectuals within and outside the Union. The argument that the CAW and the left had not provided an alternative was held by many who supported the high skills approach. A white union official who worked in NUMSA for over 20 years and said she generally stayed away from contentious issues and shared few comments or direct opinions during the rest of her interview clearly articulated this position:

I'm a fence sitter...and it used to drive my colleagues up the bend! However, I felt personally annoyed by the Canadians and their interventions in the debate. I asked them...what alternatives are they bringing forward? Do they have successful examples where they had implemented their ideas? It was easy for them to criticize but we had real issues and problems to address in the Union (Interview with former Union Official, 1 November 2017).

CAW had, however, put forward a number of concrete, comprehensive proposals. But CAW officials and the left Canadian academics understood skills and skills-based grading was part of a broader approach to industrial and workplace restructuring. Thus, their proposals concentrated primarily on the latter rather than narrowly on skills. In speaking of "real issues and problems" the official implied that such proposals were unrealistic, and any solutions needed to work within the status quo. This limiting of political imagination and terrain for the debate enabled proponents of high skills to argue that only they were offering a way to improve workers' conditions in the new era.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, it was shown that a confluence of factors led to the defeat of left positions in NUMSA on training and by extension in COSATU as well. Some of the factors were issues of structural and organisational power within the unions. The shifts by intellectuals who were part the workerist faction and held progressive Marxist also contributed. Their institutional power within NUMSA, their history proven history of struggle in working class organisations and links with organic intellectuals, resulted in their position winning within the union. The victory of intellectuals also coincided with a political shift by the black leadership, who were changing their class location and orientating towards the ANC. All of this must be located within the generalised retreat of progressive forces in South Africa. This confluence of factors explain both the emergence of skill based grading and its acceptance within NUMSA and eventually COSATU.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.

ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble (Shakespeare, 1606).

The 1990's represented a burning cauldron, into which the South African working class was thrown; to emerge bowed, changed and defeated but with elements of historical memory damaged but still alive. From the 1970's to the 1990's, the capacity for struggle and resistance of the South African working class inspired millions across the world, with its heroism, preparedness to sacrifice and a deep wealth of strategic political and organisational capacity. The defeat of this class can only be explained by examining the multiplicity of factors that impacted its organisations, its political life, its culture and ideology and its resilience due to its historical memory. Given such a history, its current inability to resist many neoliberal prescripts, impoverishment and assaults on it are more than just a sociological curiosity. The future of the country may rest on how this generation of Marikana assimilates lessons from history, recovers from the wide-ranging assaults and re-imagines a different future.

This research report is just the beginning of a much larger project to understand the role of the non-ANC and SACP left in the formation of the South African working class; on its organisations, politics, culture and ideology. The banning of the ANC, SACP, PAC and other organisations in April 1960 ushered in a period of unprecedented levels of working class organising, accompanied by ideological contestations which resulted in the building of the modern trade union movement and a range of social movements (understood as non-trade union forms organisation in townships). This particular history and the effect of these contestations is generally not covered in literature and is thus not examined. This report examined a debate within the trade Union movement leading to the adoption skills-based grading and the South African qualifications Framework, which went against previously held positions on the emancipatory role of education, recognition of inherent worker knowledge and experience. The writer cannot say better than Cooper (1998), who commenting on changes in trade Union education argued that:

Worker education in South Africa can currently be viewed as a site of struggle between two competing discourses, each vying to construct the meanings of experience, learning and knowledge. One discourse emerges organically out of the history of the labour movement and links education closely to political practice; it sees learning as emerging out of workers' collective experiences of oppression and exploitation and views the purpose of education as one of empowerment and social

transformation. The other discourse has been appropriated by the labour movement from the world of human resource development; it emphasises the assessment and accreditation of learning from life and work experience as the basis for creating new routes into higher education, employment and training opportunities (Cooper, 1998, p. 143).

This revelatory quote speaks to the historical inheritance from generations of worker struggles that has been squandered, lost and has emerged from this cauldron transformed into its opposite. This report sought to understand the social forces that coalesced to produce a conception of education and skill far removed from notions of emancipation and progressive transformation.

The introduction of the concept of Skill Based Grading (SBGS) within NUMSA was based on a multitude of changes in the union's political culture, shifts in the class positions of the black leadership and the shifts by white intellectuals who pushed for acceptance of the ideology of competitiveness. This also coincided with changes in both practice and organizational culture within NUMSA and other unions. Literature on South Africa's skill system examines what the system is aimed at achieving and is generally critical over the choice of the skill system (Akoojee, Gewer, & McGrath, 2005; Allais, 2010, 2012, 2014b, 2014a; Kraak, 1993; McGrath & Akoojee, 2007). The literature also accepts that trade unions, particularly in the form of NUMSA, played a critical role in promoting and ensuring the implementation of the skill system (Ngcwangu, 2014, 2016; Samson, 1997; Samson & Vally, 1996). It is also accepted that Australian trade unions played an important role in arguing for Skill Based Grading, to the extent that an expert was embedded within NUMSA to drive this process (Forrest, 2007; Ngcwangu, 2016).

However, most literature does not examine the fact that there was contestation within the unions over the proposal of a Skill Based Grading System and the Qualification framework that it led to. Key amongst those opposed to this were the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). CAW had long standing ties to NUMSA and intervened in the debates on Skill Based Grading systems. In the final analysis, NUMSA and COSATU made a political choice to agree with Australians. Drawing on published literature, archival research and interviews conducted with NUMSA and CAW actors, this paper examined what the alternative positions were and attempted to explain why these positions were not adopted. In doing so, the paper examined the role of white intellectuals within the unions and their contradictory location. It also argued that one cannot understand COSATU's endorsement and promotion of high skills as a key cornerstone of the post-apartheid skills system without interrogating how this was linked to the victory by proponents of corporatism within the unions and the ANC. This analysis is critical, not only in understanding the historical evolution of the skills system, but also in understanding the limited nature of current critiques belatedly being raised by COSATU.

9.1 What the Canadians predicted came to be

Some of the issues raised by the CAW with NUMSA have come to pass. These include the introduction of an overly bureaucratic skills system, the abandonment of older workers with low levels of literacy, and the failure to link grading to skill. This is linked to the failure of the promise that workers would be able to progress from being low-skilled to highly skilled. They also argued that the SBGS was an attempt to avoid taking up political struggles by

choosing a technical' solution, which promised to get rid of the apartheid wage gap and grading system. They also argued that the ethos of SBGS is not based on a worker centered understanding of education; an issue raised forcefully by Cooper (1998).

Notwithstanding the adoption of SBGS's, by the early 2000's Auto manufacturers had started requiring some degree of post school qualification to be considered for employment (Buhlungu, 2006a). In most sectors of the economy, including those organised by NUMSA, there was physical re-composition of workforce through prolonged processes of retrenchments that swept South Africa before and after 1994. Employers had chosen the form of response to liberalization and competition through restructuring, off-shoring and embracing globalisation by moving into Africa and conquering regional markets (Carmody, 2002, p. 262). The Buhlungu (2006a) longitudinal studies on the political opinions of COSATU members also point to changes in the social composition of COSATU. They show declines in numbers of blue collar workers who had carried the union movement since the 1970's and a rise in the number and proportion of public sector workers. Although NUMSA is not a public-sector union, many of the findings in the study also reflect changes that were taking place within it. Buhlungu's study (and previous ones as well), found a weakening in working class culture, both in the workplace and within households which showed that workers aspired towards a middle-class life-style. This was made possible by the fact that over 90% of COSATU members were permanent workers, who were younger and better educated than their counterparts before the new dispensation:

The democratic dispensation ensures that the worker, like all citizens, enjoys basic rights. But more importantly, the Cosatu worker has a relatively better education, occupies a better position in the occupational pecking order and therefore stands a better chance of earning a promotion than his or her counterpart in 1994 (Buhlungu, 2006a, p. 14).

The authors point out the fact that the average COSATU member is thus in a relatively privileged position compared to unemployed and informal workers. They also point out that these changes in social composition are bound to reflect themselves in changes in organizational culture within unions. Although the survey reports strong and continuing support for democratic traditions, the survey questions if this is not just ritual, as opposed to organizational practice. In this paper, it has been argued that substantial weakening of organizational practice had occurred in issues such as worker control, the ascendance of full time shop stewards who had weaker links to members and the introduction of investment companies, tied to BEE entrepreneurs. Various studies of COSATU unions have pointed to weakening of democratic traditions, particularly the concept of worker control and accountability of shop stewards and other leaders to their members. In this paper it was argued that examples of this include the failure of COSATU members to persuade their leaders to codify historic victories into the Labour Relations Bill. Hirschsohn (2011) also argues that as unions grew in number and the complexity of issues increased, the unions responded by instituting new structures which further weakened traditions of worker control. He also comments on the peculiarity of the decline in internal democracy at a time when the country entered into a democratic dispensation. In Forrest's (2007) study of NUMSA, she points to the loss of power by workers at a time when the union was focused on implementing a Skill Based Grading system. There was a generalised weakening of worker control and less focus on issues that concern workers.

9.2 Failure of the Promise

In his PHD thesis, Ngcwangu (2016, p. 296) argues that trade unions and their members had expected radical changes to the apartheid education system and clear processes for recognition of their skills and appropriate rewards. However, unions have been disappointed with the actual outcome of the skill system. Allais (2014b); McGrath and Badroodien (2006) and Ngcwangu (2016) all point out that the unrealized expectations of unions and their members have given the skill system a decidedly political character and that it was the site of ideological contestation.

Marock (2016, p. 16), in an unpublished paper on union participation in the National Qualifications Framework, observes that as far back as 2009 there was disquiet within unions on the outcomes of the qualifications framework. COSATU convened a National Skills Conference in 2009, wherein the then General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi stated that unions had failed to transform the skills system. He is quoted as observing that:

the systems for recognising prior learning (RPL) are still not generally in place; most workers still do not have access to training - according to the Labour Force Survey, white men are still more likely to get training than black workers, at the same time, many employers refuse workers paid time off for training so they end up taking courses at weekends or at night; the planning process in most companies remains firmly in the hands of management - Cosatu has not sufficiently empowered workers and shop stewards to develop demands and fight for them; the SETAs are not blameless, too often, their extensive planning requirements, even if well intentioned, have stalled progress; Cosatu has not linked skills development sufficiently to employment equity while it has yet to improve its representation on SETA boards; and, the failure to ensure that ordinary workers have a voice in defining skills needs and programmes.

In its response to the proposed changes to the SETA landscape by the Department of Higher Education, NUMSA (2016, p. 2) stated that:

(T)he South African skills development system is a product of our struggles as workers. At its core has been our emphasis on redressing past imbalances created through apartheid education... (f)ew disagree that the current skills development system has failed to adequately address the 'skills crisis' and more prevalently the needs of our country, particular in so far as we need to address the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Having noted the failure of unions to achieve key objectives, the document proceeds to note the centrality of an industrial policy that begins to resolve the structural problems in the economy and also notes that education 'follows' growth and that growth does not emerge on the basis of skills provided to the workforce. These positions are ironic given NUMSA's central involvement in the early 1990s pushing through the skill formation system in its current form, including the focus on 'high skills'. This points to problems of historical memory within unions and the need to maintain a patriotic history that according to Dhar (1993, p. 96), maintains a rhetoric of historically consistent positions aligned to the revolutionary ideology espoused by NUMSA and COSATU. Retrieving the history of how the unions' positions on high skills were forged in relation to broader ideological debates in the unions in the 1990s could therefore have a crucial impact in shaping the way forward as the unions develop their positions in the current era.

9.3 Shards of Hope

Although workers lost the battle against forces of the ideology of competitiveness, there remains a reservoir of hope and optimism. The fact that unions are forced to pay homage to rituals of the past such as their resolutions rejecting neoliberalism, or the need for working class organisations to remain independent or at least hold independent positions, points to the depth of the history of struggle from which unions emerged. In the 1980's, the Freedom Charter became a powerful statement of working class aspiration in South Africa. Its promise allowed the ANC to win ideological dominance over working class organisations including the UDF. Workers seized on it, as a vehicle towards a socialist future. It promised to open the doors of learning and culture. It promised equal opportunities and an end to poverty. It encapsulated the dreams of a future free of racism and indignity.

The paradox of unions accepting neoliberal economic policies, whilst passing resolutions in support of socialism; shows the power of those dreams. Elites are forced to pay homage to this history, if only as empty ritual. In an interview, Leo Panitch makes the same point and states that after a visit to South Africa at NUMSA's invitation in 2016 he noted that the Union had previously turned to the right and was turning back to the left. He had given a speech on understanding the global alignment of class forces and the need for radical left alternatives:

Maybe I'm being Pollyanna, but what's promising is that the traditions of struggle have not been completely exterminated. It is necessary to keep a mass base that understands the need to keep its institutional capacities to understand the world in particular ways. There's a legacy of struggle that we do not see in many other places in the world. When I spoke to the NUMSA stewards last year, what I felt, the 300-people understood what I was talking about. If I were to do the same in Canada, even in Port Elgin, (CAW's training facility in Ontario), people would wonder what I was talking about. It was a bit like 1905 (in Russia) or 1917, you could see the remnants of what the left managed to achieve, it's still there (Interview with Leo Panitch, 11 April 2017).

9.4 Voodoo economics sold to workers

A number of authors point to increased levels of black affluence. Burger and van der Berg (2004) point to an apparent connection between mobility and educational outcomes. Selzer and Heller (Selzer & Heller, n.d.) examine the spatial dynamics of the inclusion and exclusion of the black middle class within enclaves of white privilege and Southall (2014) examines the historical origins of the middle class and its make-up. However, the role of trade unions and the emergence of the black middle class via trade unions has not been studied and there is very little literature on the role of Union investment companies in class formation. In fact, Nherera (2000) points to the absence of literature on this critical issue and goes on to look at patterns of investments by trade unions. In the case of unions, the newly formed middle class made a Faustian pact in return for abandoning the working class. They sold the working-class dreams of freedom through neoliberal capitalism. All literature points to growing levels of inequality and unemployment, with all the attendant declines in the social determinants of health for the majority of the poor. As far as skills are concerned, the dream was 'from sweeper to engineer, for any worker with the desire to learn!' A concise

ladder was drawn showing how any worker with the ability to do so, could move from being a sweeper to an engineer (Bird, 1993).

Similar visions were sold the working class when the new structural adjustment policy of GEAR was sold to the working class. The public was promised that through the magic of reducing fiscal deficits, lowering inflation, maintaining exchange rate stability, decreasing barriers to trade, cuts in state expenditure and liberalizing capital flows would result employment creation, wealth redistribution to the poor, better public facilities and a 'better life for all' (ANC election slogan). In a similar vein, workers were promised payment for the skills they had rather than the work they did. Recognition of their prior knowledge and skill, an end to the apartheid wage gap and so on. All they had to do was to stop struggles and conflict. This is the Faustian pact of which I speak. The promise of something better, at some future point along the line; whilst former leaders climbed the corporate ladder, became members of parliament and ascended in many other (real) career paths they chose for themselves. Workers were sold illusions of a better life and unions continued to pass resolutions against GEAR and make various proposals for changes that were never taken seriously by its alliance partners. It can then be argued that part of the process of class formation within the trade Union movement included not only a flight to parliament and government, but various attempts by individuals to climb corporate ladders. Many of these individuals became extremely wealthy based on these investments. Examples include individuals associated with SACTWU, NUM, CEPWAWU etc. This under researched area is one of the key issues that needs further investigation within the academy.

In conclusion, the promise of magic sold to the working class is akin to that one sold to Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's 'The tragical history of the life and death of Dr Faustus';

Good Angel. O, Faustus, lay thy damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head!
Read, read the Scriptures:-that is blasphemy.

Evil Angel. Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements.

9.5 Areas for further study

There are a number of key issues and gaps that are not dealt with in this research report, given the nature and length of the research project. The paper argues that although there is a large literature on the formation of the South African skills systems and its problems, its political origins and the social classes that supported it is not adequately explored. A full exploration of its origins, means that the role of trade unions in it must be explored. In exploring the role of trade unions, it is also necessary to discover the role of various non-ANC left forces in popular movements.

The project has shown that there is very little that is known in the literature about the history, nature and influence of left thought in South Africa. Yet, the left in its variety helped

to build popular movements and proposed alternatives on a range of issues. This gap in the literature includes an examination of the intellectual, social and class location of white intellectuals who played an important role in the formation of unions, social movements and NGO's. Another area is on the emergence of the black elite from within the trade union movement; how they were constituted, their institutional location, their relationship with the emergent BEE entrepreneurs and their ideological orientation is another related but separate area for investigation. Another related issue is the role of union investment companies in class formation. Some of the issues to be explored include their relationship to financial services companies (who are the pinnacle of white monopoly capital) and how that relationship was mediated through unions' control of worker provident funds. Within the provident funds themselves, the reasons why unions agreed to move worker funds away from pension funds and the role of finance capital in that role and how it is linked to issues of class formation and the political orientation of trade unions needs exploration. This research is important as it will contribute the documentation of the unwritten and largely unknown history of left opposition in South Africa.

10. List of Interviews

1. Greg Albo, interview with Eli Kodisang, 12th April 2017
2. Sam Gindin, interview with Eli Kodisang, 11th April 2017
3. Leo Panitch, interview with Eli Kodisang, 11th April 2017
4. John Saul, interview with Eli Kodisang, 13th April 2017
5. NUMSA sector coordinator, interview with Eli Kodisang, 15th August 2017
6. NUMSA ex official, interview with Eli Kodisang 1st November 2017

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