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Trade Unionism in South Africa: A critical assessment of trade union strategy

The case of the CWIU, 1987-1999

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or to any other university.

Mbuyiseni Ndlozi

_____

30 September 2010

Dedication

To my Mother, Queen Zithelile Ndlozi, who made me!

Acknowledgments

For the completion of this work, I am indebted to many people, but there are those who have had a direct contribution and deserve a special mention. Firstly, I would like to express gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Lucien Van der Walt, for your support, guidance, uncompromising leadership and robust exchange throughout the journey of my development in this work. I would like to thank the NRF Chair at the University of the Witwatersrand, for a supportive relationship, mostly to Dr. Noor Nieftegondien and Nathasha Vally for collaborative effort in data collection, but also for emotional support through this lonely journey. Special gratitude to the CEPPWAWU Head Office staff for a warm environment you created on my countless visits, for engaging me about my work and expressing confidence in it (especially to ntate Magane and Cedric). And to comrade James Pendlebury, thank you for engagingly editing this work.

For perseverance in pursuit of this work, am also indebted to the community we sought to create for post graduates, not only in the Department of Sociology, but at the University as a whole. Special thanks particularly to Prishani Naidoo, Dr. Shireen Ally, Prof. Shireen Hassim and Peter Hudson for your inspiration and support; your unwavering confidence in me, and this I most needed in the world that is Wits. Above all, I would like to express deep gratitude to my comrades in the struggle to redeem pedagogy at Wits; some of whom have become brothers and sisters. At any time in history, I could not choose to be in any other generation! To Musawenkosi, Kathleen, Nurina, Komnas, Nokubongwa, Sian, Andrew, Tola, Themba, Tessa, Nathasha, Silvie, Aviva, Sarah, and all of my generation in the class of 2009; the struggle fought by your side seemed easy and worth pursuing.

My further gratitude to the WCV community for an excellent home away from home, special thanks to Mpho, Itumeleng, Maabo, Donny, Redeem, Mam'Connie, Ma'Dlamini and Ma'Mtjali. To my friends Darsh, Kani, Phindile, Thami, Mduduzi, Nombulelo, Naadira and Fatima your friendship is irreplaceable! To Tsepo wa Mamatu, you are simply leadership! Finally, to my family, Tumelo Mahusi (my best friend), ntate and mme Ngakane, the world is a better place with you by my side. To my loving sister (Lebohang) and two brothers (Mpumelelo and Nhlahla) thank you for your patience, your love and faith in me. To all my cousins, especially my lifetime mate Nkomozembiwa, and Nomathemba, Ntombifuthi and Khumbulani. Special thanks to my uncle and brother Ketso "TO", malume Bangizwe and the first lady of my life, my grandmother: Nomgede Ndlozi. To my mother, my maker, my guide and role model; Ngiyabonga, makwande maLenda mahle! *Ke mmila o mosesane*, such has been the journey of this work.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Rationale of the study, methodology and overview of the report

> History teaches us that all advances that are the result of revolutions were secured in the period of popular enthusiasm, when either a recognized government did not exist or was too weak to make a stand against the revolution. But once the government was formed, so reaction started which served the interest of the old and the new privileged classes and took back from the people all that it could.[1] (Malatesta E)

> Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity and, worst of all, the impulse of self help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above... Socialism steadily lost its character of a cultural society, and, therefore, could not let itself be halted by the artificial frontiers of the nation states... So inevitably the labour movement was gradually incorporated in the equipment of the national state and restored to this the equilibrium which it had actually lost before.[2] (Rocker, R)

1.1 Prologue

When we can look back from where we stand in the year 2010, twenty years after the apartheid government formally pronounced its preparedness to negotiate the democratisation of South Africa, we can say that part of our history points to the importance played by organisations of workers in the fall of apartheid. Indeed, by 1987 the African labour movement, in the form of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), was the single most powerful organised formation in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa[3]. From the early 1970s to the late 1980s, the African labour movement had evolved as a stronghold for the expression of the aspirations of

[1] Malatesta E, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_Archives/malatesta/tar.html

[2] Rocker R, 1938, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, AK Press: Scotland, pages 54 - 55

[3] Baskin J, 1991, *Striking Back: A History of COSATU*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg, South Africa, pages 277 - 286

the working people, characterised in a widespread but not always well-defined aspiration to "socialism".

This struggle saw labour emerging as a militant, radically democratic and politically unavoidable force. This history, which tells the stories of the agency and potential of the labour movement in pursuing its goals, is of critical importance to our generation, when the masses of the working people suffer with the neoliberal restructuring that has resulted in retrenchments, privatisation, outsourcing and casualisation. This history ought to be recalled when the masses of the working class continue to experience high levels of unemployment and poverty in an economy that has relatively benefited the few on the top of the social hierarchy in society. This history reminds us that unions have not so long ago put an authoritarian regime on its knees and secured real gains on the shop floor regardless of repression or economic crisis.

Who today will deliver workers from the retrenchments they face, privatisation and outsourcing? Who today will provide them with the tools to reshape their lives for a better society in which means of administration and production serve their needs, eradicating poverty and giving them access to produce living for themselves? How will the aspiration towards socialism which had inspired and formed the end goal of workers be realised today? Indeed, does the labour movement, once so militant, threatening to the ruling minority in the years of apartheid, still serve as the means through which workers can fight for their liberation, imposed by the neoliberal state of post apartheid South Africa?

Can we still aspire to a revolution, "...the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; the destruction of privileges and monopolies; the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life"[4] – based on the abolition of wage labour? Is it the unions who will "..raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscientious action, for their own futures"[5] when the democratic state, once trusted to provide building blocks for this socialist future, shifted to the adoption and implementation of neoliberal policies?

[4] Malatesta E, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_Archives/malatesta/tar.html

[5] Ibid

It is in the shadow of the above concerns that this report engages trade union strategy in South Africa today. The report asks, *looking at the trade union strategy in and of itself, what accounts for the decline in worker control, the loss of the battle to defend gains such as jobs and high wages; and the defeat suffered against casualisation, privatisation, and outsourcing*. This requires an engagement with the dominant intellectual tradition in trade union studies in South Africa, which provides much evidence to suggest the occurrence of the above factors and might be called the "Websterian" tradition (in honour of its pre-eminent figure Eddie Webster), and the writers associated with him (notably Glenn Adler, Sakhela Buhlungu and Karl von Holdt).

This tradition provides key insights into the unions' current strategy, which it describes as "radical reform" using "strategic unionism", wherein a "radical version of social democracy" is to be realised through social democratic reforms via "legal means of struggle".[6] It is also characterised by a very optimistic assessment of the "radical reform" strategy, which the unions have embraced since the early 1990s.

Moving from description to prescription, the Websterian tradition tends to see labour's reformist approach as a successful challenge to neo-liberal orthodoxy. Labour's power – built from radically democratic and militant shop floor-based organisation and operating in alliance with social movements – supposedly can and does successfully use the opportunities provided by the advent of parliamentary democracy to change society in a pro-working class direction.

Labour, it is argued by the Websterian tradition, was not only critical to making the democracy possible, but now uses the legal means of struggle it provides to push that democracy in a radical direction. The agenda is to have labour make "a historic compromise [with] capital"[7] via the creation of a "left version of social democracy"[8]. Labour seeks to put in place radical reforms that can act as building blocks for a gradual transformation of society to socialism. While this literature has focussed increasingly on union efforts at the transformation of the "apartheid workplace regime",[9] it remains aware of this larger transformative project. Thus, union activity

[6] Adler G and Webster E, 1995, *Challenging Transition Theory: Labour movement, radical Reform, and Transition to Democracy in South Africa,* Politics and Society, Vol. 23. No. 1

[7] Adler G and Webster E (ed.), 2000, *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa,* Wits University Press: Johannesburg, page 18

[8] Ibid

[9] Ibid

is viewed as "strategic unionism": the unions participate in structures of power to ensure specific reforms via policy interventions and corporatist engagements, yet maintain an independent power outside of these structures through their mass character and demonstrable willingness to undertake mass actions in support of reforms[10].

The report is critical of the strategy of radical reform practiced by COSATU, and thus, of the optimistic prognosis of the Websterian tradition. Drawing on the traditions of Marxism and anarcho-syndicalism, it develops a critique of the practice of radical reform through a case study of the activities of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), a COSATU affiliate that was a leading advocate of the strategy. It is argued that the Websterian tradition has understated the failings of the radical reform approach and the manner in which the strategy has weakened the unions. In praising radical reform, this tradition has also paid inadequate attention to elements of union strategy and discourse that are at odds with radical reform, and which envisage a more radical challenge to class relations and capitalism than a "left version of social democracy".

The CWIU was born in 1974 out of the 1973 Durban strikes; it merged with Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU) in 1999 to form the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU). This study focuses on CWIU efforts at radical reform, and shows that the union has not benefited from the usage of this approach for its core demands; instead it has experienced ongoing losses, manifested in retrenchments, outsourcing, privatisation and low salaries. In addition, the union has developed a technocratic style of politics, based on expert negotiations and high-level research, reducing rank and file union members to passive spectators in the theatre of "legal means of struggle" that centre on bargaining via industrial and corporatist structures like the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Overall, the practice of radical reform has resulted in unions co-managing capitalism without securing gains for working class people, and facilitating their own decline as agents of the working people to defend gains like employment and working conditions; in no sense has the strategy led to significant steps towards the achievement of their socialist vision.

[10] Ibid

Using the unions' own views, the report discusses the history of its activism in fighting for the interest of the class it belongs to as captured by its struggles, and its engagements with the state, capital and the Alliance – that is, the tripartite alliance between African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and COSATU, formalised in 1990. The report examines the CWIU's outlook from 1987-1993: this establishes what unions sought before radical reform became dominant, recapturing the revolutionary activity of those times; it looks, then, at the period from 1993 to 1999, examining the radical reform approach that eclipsed the earlier radicalism. Particular attention is paid to the union's own perceptions: the union's view of its unionism, and its assessment of whether it has benefited, or not.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the rationale for the study of union strategy in-and-of-itself, the need to look at COSATU affiliates, the time frames chosen, and the tools of data collection employed in this study. The chapter will conclude by providing a brief overview of the whole report in its various chapters.

1.2 Trade union study

There are many studies that have examined trade union strategy, and these have largely been on the COSATU federation (for example Lehulere, 2003). Indeed, very few look into a specific COSATU affiliate over a long period of time; fewer still look at other federations. Studies that have looked at trade union strategy have often done so through case studies, thus allowing a process where strategy is seen in practice specifically using the case study (for example Webster, 1985, Buhlungu, 2001, 1996, Von Holdt, 2003), but usually these studies have focused on particular workplaces, rather than at industrial level or affiliate level.

In these ways, union strategy remains understudied, even though it has been seen as central in understanding unions in contemporary South Africa. Looking at union strategy at an industrial, and affiliate, level entails providing space for the union to voice the objective it seeks to achieve and its understanding of the socioeconomic situation confronting it. Through strategies unions communicate what they stand for, how they understand their political situations, how they intend on approaching them, and, lastly they reflect on their progress on various ends. A focus on a given industry (rather than at the micro-level of a selected workplace) and the industrial union operating in that sector (the affiliate, rather than the macro-level of a federation), allows

strategies to be examined in detail, and over time, with a precision that micro- and macro-level studies cannot provide.

If we begin by looking at this, we open our texts or studies for specific unions' voices to be captured by congresses, and meetings' resolutions and deliberations. It is this voice that we then enter with in conversation about the political economy of its context. This provides an opportunity to learn from the intellectual work that goes into planning strategies over a period of time in real confrontation with challenges and actually engage it as we enter into conversations about the situation of the working class in a specific epoch. This departs from assuming that we can understand unions only by talking to members about specific situations (for instance, the Vaal Stayaways, 1984), or through case studies of specific circumstances (for instance, case studies of restructuring at particular automobile plants).

1.3 Sampling and time frame for the study

It is noteworthy in consideration of labour studies in South Africa that not much has been done to conduct intense studies of specific union affiliates, with rare exceptions like Forrest's PhD on the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Forrest herself notes the following in that work:

> Nowhere in the academic literature can an integrated study of the developments within a singular South African manufacturing union over a sustained period be found. Some studies are available which examine particular workers' organising efforts such as Allen's three volumes on black mineworkers but these focus on miners' organisation between 1871 -1992 and are thus not a history of a particular union (although Volume Three does substantially focus on the National Union of Mineworkers). Some popular trade union studies are available, including Sachs' personal account of the Garment Workers Union between1928-1952 and the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union and National Education Health & Allied Workers Union's popular photographic histories but obviously reflect an insider bias.[11]

[11] Forrest K, 2005, *Power,Independence and Worker Democracy in NUMSA and its predecessors, 1980 – 1995***,** Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, page 2

While there are studies of both trade union federations at a macro level (such as those in Adler and Webster, 2000), and of specific workplaces (for example, von Holdt 2003), such studies of specific union affiliates over a set period of time remain rare.

Yet, as Forrest argues, the "...academic study of a particular union allows for the opening up of a rich and detailed area of analysis. It also offers the opportunity to gain holistic insight into constraints and unforeseen problems, the implementation and impact of particular policies and strategies and the contradictions that emerged, and an understanding of how the union furthered its agenda in both expected and unanticipated ways."[12] These are powerful advantages, and this author agrees that they should inform study.

This study chooses the CWIU largely because of its history as one of the most radical unions in COSATU in the 1970s and 1980s, and its key role in implementing radical reform in the 1990s. Three reasons make it of particular interest. One is its association with the tradition Baskin calls "independent worker bloc" in COSATU in the 1980s: "...organisationally they placed great stress on democratic grassroots-based structures... Politically they were often, but not always, hostile or cautious towards the ANC/UDF [United Democratic Front] tradition, and tended to be suspicious of community organisations as well as nationalist politics"[13]. The second reason is that its history remains largely unaccounted and uncollected within academic literature. Thirdly, as it will be shown in this report, the CWIU was a champion of radical reform, and played an active role in its implementation; its experiences are thus a key means to assess the successes (or otherwise) of that strategy.

There are, as Forrest notes, only three studies of CWIU, all by insiders. One, from 1994, is by Tanya Rosenthal, a CWIU official, and is a popular history by the union; another is an official union history, produced in 1984. These are narratives, recounting events without an accompanying critique[14]. Rosenthal's book focuses on the union's historical role as a radical and

[12] Ibid, page 3

[13] *Struggle for Workers Rights: A History of The Chemical Workers and Industrial Union*, 1994, Produced by CWIU: Durban, page 103

[14] See *A History of The Chemical Workers and Industrial Union – 1974 – 1984*, Produced in 1984, and *Struggle for Workers Rights: A History of The Chemical Workers and Industrial Union*, 1994, both Produced by CWIU: Durban

militant union often influential in the federation, despite its relatively small size. Rosenthal's book drew on her Honours research into the union; she later expanded elements of the book into a thesis on the CWIU-linked SASOL workers who participated in the Vaal Stayaways, 1984.[15] These works do not interrogate the union's strategy over a period of time, and they do not cover the era of radical reform.

There is a related work by Sakhela Buhlungu, another insider, a former PPWAWU stalwart turned academic. He examined workers' control in three unions, including the CWIU/ CEPPWAWU, asking what accounted for the development of the tradition of worker control in the CWIU from inception. His study sheds light on the CWIU as a union with origins of strong worker control tradition. It does not, however examine union strategy over this period; instead it traces changes as far as worker control in concerned; it looks at the dilemma of leadership and full-time officials[16].

Collecting union history provides an opportunity to also learn from the past to inspire contemporary debates and struggles. Clearly, for instance, the CWIU has always been shaped by a decision-making process that included the broader membership with emphasis on worker control. The union had serious interests and programmes that were pushing non-factory issues, such as programmes on the environment. In addition, the union possessed a radical political culture: in the 1980s, it had slogans like "no holding hands with the bosses"[17] demonstrating an attitude that was then militantly anti-corporatist; it was also notable for its internationalism, efforts to join hands with other workers offshore and in other countries.[18]

The period 1987 and 1998, the focus of this work, is critical in that it marks three important changes in African trade union movement history. Firstly, it opens with the year of the largest strike in South Africa – the great miners' strike; COSATU offices were bombed; there was the

[15] Rosenthal, T. 1997 *Collective Action and Worker Consciousness in the Chemical Industry, 1980-1987*, thesis submitted for the fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts to the faulty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

[16] Buhlungu S, 2001, *Democracy and Modernization in the Making of the South African trade Union Movement: The Dilemma of Leadership, 1973 – 2000,* thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid

proposal of the new Labour Relations Act that was to see the banning of strikes and limits in a number of significant gains by the labour movement. From February 1988, with the banning of the UDF, which had been COSATU's closest ally in resistance to apartheid, COSATU emerged as the leading force against apartheid, having previously survived repression that came with states of emergency in 1985 and 1986 successively[19].

The second shift was with the unbanning of certain political organisations in 1990, the consolidation of the formation of the tripartite Alliance between ANC, SACP and COSATU, and the official beginning of negotiations for the removal of apartheid, leading to the closure of the UDF[20]. Finally, there is the period of democratic installation in 1994 and the subsequent consolidation thereof. In this period there were many policy and legislation changes, ranging from macroeconomic policies to Acts such as the Labour Relations Act (LRA, 1997) and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997). Moreover, taking discussions on trade unionism, it is the immediate period after transition to democracy, South Africa's economic exposure to the world and adoption of neo-liberal policies as economic frameworks[21]. This, it can be said, is a period of classical radical reform for the union before its merger with PPWAWU. In addition, it is also the shifts in macroeconomic policy that make the period critical, particularly for the type of choices in unionism the trade union movement makes.

1.4 Methodological tools

This study falls within the broad fields of historical and industrial sociology. As regards historical sociology, it is said to be a complex combination of various other disciplines and traditions of enquiry within humanities and social sciences. A claim must thus be avoided that this study is only sociological; rather it is better to say it will find its "centre of gravity within the academic discipline of sociology"[22]. Skocpol is insistent in her indication that historical sociology "...blends at its edges into economic and social history, and completely melds in one of

[19] Baskin J, 1992, pages 168 - 239

[20] Ibid

[21] Adler G and Webster E, 1995

[22] Skocpol T, (1979), *Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies*. Vision and Method in Historical Sociology Cambridge University Press: New York, page 359

its prime areas, political sociology, with the endeavours of scholars who happen to be political scientists by disciplinary affiliation"[23]. She continues, saying it is a field oriented with "...research into the nature and effects of large scale structures and long term processes of change"[24].

This study focuses on official positions of the CWIU as an organisation, since it is concerned with official strategy. It is not a social history, as such, but an organisational and political history.

As we have seen in the discussion around trade union strategy, by state we mean a centralised, hierarchical, territorial organ of administration and coercion, which thereby functions as a major pillar of class rule (with its own dynamic that is not entirely economically determined). In this report much focus will be given to institutions of policy planning and co-ordination that bring together labour, government and business. These institutions exist in different sectors of the economy and industry, as well as in different sections of the state, like the cabinet, parliament, legislature, provincial and local government.

Thus, a combination of archival documents and in-depth interviews was used to collect data, yet emphasis was put on archives as the study's central concern is assessment of trade union strategy. This means the interviews were used to gain intellectual analysis by strategic actors in the time, engaging their views based on the developments of this period in union strategy and asking for assessments in retrospect.

The two methods did not come without a challenge. Firstly, I was given unprecedented access to the archival work in the union offices, an advantage I found very useful and appreciate a great deal. This is because in the execution of this research I was sponsored by Philip Bonner, National Research Foundation (NRF) Chair in local history at the University of the Witwatersrand, who was involved in 2009 in organising and writing the official history of CEPPWAWU in celebration of its ten years of existence (dated from the merger of CWIU and PPWAWU). Noor Nieftagodien, working in the Chair, was in charge of this project, which involved the NRF Chair receiving funding from the union, which it could use to recruit researchers to the project – among them, this writer.

[23] Ibid

[24] Ibid

This sponsorship did not have any direct implications for my research agenda and its critique; it also did not mean direct supervision by the NRF Chair, or reporting to the union. Its condition was simply that I would share all the information I collected both in archives and in interviews with key informants, whilst they would sponsor my research expenses. The access to interviewees also was facilitated by the union and the NRF chair. The project was largely independent, despite the generous help received in terms of finance, and through support in locating and interviewing respondents of my own interest.

One limitation arose from the interest of the NRF chair in conducting life history studies using in-depth interviews; my project did need most of the data generated in this way. This meant complications with regards to access to interviewees whose time was always limited. Thus, whilst it took several meetings with respondents which resulted in covering fewer people than expected, but also because most of them no longer work in the union, and thus were hard to find, historical developments and life outside the union gave me a language with which to engage strategic questions about union strategy. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, it is the intellectual analysis of interviewees which was important, that is, how they understood the strategy and its implementation in retrospect.

The union's own archives were also accessed to tell what the strategy was; I was not interested in specific events and case studies, like the SASOL case of Rosenthal, which would require historical contextualisation that gets affirmed by interviews. Indeed, my study focused on reports on events submitted in meetings, and deliberations in minutes about that occurrence and the other. For its analysis these were enough, taking that it is the strategy and how union's reflection on events as opposed to events themselves is important. In essence, it means the study concerned itself with the official voice of the union, its official assessments and that of strategic actors, but for the latter, in retrospect.

Thus, is can be said that this study is a systematic assessment of the official thought of the collective expressed as a union over a period of time. It takes us through the union's official documents like a read of one's philosophical thought developed over an academic career. It is also the history of CWIU's strategy: it does not report on the chronological development of the union, but its strategy, yet with the purpose of its critical assessment. The study of the CWIU is

thus an example of the progress of the federation on radical reform as a union strategy and its conclusions can be further tested using other affiliates within COSATU.

1.5 Archives and Documents

The archival access to the union has already been mentioned. The archives are kept at the union head office, and are fairly well-organised; it is likely that they will be relocated to a university archive at some nearby date. I also utilised the Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand as well as the Trade Union Library in Cape Town for additional CWIU materials that were housed there. Needless to say, the CWIU archives in these places were fairly small and often ending before 1994. Thus, most of the data used came from the union's archives in Johannesburg which although largely unorganised have kept most of the useful information about the union including minutes of the National Executive Committee (NEC) Meetings, Reports on Congresses, Policy Workshops, Branches, Secretary, policy research units, Discussion Documents, and more.

Choices about which documents to use in order to see the union's strategy, and how it had been practiced, were not that easy, as most of them had something to say about CWIU's unionism. Congress resolutions, policy workshop documents and reports, secretariat reports, NEC minutes, were thus prioritised. This is because they focus on the overall picture, and shed light on much of the underlying activities of the union. A choice had to be made on looking at union restructuring, occupational health and safety, collective bargaining, industrial restructuring, and education documents and work that the union was engaged in. Due to the space for this report and to achieve an in-depth discussion of strategy, one aspect had to be the focus: this became industrial restructuring policy, chosen for the information it carried about actual engagements with capital and the state about industry policies and developments. Arguably, looking at collective bargaining and how it developed, or occupational health and safety, and so on, could also give light on the industrial policies in the chemical sector, dealing with the state and capital, but I believe that this choice was the best one, not random but relevant.

Archival documents are not without limitation even in a study that merely seeks the tabling of a strategy and official pronouncements thereof. As Ulrich puts it, "the content of archival documents needs to be interpreted and tested for reliability [thus] historians need to be aware of distortions and inaccuracies. Scholars... have already highlighted a number of problem areas

when dealing with union records and draw our attention to political silences, the authorship of union documents; and inaccuracies in the documents."[25] I sought to address this through interviews (see next section).

1.6 Interviews

A selection of key informants was made on the basis of the role played in the union: thus, only strategic leaders who mostly participated in NEC meetings, NEDLAC structures and who were organisers and in research units were targeted. The study used 9 life history in-depth interviews with key leaders who played prominent roles in the CWIU during 1987 – 1999. More interviews could have been conducted; however, most of these individuals were met more than twice, many three times. Most union officials are no longer in the union and work in the state, private business or consultation, in COSATU or even in other unions outside the COSATU federation.

As with another work, "Perhaps the most notable weakness of this study is the absence of shop stewards voices. Until attention is given to the voices of worker leaders and union members much of the history will remain eclipsed"[26]; so shall it be with their intellectual contribution to this study in particular. That is to say a voice from the shop stewards about the experiences of union's strategy and its practice would have been of even greater contribution to this study. Nonetheless, it was not feasible or strictly essential.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Proper consideration of rights of the participants was respected and of ethics provisions as per the University of the Witwatersrand Ethics Committee. Indeed, the proposal for pursuit of this study received the approval of the committee.

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[25] Ulrich N, 2007, *Only Workers can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970 – 1979,* thesis submitted for the fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts to the faulty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, page 69

[26] Ibid, page 70

The study gave strict adherence to making clear to participants that participation is voluntary, with no consequences if subjects chose not to participate or to withdraw from the study; the objectives of the study were made clear to respondents; commitment to confidentiality of respondents was also guaranteed, except that none of the respondents demanded such. Participants were asked whether or not they wish to be identified in the research report, and their wish would be honoured with no consequences for them. Consent was sought on usage of recorders, such that in case the participant wished not to be recorded, recorders would not be used. Opportunity was also provided for participants to obtain appropriate information about the nature, results and conclusions of the study.

The limitations of the study come with the earlier advantage that the union itself had requested studying the union. This may have led into attempts to influence its direction in terms of who gets interviewed; however, strict adherence to objectivity and academic freedom was maintained as earlier noted, indeed ultimately not even a single interview was facilitated by the union. In conclusion the material gathered, except interview recordings and transcriptions will be given to the University of the Witwatersrand archives for public use without time frames.

1.8 Overview of the report

The central concern of this report is with the examination of CWIU's trade union strategy and practice, rooted in the history and experience of labour (COSATU) in this country against the apartheid regime and capitalist exploitation as highlighted in the beginning of this chapter. The report will therefore begin by examination of literature in chapter 2, mainly looking at how trade unionism has been captured in studies of labour strategy, theorised and conceptualised. In addition, this chapter seeks to set a context within which this study takes place in literature, arguing that the strategy of labour has been understood as "radical reform", linked to social democracy, and identifies it with its optimistic advocates – the Websterian tradition. The report further introduces the traditions of Marxism and anarcho-syndicalism to which it turns for assessment of the Websterian tradition, and of the practice of radical reform itself.

Chapter 3 deals with the first set of findings between 1987 and 1993, a period before the official fall of apartheid in 1994. Here, the report examines the period before the rise of the CWIU's practice of radical reform, and then the emergence of that approach, identifying shifts, consistencies, tensions both in practice and in theory that the strategy carries. It deals with the period of transition, showing how the CWIU imagined a different outcome from what actually occurred. This chapter concludes with a concern building up about the union scoring fewer victories in its partnerships and cooperation with the state, capital and political parties. It notes a major shift around 1993 in attitudes to the state and to class struggle, where the union's focus is on interest group politics that cater for its members, as opposed to the identification with the working class as seen in the period before 1993.

This concern about failures of the strategy is further carried over in chapter 4: in the context of these major shifts as indicated above, this part looks at industrial and plant based restructuring. Here the practice of radical reform is examined using industrial and plant based restructurings. The report records further failures on core demands, and shows that the union's concern about the strategy not working is growing. It notes the weakening of worker control, development of technocracy and a resultant tension that is building up between this objective of intensifying worker control and the pursuit in usage of radical reform. This chapter ends with a matured concern about why the union persists to use radical reform in spite of the losses exemplified in industrial restructuring.

Chapter 5 draws threads together from chapter 3 and 4, and the union's decision to stick with the (arguably) failed strategy discussed, and starts by a brief look at the 1997 congress resolutions. The 1997 congress was the last CWIU congress, as the merger that led to CEPPWAWU followed soon after. The report showed that radical reform continued to be a choice of the CWIU despite failures and losses. It concludes by discussing part of the reasons why the union stuck with radical reform despite the union's own admission that it had weakened it organisationally (particularly in terms of worker control), and been largely unsuccessful in its aims.

In concluding, the report discusses the relationship between the practice of this type of unionism, "strategic unionism", and the achievement of socialism. It insists that there is a tension in the pursuit of radical reform, and the objective of maintaining worker control. More importantly beyond this tension it discusses whether radical reform succeeds in defending workers' gains, or

drawing society closer to socialism. The argument is made that it is a historical fact that radical reform does not work, has weakened labour organisation and, perhaps worse, has not brought it any nearer to the ideal of socialism.

The report argues that a call for the recovery of the agency of the trade union movement begins with rejection of radical reform, and that it is important to return to – but update – the union's pre-1993 revolutionary politics in order to realise socialism. It urges the trade union movement to engage in "militant class politics outside and against the state", for here it regains worker control and restores the solidarity and mutual aid of the workers, fighting for the defence of its existing gains and also for drawing nearer to the realisation of socialism. This drawing nearer is in that the movement begins to take a form of an embryo for a radically different society, a movement that will be able to lead itself to the realisation of socialism.

Chapter 2

Interpreting and Conceptualising Trade Union Strategy: Radical Reform and Strategic Unionism

2.1 Introduction

Trade unions have been a central locus of study as organisations of working class people in the social sciences. Trade union movements proved critical in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa; thus they have been central in understanding anti-apartheid history and the transition to democracy. In post-apartheid South Africa, they continue to play a critical role in the development of democracy and society broadly. However, many studies have identified challenges unions face in post-apartheid South Africa that may inhibit them from being central to the shaping of society and being agents by which the working class improves their living standards and contributes to the realisation of a class-free society.

A raging debate exists in the literature about the role of the trade union movement in the struggle for liberation against apartheid, the transition to democracy and its consolidation. On the one hand, the dominant interpretation frames the scholarship on these very terms: the struggle against apartheid, transition from apartheid to democracy, and its consolidation. Here are scholars like Webster, Lambert, Adler, Von Holdt, Buhlungu and others[27], who argue that the African labour movements in South Africa have been critical to the fight against the authoritarian racist regime since the early twentieth century, and emerged out of the transition to democracy as an independent force that cannot be ignored in the shape of post-apartheid South Africa.

These scholars have argued that the African labour movements have been highly militant, and usually grassroots-based, in their operations in the era of political domination and exclusion of black people in South Africa. Equally, they have stressed the emergence of a tradition of "worker control" (that is, of a democratic union practice centred on participatory democracy and shop-

[27] See Adler and Webster, 1995, 2000, Webster and Von Holdt, 2000, Lambert, 1988, Buhlungu, 2000

steward structures) in the early 1970s as a sharp break with the earlier African unions of the era before the banning of political parties in the early 1960s[28].

On the other hand, scholars like Barchiesi, Bramble, Callinicos, Lehulere, McKinley, Van der Walt and Nash agree regarding the historical importance of militancy and worker control[29], but have treated the development of the African trade union movement with more scepticism, particularly in the post-apartheid era. This minority tradition in the scholarship focuses much of its attention on the post-apartheid role of the African trade union movement, and much of its work is the product of a new crop of scholars, working from the 1990s onwards. In general, this school is informed either by independent Marxism, or by anarcho-syndicalism.

The cleavage between these scholars is clearest in their different interpretation of the role of the African labour movement in post-apartheid South Africa. The former "Websterian" crop of scholars, often beginning their work in the 1970s and 1980s, stress apartheid as the central obstacle to the battle that the African labour movement waged in the pre-1990 era, although they did not necessarily suggest that the movement did not have an equal stress on anti-capitalism and striving for socialism. However, this crop of scholars has, in the post-apartheid era and the advent of open markets and neo-liberal restructuring of the workplace, tended to view the rise of radical reform in positive terms. They have also stressed the struggle to transform the workplace regime from one that is characterised by white, authoritarian, domination to one characterised by (social) democracy[30]. In their positive views of the current union strategy, what binds them is arguably an acceptance of the trade unionism that is represented by COSATU. If this school is influenced by some Marxist concepts, its overall outlook is nonetheless shaped by a social democratic approach.

This is what separates the "Websterians" from the Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist group, which rejects radical reform, arguing that, rather than being an innovative and successful approach, it is

[28] See Ulrich N, 2003. I do not suppose that Ulrich falls in the same tradition of trade union interpretation with these scholars; presumably she belongs to the anarcho-syndicalist tradition … but it is her work that best revealed the fact of the emergence of worker control from the late 1960s, mainly in unions that are part of TUACC in Natal and later in the Witwatersrand.

[29] See Barchiesi F and Bramble T, 2003, Callinicos, 1992, Van der Walt, 1997

[30] See Von Holdt K, 2003, 2005, Masondo D, 2005

substantially responsible for the ills of COSATU. There are indeed differences within this crop in terms of what type of trade unionism should be adopted by COSATU; however, for the purposes of this study, it is the concern with the ills that will be important, although understanding them is critical for presenting more options for trade union practice in South Africa. In characterisation of the ills of the African trade union movement, it will be more helpful to begin by a discussion of conceptualisations of trade unionism largely developed by the earlier crop, and then look into case studies that speak to each of these crops of scholars.

It will be the purpose of this chapter to assess literature pertaining to trade unionism, both theoretical and empirical material. The chapter seeks to situate the study within the broad practice and thought of trade unionism in secondary literature so as to not only inform its narrative, but engage the thought and practice at the same time. This it will do, whilst developing a structure within which the findings in this study will be engaged. Indeed, it goes beyond merely stating what the secondary literature says, of course critically, but positions itself to challenge or test, indeed assess, some conceptual narratives developed in the secondary literature to characterise the trade union strategy in the South African labour movements.

2.2 Radical reform and trade union strategy in the South African labour movement

Adler and Webster respond to a broader scholarship on interpretation of South Africa's democracy that centred on transition theory; a perspective that the negotiations that ensued, dominated by the ANC with the apartheid state, were largely between moderates in the former and reformers in the latter, thus leading to a pact enabling democratisation, between these elites[31].

In line with their largely optimistic prognosis, however, Adler and Webster argue that "...pacting should not be seen simply as a function of the consolidation of democracy, but as a conflictual process of class compromise, the result of which may produce workers loyalty to

[31] See Adler G and Webster E, 1995, *Challenging transition theory: labour movement, radical reform, and transition to democracy in South Africa,* Politics and Society, Vol. 23. No. 1, Sage Publications, pages 75 -106. Also see Ginsburg D, 1996, *The Democratisation of South Africa: Transition Theory Tested,* Transformation Vol. 29

democratisation"[32]. Indeed, popular movements, in which labour is central, played a significant role in the "origin, development, and outcome"[33] of the talks. It is their contention that even prior to the moment of transition, labour was able to use its power of mobilisation combined with strategic engagements with the state to win concessions that translated to change of laws and other conditions. Thus, they insist, "...movements may be able to inject more content into the democratisation process and wrest important concessions from reformers and moderates alike"[34]. They add that:

> The fledgling unions, in particular those affiliates to FOSATU [Federation of South African Trade Unions, COSATU's main forerunner], had made important strategic innovations, which profoundly affected trade union development as well as the course of political struggle in South Africa. They successfully combined a radical vision with a strategy of reform; we call this strategic use of power radical reform.[35]

This is, they suggest, demonstrated by labour's proactive role in initiating talks on industrial or economic negotiations, leading directly to the formation of structures like NEDLAC, which brings business, government, labour and civil society to secure agreements on various socioeconomic issues.[36] Labour, in short, had a "strategic use of power" that made it a player in the transition, and an author of corporatist bodies that (they argue) laid the basis for a future radicalisation of democracy. Adler and Webster see elements of this approach as dating back to FOSATU:

> In pursuit of the long term goals of struggle of ending apartheid and of creating a socialist economy, the unions emphasised legal means of struggle. They sought inclusion of all workers within the industrial relations system and decided to register their unions under

[32] Adler G and Webster E (eds.), 2000, *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*, 1985 – 1997, Macmillan Press: Britain, page 3

[33] Ibid. page 76

[34] Ibid

[35] Ibid, page 80

[36] Ibid

> the LRA [Labour Relations Act, 1956]. Finally, they eschewed involvement in national political issues and refused to align themselves publicly to any political movement.[37]

However, they stress that "...the most significant difference from past action is that labour is both on the streets and inside the centres of power", whereas under apartheid it was mainly on the streets and outside and against the state.

Adler and Webster conclude by recommending that labour must maintain what they call its "dual emphasis", meaning participation within the formal institutions of power combined with the strategic mobilisation of power in civil society[38]. This participation in formal structures of power is an attempt to influence policy directions, and includes the tripartite alliance and state institutions. Labour's role in initiating NEDLAC gave it a power that is not captured by the notion that the democratic transition rested merely on an elite pact; using NEDLAC and the Alliance, and other structures "inside the centres of power", labour can nonetheless supposedly push the new democracy well beyond the terms that elites might have agreed on, in any case.

Therefore, the underlying framework for understanding the democratic consolidation, from this perspective, is that "...labour shifts from deploying its power to impose its will – regardless of the resistance – to using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial relations system and beyond"[39]. Adler and Webster argue that "...this more nuanced use of power – characteristic of democratic polities – involves a shift from the mobilisation of power to the use of influence in the heart of decision making at the enterprise, industry and national level"[40]. This is because, as earlier indicated, organised labour is understood to have become an important part of democratic society, for decision making in the spheres of the economy and politics.

Thus, the Websterians shift between description and prescription, and view the new strategy of radical reform in the most positive light. There is confidence that, in the framework of democratic consolidation, labour has proven a legitimate force in society and a force to be

[37] Ibid, page 80

[38] Ibid, page 18

[39] Ibid

[40] Ibid

reckoned with. These scholars argue for labour to continue making gains, it has to use democratic institutions whilst maintaining its independence outside of them; these institutions include those in industrial bargaining, besides the space created through the Alliance and the state, This means that democracy is seen as a process in which coexistence by rival forces of society can be ensured, whilst these forces continuously shape each other and society in general. Labour should thus use the democracy it has brought about in order to negotiate its vision and interests in society.

It is noteworthy that Webster and Adler believe that revolutionary rupture is not possible at this time, and insist that "...if... socialist solutions are unfeasible, the conclusion we reach is for the need for a historic compromise between capital and labour: a left version of social democracy"[41]. The recommendations of "dual emphasis" - combine politics of interest representation and those of social movement forms of protests and struggle[42] - and use of power to influence - participation of formal institutions of power combined with strategic mobilisation of power in civil society[43] - come to be seen as requirements for implementation of a "left version of social democracy".

Radical reform is therefore posed in two ways by Webster and Adler: one is as an interpretation of union strategy, but the other, secondly, is as a recommendation for moving forward - a case *for* a "left version of social democracy". It is a trade union strategy carrying a vision of socialism, which is radical; in its historic meeting with capitalism, it nonetheless compromises a radical vision, realising socialism *now*, via strategic partnerships in a democratic capitalism, resulting in radical reforms that create building blocks for the realisation of socialism in the future.

Adler and Webster correctly point out the shifts in how the exiled / underground ANC and SACP 1990 imagined liberation before. The exile movement discouraged participation in the apartheid state due to its illegitimacy, and hoped to completely overthrow the apartheid state. On the other

[41] Adler and Webster, 2000, page 18

[42] Ibid

[43] Ibid

hand, the independent African trade union movement, mainly FOSATU took a different and pragmatic direction, in the teeth of ANC/ SACP opposition. It strategically contributed to the reforms of the LRA in the late 1970s, which resulted in the legalisation of African trade unions, although it still maintained racial segregation. They argue that this demonstrated the independence of the new labour movement, but also that radical reform could work[44].

From 1990, of course, the ANC/ SACP dropped their insurrectionary hopes, and entered into negotiations with the state. Trade union willingness to engage (and reform) was no longer viewed with scepticism; it was now seen as perfectly fitted to the new era, and the ad hoc reforms of the past were replaced by a fully developed strategy of radical reform. Meanwhile, the formation of the tripartite Alliance signalled a deeper reconciliation between the ANC/ SACP and COSATU approaches. In the 1970s and early 1980s, after the 1973 rise of African trade unions, much emphasis was placed on being independent from political parties and activities occurring in communities (although this did not mean working *against* them). The formation of COSATU began the process of linking the unions to the ANC/ SACP and a softening of the positions of the "independent worker bloc". From 1990, even that bloc saw its future as lying within the Alliance.

In his conceptualisation of the type of unionism that had characterised the labour movement in this period, the 1980s, Webster engages with the notion that unions in capitalist societies "mature" within the a formal industrial relations system[45]: conflict gets institutionalised, unions become less bottom-up, and the militancy of their early years fades. This did not seem to be the case with African unions. In South Africa (and other late industrialising countries), a different type of unionism emerges which seemed at odds with this teleology. Webster spoke of the "two faces" of South African unionism in the 1980s:

> One, the economic dimension, is that of a union trying to win increases and improvements in living conditions; the other is that of a voice institution, i.e. a social and political institution. Where, as in South Africa, the majority does not have a meaningful voice within the political system, unions will inevitably begin

[44] Adler and Webster, 199, page 81

[45] Huntington S, 1968

> to play a central role within the political system. However, it was the decline in living standards accompanying the economic recession that brought the two faces of unionism together. It is this fusing of the economic with the political – two faces of unionism – that began to take place after the November 1984, that I call social-movement unionism.[46]

It is the blending of the two faces that makes social movement unionism (SMU). Webster argues that it is the conditions of living that came about due to recession in conjunction with the exclusion from the political system that brings about SMU. Thus, the economic conditions imposed by recession on the workplace as well as issues such as rents and bus fees, in combination with the political repression that swept the country from the 1970s, led to a combination of school boycotts, rent strikes, bus boycotts, consumer boycotts and stayaways (general strikes), in which unions played no small role. In essence, SMU here is a description of developments that characterised the trade union movement in the 1980s; integral to it are the organising traits that characterised it, democracy, worker control, militancy and grassroots organisation – it is a union strategy interpretation.

However, do these characteristics dispel the *telos* of bureaucratisation and institutionalisation that Webster noted? Webster's analysis did not really dispute the notion of an inevitable "maturation", as much as it is dismissed in *specific* cases as inapplicable: it was the condition of political exclusion and absence of voice in political sphere that *prevented* maturation and generated SMU. Implicitly, at least, he indicates that there was no reason why, upon removal of these conditions, SMU would not be replaced by the moderate unionism already seen in Western countries. (It is imperative to mention that SMU was not viewed as unique to South Africa, but rather as a type of "militant, mobilised industrial" unionism in newly industrialised countries such as Brazil, South Africa, South Korea and the Philippines in the 1980s.[47]).

[46] Webster E, 1994, *The rise of Social Movement Unionism: The Two faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa,* In Webster E, Alfred L, eds., Work and Industrialization in South Africa: An Introductory Reader, Ravan Press: Randburg, page 268

[47] See the following citations in von Holdt; Lambert, 1990, Lambert and Webster, 1988, Munck 1087, Scipes 1992, Siedman 1994, Waterman 1984, 1992, Webster 1988; also see Ulrich N, 2007

Other scholars have used this conception too. Tanya Rosenthal, in her study of the CWIU workers at SASOL during the Vaal Stayaways in 1984, argued that SMU "...explains the structural and organisational conditions necessary for militant unions to take up broader political issues. It also acknowledges the voluntarism of agents; however, the explanation offered is elite driven focusing almost entirely on the decisions of leadership. But both structural and elite-driven explanations leave crucial questions unanswered."[48] She goes on to say the question that must be raised is "why the labour movement gained grassroots support for articulating the needs of the working class more broadly. Why did workers, in a hostile political environment, embark on collective action around broad political demands?"[49]

Rosenthal argues that beyond "workers' identity, consciousness and sense of moral outrage" was identification with the broader labour movement[50] providing "a sense of strength and solidarity"[51]. She insists that part of what explains the risk that these workers took in the action at SASOL, indeed standing to lose their jobs, is "their confidence that they would have support of other unions and workers, should they suffer any negative consequences from embarking in the stayaway"[52].

Von Holdt proceeds to claim that the development in the practice of SMU in Highveld Steel deepens the understanding of this unionism. In his study of the Highveld Steel, "...exploring the nature of the apartheid workplace regime... and the potential for union driven project of transformation of this regime"[53], Von Holdt argues that unions' links with popular movements produce a nuanced and often contested union identity, emphasising this in its internal practices and institutions. He says the "...popular political identity of social movement unionism forged in

[48] Rosenthal T, 1994, *Collective Action and Worker Consciousness in the chemical industry*, Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, page 107

[49] Ibid

[50] Ibid, page 110

[51] Ibid

[52] Ibid

[53] Von Holdt, 2003, *Transition from Below: Forging trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa*, University of Natal Press: Scottsville, page 143

the broader struggle against apartheid shaped union practices on the shopfloor"[54]. He further shows

> ...the union to have been as much a popular organisation as a class-based one, constituted through amalgam of collective identities forged both beyond and within the workplace... its internal organisational culture and practices, its goals, strategies, tactics and meanings were subject to continuous contestation and redefinition... and rising from this, the internal practices of the union were not unproblematically democratic and committed to debate. Indeed, the failure of union democracy to empower less literate migrant workers led them to resort to coercion to empower themselves... solidarity was formed through revolutionary bullying.[55]

Even though such solidarities, as Rosenthal says, were useful in cementing and consolidating the risk taken, they were also problematic in the practice of SMU. Critical, though, is the influence that popular movements had on the unions in the practice of internal democracy, envisioning and organisation. Still, neither Rosenthal nor Von Holdt give no reason to suppose that South African unions would not "mature" as conditions changed, and as the grievances that fed them faded.

Indeed, it was noted by the Websterians that, by the late 1980s, the African trade union movement *was* changing. It had combined the usage of "emphasis of legal means of struggle" with a radical vision of socialism, whilst a social movement character was still maintained – meaning employment of strategies like protests, strikes and stayaways. As noted earlier, the trade union movement emerged out of the 1980s as the single most powerful anti-apartheid movement, which had demonstrated leadership at the forefront of the struggle with the weakening and banning of the UDF and other movements[56].

The FOSATU/ COSATU unions had used reforms under apartheid, "not regarded as ends in themselves but rather as dynamic phases in a progressive struggle to achieve the longer-term

[54] Ibid

[55] Ibid, page 175

[56] Ibid, page 82

goals".[57] As the 1990s opened, the COSATU unions shifted quickly to radical reform. As put by Adler and Webster:

> Labour combined a radical vision of a future society with a reformist, incrementalist strategy... In pursuit of the long-term goals of ending apartheid and creating a socialist economy, the unions emphasised legal means of struggle. Through its independent power base it had the capacity both to mobilise and restrain its members, a capacity it used in negotiating with its enemy – both capital and the state – to win and expand legal space in which to pursue its goals[58].

The post-1994 era would also be conceptualised as that of democratic consolidation, in which old school SMU was replaced by strategic unionism, with the unions envisaged as legitimate parts of the new South African order. This was expressed by President Nelson Mandela at the 1994 COSATU congress, calling for the unions to not only assist but be at the forefront of the development of democracy. Mandela, acknowledging the unmatched contribution of the labour movement to where the country is, argued:

> It will always be crucial for the trade union movement to play the role of a critical extra-parliamentary force. But today you also have to take active part in determining and implementing Government policy. It is fundamental that the trade union movement should jealously guard its independence. But today you also have to use, to maximum effect, the elements of political power that we have together achieved in struggle...
>
> What sets this Congress [the COSATU 1994 congress] apart from all others before it is the fact of the elements of political power that the democratic movement as a whole is wielding. The challenge therefore is to use this power to consolidate democracy at the same time as the union movement promotes its own interests!
>
> To achieve this requires a partnership that will now find expression in statutory arrangements involving all the major role-players in the economy. The decision to set up

[57] Ibid, page 80

[58] Adler G and Webster E, 2000, pages 1 - 2

of the National Economic, Labour and Development Council is an important part of this process. (We are determined as Government that this body should be formally constituted before the end of this month.) ...

Among the many urgent tasks that face this Council is the question of industrial restructuring so necessary for us to become a full and competitive partner in international economic relations.

The Government is fully committed to the protection of the integrity of the collective bargaining system. Yet, among the lessons that we have all learnt from recent industrial actions is that this system should be improved, particularly with respect to mechanisms of mediation that should help resolve disputes before they come to a head.

It is quite instructive that major sectors such as mining, clothing and textile, and the iron, steel and metallurgical industries concluded their negotiations without recourse to strike action. Besides the fact that the number of strikes in this period this year was much lower than in previous years, this goes to demonstrate that we have healthy industrial relations in South Africa. The psychology of crisis, fanned by some enthusiasts in the media, has little to do with reality...[59]

These extracts demonstrate the understanding that existed between the government and the labour movement, and avoiding a "psychology of crisis": industrial conflicts were symptoms of "healthy industrial relations" and democracy, and were, of course, supposedly easily resolved under democracy. Old school SMU no longer had a place in an order in which "all major role players" would abide by the rules; the illegitimacy of state power that fostered massive conflict was a thing of the past. Democratic consolidation meant the working together of all major parties, business, labour and government, in redirecting and restructuring of the economy and country. It is in this context, in the spirit espoused by Mandela's address, that we should not only understand, but also position the practices of the labour movement in the post-1994 era.

[59] Mandela N, *Address by President Nelson Mandela at the 5th national congress of COSATU* - 7 September 1994, http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/1994/sp940907.html

In addition to this political environment, and indeed the type of state that labour participated in shaping, are the macroeconomic policy developments of the time, adopted by the tripartite Alliance first and turned into a macroeconomic policy for the first democratic government. As Adler and Webster insist, they locate labour as an important force and an indication of the success of its 'strategic use of power'[60].

2.3 RDP and GEAR: radical reform and macroeconomic practice

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the nominal macroeconomic policy of the ANC government from 1994 to 1996, emphasised two aims: the alleviation of poverty and the reconstruction of the economy; indeed, it treated them as interrelated, using a Keynesian approach that viewed redistribution as the key to growth. The programme asserts that there will be no balanced economic growth without the simultaneous promotion of economic development and "economic growth without development would fail to bring about 'structural transformation', that is, a more advanced economy and a more equitable and prosperous society"[61]. This simply tells us that a myopic emphasis on growth would just stress the already existing disparities and poverty, in that the poor will remain poor and the rich would get richer. The programme's aim is therefore to promote the state's role in ensuring that its growth is accompanied by economic reconstruction and social development[62] .

The RDP intended to realise this vision through, firstly, what it called "meeting basic needs". Here the programme refers to job creation, land redistribution, housing, water, electricity, telecommunications, transport, health care and social welfare[63]. Second is the development of human resources, premised on the view that the RDP is "...a people-centred programme… People must be involved in the decision making process, in implementation, in new job opportunities requiring new skills, and in managing and governing… society…but an education and training programme is crucial"[64] in order for this to be successful. It envisaged making education and training available to all, from high school to tertiary institutions. Thirdly, the

[60] See Adler G and Webster E, 1995

[61] Lodge T, 2002, *Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki*, David Phillip: Cape Town. page 54

[62] Ibid

[63] ANC, *Reconstruction and Development Programme*, Umanyano Publications: Johannesburg, 1994

[64] Ibid

programme aims at "building the economy", by which it speaks heavily of strengthening labour laws to the extent of allowing labour to be included in the reconstruction and development of the economy through consultation[65].

Fourthly, the programme speaks of the democratisation of the state and society, where the aim is to link democracy, development and a people centred approach, and determine a new democratic order. Here the programme speaks of strengthening bureaucratic measures of the state at provincial and local level, the judiciary, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in facilitating socio-economic development. Lastly, it deals with the implementation measures, in which it stipulates ways of mobilising funds for the programme[66].

The RDP is characterised by different economic paradigms. First, as indicated, is a large dose of Keynesianism: it intends to roll out employment through a huge public works programme where infrastructural development will ensue. This was not seen as a passive handout of reforms – as noted, the unions and other popular forces were seen as active partners in the implementation and governance of the RDP. Secondly, there is some neoliberalism: it intends to open up South Africa's economy through reduction of tariffs and envisages export oriented growth. There is emphasis on creating a competitive industry in light of the above, where industries like mining are competitive abroad as South African firms, or South Africa leads in terms of producing certain products at a cheap price in a global economy.

It is a Keynesian concept to have high wages. This works in that the few that have jobs will be earning on behalf of the household and will be able to provide for it, and this will ensure that people have money to spend on the economy. In the long run the economy will expand and create more jobs. This is dependent on the fact that they will buy from domestic companies, which can directly boost the economy. This activist role for the state, which suggested that economic growth can be realised through the redistribution of wealth, driven by the state, clashed with the outgoing apartheid government's conversion to neoliberalism, which called for "redistribution through growth": grow the economy first, and then there is something to redistribute.

[65] Ibid

[66] Ibid

It is noteworthy that the RDP was initially conceived by the labour movement as a Reconstruction Accord,[67] and was the result of compromise arising from a popular consultative process that included labour, civil society and business. Indeed, it originated with labour's efforts to strike relations with the ANC government in realisation of a union-led transformative vision. Labour sought to enter in agreement with its struggle partner before its inauguration into leading the South African state, hoping to bind it to a pro-poor and union-friendly policy. Through the Reconstruction Accord, as Gotz shows, "COSATU hoped to… tie the ANC to express wishes of organised labour by subtly pointing out that it could never hope to be the government if it failed to take on board a set of goals that its huge membership base would identify with"[68]. Indeed, this would be "...a relationship by which an ANC government's identity would be overdetermined by what the ANC itself has always been – the leader of a range of liberation forces fighting side-by-side".[69] "The unions wanted a programme which would enable workers to gain increasing control over their lives, an empowerment process facilitated by a decisively interventionist government prepared, with working class interests specifically in mind, to force rapid change in atrophied, deeply exploitative and discriminatory social and economic relations."[70]

This was, of course, an approach arising from strategic unionism – the RDP as a package of radical reforms hopefully fostering "a left version of social democracy". It is this accord that led to the development of the macroeconomic policy as discussed above, with demonstrable evidence of the influence labour espouses, as Gotz, Von Holdt, Adler and Webster show. In addition, this is a policy which guaranteed the interventionist state seen as critical to the achievement of socialism as a future vision. Von Holdt argues:

> Social movement unionism in South Africa emerged in the struggle against apartheid generally, and white power in the workplace specifically. With the democratic breakthrough of the negotiated transition, there was a fundamental political reorientation within the union, although the workplace regime barely

[67] Von Holdt K, 2003, pages 1 – 27, Lehulere O, 2003, pages 22 – 42, Gotz G, 2000, pages 159 – 189

[68] Gotz G, *Shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls; Labour and the changing definition of the Reconstruction and Development Program*, in Adler G and Webster E (eds.), 2000, Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa, 1985 – 1997, Macmillan Press: Britain, pages 166

[69] Ibid, pages 167

[70] Ibid

> changes. The trade union movement responded with the new strategy of reconstruction.[71]

This strategy aimed, essentially, at contesting and radicalising the democratic process. With the RDP:

> ...the union movement had shifted from a stance of all-out challenge to an economy structured by apartheid and capitalism, to a concern with the problems of economic reconstruction and industrial restructuring, and a quest for various channels and institutions through which to participate in national economic policy formulation. Concern with building institutions rather than destroying them, solving problems rather than precipitating crises, governing rather than opposing, had profound implications for the organisational policies and practices, culture and identity.[72]

Yet, the RDP, the greatest of the radical reform initiatives, was a failure. It was never implemented, the RDP *White Paper* of September 1994 essentially recasting the document as an orthodox neoliberal strategy. The *goals* of the RDP – reducing poverty and so on – were retained, but its *methods* were replaced by the very vision of "redistribution through growth" that the outgoing apartheid government had proposed. The neoliberal framework was also applied in industry, not just at macro-economic level, as will be seen in the experience of the CWIU with the chemical industry (below).

The macroeconomic strategy that eventually emerged – significantly, developed without participation of labour (unlike in the case of the RDP) – is Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). Adopted in 1996, its vision was of building "...a competitive fast-growing economy which creates sufficient jobs for all work seekers, a redistribution of income in favour of the poor, a society in which sound health, education and other services are available to

[71] Ibid, pages 185-186

[72] Ibid, page 186

all and an environment in which homes are secure and places of work are productive"[73]. It intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, to lead to market-led growth. "This presupposes a set of policy measures to facilitate the withdrawal of the state from the productive activities, regulatory functions, as well as the provision of social services. Accordingly, the private sector is supposed to play a leading role in the reconstruction and development process."[74]. Consequently it meant the private sector was to have its own way in the market without much intervention by the state; instead the state would level or engineer conditions favourable for the market to flourish.

In assuring this, the government's strategy speaks of adopting a "...tight fiscal policy… to increase domestic savings and benefit from the expansionary impact of the stronger investment and export performance"[75]. It further speaks of keeping a check on inflation and releasing domestic resources to finance capital formation (investment), therefore proposing the lowering of the fiscal deficit. By implication, the government would, as the strategy puts it, let the private sector take care of some social services, as they would be servicing the debt and aiming at investment for the creation of growth, which would mean reliance on the private sector.[76]

Secondly, the strategy addresses monetary and exchange rate policy, where the central aim is the "maintenance of financial stability and the reduction of the inflation rate"[77], so as to create a favourable environment for the creation of employment and generation of growth. To lower inflation rates through trade liberalisation, whilst maintaining lower (but positive) interest rates, as per the strategy, would attract investment and promote savings. Third are trade, industrial and small enterprise policies: here the strategy seeks to speed tariff reform by consolidating the trade and industry policy, and in addition to provide supportive measures for small and medium enterprises as a key area for employment creation and income generation.[78]

[73] GEAR, 1996, *Growth, Employment and redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy*, Pretoria: Department of Finance.

[74] Lesufi I, 2002, Six Years of Neoliberal Socioeconomic Policies in South Africa, (http://jas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/37/3-5/286, SAGE Publications

[75] GEAR, 1996

[76] Ibid

[77] Ibid

[78] Lesufi I, 2001

The strategy calls for public investment and asset restructuring, where the government trades assets totally or sells them whilst retaining strategic interests in them. This part encourages the government to form partnerships with the private sector for the strategic objective of maintaining four basic sources of finance: "fiscal transfer, concessional finance from multilateral institutions and other international sources, development finance channelled through development finance institutions, and loans raised on commercial terms"[79]. This is to lead the creation of employment and distribution of wealth through optimising investment of resources.[80] Lastly, GEAR envisages labour flexibility, which will "...produce a labour intensive growth path, accelerate investment, lower inflationary pressures; wage increases limited by productivity growth; as well as variable application of employment standards"[81].

The core fact in GEAR is the reduction of the state's role in the market, except for creating an investment-friendly environment: this the state attains through trade liberalisation, privatisation, reduction of government spending, and deregulated trade, financial and labour markets, whilst redistributing wealth and reducing poverty through job creation. Therefore its intervention is in favour of capitalism and a competitive economy. Also, it depends on investment to ensure sustainable growth and create employment.

This holds negative consequences for labour and what it had initially thought as its Alliance vision of reconstruction, as there is emphasis on the reduced role of the state, less social spending, flexibility of labour law and privatisation, which may result in lower wages. Nevertheless, the presentation of GEAR by government was not one that posed it as a strategy that fundamentally departed from RDP. Instead, it was presented as having incorporated the RDP (or at least, the RDP goals) and made it a more governable, viable, policy[82]. Gotz insists that the RDP is "...the metamorphosis [of the] growth and development strategy and in turn macroeconomic framework, government may believe that it has found a seamless fit between the development of a society in which no interest might feel itself excluded"[83].

[79] Ibid

[80] Ibid

[81] Ibid

[82] Gotz G, 2000, pages 174 - 175

[83] Ibid

He adds, though, that the continued reference to the RDP by the ANC "necessitated a profound rearticulating of its meaning, one with profoundly negative consequences for organised labour."[84] This is the context in which the CWIU and many other affiliates had to look to secure their members' interests, a period known as one of consolidating democracy, as Mandela puts it. Writing four years after GEAR, we find Adler and Webster concluding: "If, at this time, socialist solutions are unforeseeable, the conclusion we reach is for the need of a historic compromise between capital and labour: a left version of social democracy... there is a need for labour to shift from deploying its power to impose its will – regardless of resistance – to using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial relations system and beyond."[85]

Yet the record of the ANC in power, from 1994 to 2000, showed few signs of this "historic compromise", nor provided much reason to see labour as successful in achieving "social democracy", "left" or otherwise, via radical reform and "using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial relations system and beyond".

2.4 Strategic unionism and shop floor emphasis of radical reform

Perhaps because the record of the strategy of radical reform at a macro-economic level is so discouraging, scholars in the Websterian tradition have, since 2000, focused their attention on workplace case studies. In this context, Von Holdt argues that usage of the notion of radical reform by Adler and Webster entails an over-emphasis on the *institutional* role of labour in transition and on its influence *from above*. For Von Holdt, the focus must extend to include transformation of the workplace regime by looking at "transition from below – the workplace, the trade union, the town council, the ANC branch"[86].

Von Holdt looked at NUMSA's strategy to confront industrial restructuring, which inevitably entailed consequences such as retrenchments, outsourcing, new technology, reorganisation of production, and the opening of closed markets to the world which comes with increased competition for employers. His focus was on a single case study; "Highveld Steel". In this

[84] Ibid

[85] Adler G and Webster E, 2000, page 18

[86] Ibid

context, NUMSA's strategy of "reconstruction", or let us say, strategic unionism and radical reform, included "skills training, grading and narrowing the 'apartheid wage gap' as a strategy for addressing pressures for improved productivity". In addition, the union developed "research groups for shop stewards... which comprised of seminars and overseas study tours to a number of countries, including Australia".[87] This "strategic unionism" was closely identified with Australian unionists working at NUMSA; it had been developed in Australia[88].

Like radical reform on a national institutional level, Von Holdt sees strategic unionism focuses on the transformation of the "apartheid workplace regime" and trade liberalisation, and its impact on the shop floor. It also stresses participation of labour in restructuring of the economy and society at a macro and micro level. In addition, it is seen as a shift from an emphasis on resistance identified with the militancy of SMU: if the latter entailed alliances with social movements to resist a hegemonic order on the shop floor, strategic unionism focuses on contesting incorporation, not resisting it and not wishing for its destruction as SMU does.

In a recent collection edited by Von Holdt and Webster, they argue that the South African workplace restructuring is producing a work order with the following characteristics:

- reduced autonomy in the context of economic globalisation
- two dominant trends in formal-sector workplaces: authoritarian restoration, and stalemate brought about by ineffective management and resistant trade unions;
- the persistence and reconfiguration of the apartheid legacy in the majority of workplaces;
- the differentiation of the world of work into three zones (the core, the non-core and the periphery) through processes of re-ordering the lines of variable inclusion and exclusion of South African citizens;
- the weakening of trade unions; and
- deepening poverty and exclusion among the great numbers of households, generating a crisis of social reproduction.[89]

[87] Ibid, page 187

[88] Ibid

[89] Webster E and von Holdt (eds.), 2005,*Beyond the apartheid workplace: studies in transition, Work restructuring and the crisis of social reproduction*, UKZN Press: South Africa, page 32

They attribute these to the liberalisation period in the post-apartheid political economy and globalisation brought by GEAR policy practices. They argue for the need for a "counter-movement" which constitutes the state, trade unions and other social movements. Predictably, the "counter-movement" is envisaged as centring on strategic unionism – although with some elements of social movement unionism. They argue that labour will have to organise casualised workers and reinstate its power by uniting all workers. In addition, labour should go into alliances with other social movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO). It is believed that this will provide a necessary offensive against the destruction caused by global neo-liberal restructuring.

They also maintain, in this light, that the state has already shown significant shifts towards redistributive policies, despite its key role in the very liberalisation of which they complain; they see the state as potentially important in leading an offensive against the "social destruction wrought by the market", despite its role in enabling the market's "social destruction" via GEAR and the RDP *White Paper*[90]. Their prescriptions are reached despite the fact that, by the time of the writing of their book (2005), the state had never tilted from a neo-liberal macroeconomic practice, regardless of the losses labour suffered – the findings that their volume demonstrates amply.

It is striking that these scholars do not question the limitations or consequences workers suffer in relation to failures with regard to the process of incorporation in democratic consolidation. They do not ask what the process of participating in structures of power has brought labour when the RDP culminated in GEAR; there is no real grappling with the failures of radical reform. What is the evidence of the rise of a "left version of social democracy"? What has its pursuit done to defend gains and secure necessary shifts or reforms for workers? How has "dual emphasis", where labour is both on the streets and in structures of power, influencing policy formation; the demand for restructuring with a human face, whilst stressing skills development and training; narrowing the "apartheid wage gap" as a strategy for addressing pressures for improved productivity; building of research capacity within the union to support negotiation efforts and

[90] Ibid, page 35

influence on policy; and lastly, formations of alliances with social movements and the state to resist "the wreath brought by the market", brought the labour movement any hair's breadth closer to socialism?

While the Websterian tradition insists that "...socialist solutions are unfeasible", it provides little evidence to suggest that "a left version of social democracy"[91] is any more likely.

2.5 Case study - Websterians and research practice: *The case of PPWAWU*

In the same collection co-edited by Adler and Webster, we find Buhlungu's piece on PPWAWU, which looks at trade union capacity from a Websterian perspective. He accepts radical reform as a union strategy, but points to its weakness through an evaluation of PPWAWU and its capacity to carry on dual participation.

Buhlungu argues that the aim of his study is an "...assessment of union capacity to grapple with issues thrown by the transition to democracy and the entry of South Africa into the general global economy"[92]. He then concludes that "...trade union resources have been stretched and that this limits their ability to maintain their influence on the shop floor, at industry, and at national levels"[93]. In addition, the unions are unable to transform their politics from being reactive to proactive, making proposals on how best to restructure production.

He defines capacity as "...organisational capabilities to regain the initiative and maintain the influence unions have exercised in industrial relations and in society generally"[94]. This definition is based on identifying unions as operating in different circumstances than those of apartheid. The new circumstances put pressure on labour to develop this capacity and initiative in terms of managing capitalism.

Buhlungu identifies important developments in PPWAWU in terms of political education for both shop-stewards and members, complex skills required to deal with production issues and the

[91] Adler and Webster, 2000, page 18

[92] Buhlungu S, 2000, Trade Union organization and Capacity in the 1990s: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges for PPWAWU, in Adler G and Webster E (eds.), *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*, 1985 – 1997, Macmillan Press: Britain, page 77

[93] Ibid

[94] Ibid, page 76

brain drain experienced by the union. He says: "The history and struggle of the trade union movement did not equip the unions to deal with new issues in a democratic society."[95] Thus, unions need to focus on strengthening their education and capacitating themselves to continue making gains in the transition process. This coincides with the needs of radical reform as the dominant strategy as opposed to SMU. That is to say radical reform needs technical skills and practices which SMU did not require.

Indeed, Buhlungu's attribution of problems to "brain drain", incapacity and required complex skills speaks to trade union strategy, the way in which the union chooses in the first place to engage. Thus, problems that come about in implementation of the strategy must also provoke a reflection on the strategy, in case this is where the predicament is. Nevertheless, the trade union's new strategy of radical reform is not evaluated, interrogated in light of these ills, by Buhlungu himself. It is just noted that the union is weak; it is blamed for merely being incapacitated; that the strategy's very prospects rest upon the presence (or rather, absence) of a few leaders is left unremarked.

This case study provides rich insight into the relationship between workers and employers. But in the analyses of Buhlungu, the question of union strategy is posed only at the level of *implementation* – and union capacity. The strategy itself is not critically interrogated and the assumption that the strategy results from transition and global competition are not proved. So, here, the Websterian tradition ends with claiming nothing more for labour than simple recognition in policy formulation and restructuring processes. It does not consider whether the workers are exploited more; or how a union's strategy affects its revolutionary potential, benefits the working class and actually causes fundamental shifts in capitalist society.

2.6 Radical unionism: Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist critique of the Websterian tradition

Much criticism of the Websterian tradition has come from a crop of scholarship from different ideological traditions: independent Marxists (e.g. Callinicos, McKinley, Lehulere, Bramble), autonomist / libertarian Marxists (e.g. Barchiesi), and anarcho-syndicalists (e.g. Van der Walt). In this study, these scholars are grouped together, mainly on the basis of their rejection of the

[95] Ibid, page 78

Websterian case for radical reform and strategic unionism, and their support for labour not participating in the co-management of capitalism and capitalist society. Here, we will refer to them as the radical unionism tradition, which is characterised by scepticism towards corporatism, the ANC and radical reform.

Richard Hyman's work, which had a great influence on intellectuals in the trade union movement in the 1970s, is worth considering as it helped lay the basis for the thinking of the independent Marxists. In his exegesis of Marxists' views on trade unionism, Hyman notes two interpretations, which he characterises as "optimistic" and "pessimistic". The optimistic interpretation, he argues, can be identified with Marx and Engels, whereas the other interpretation incorporates three analyses identified with Lenin, Michels and Trotsky[96].

His goal is to reconcile or "synthesise" these two antagonistic interpretations, which he argues represents "a certain dialectic" in the tradition of thinking about trade unionism[97]. The main question he is dealing with, and relevant to this report, is whether trade unions possess the revolutionary potential in their activities as unions or whether they do "...facilitate (or even … inhibit) the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society"[98]. He asks this in particular regarding their external role as opposed to internal activities. This is a question of union strategy and helps identify some of the theoretical underpinnings of unionism; beyond this, it sheds light on the treatment of labour as a social force and the role it is capable of playing. In essence, this translates into the justifications of expectations we can put on unions.

Both the "optimists" and "pessimists'"viewed unions as inherently limited. Marx and Engels developed their perspective over a period of time, concluding that trade unionism had limited revolutionary potential. Workers' irreconcilable interests with those of the capitalist class created an inevitable antagonism. Thus, the co-operation of the workers with the capitalist class can be seen as weakening labour, but not fundamentally so as to disable its revolutionary potential to disrupt capitalism[99]. In essence, unions can best serve as a basis for, and then, as a supplementary power to, the vanguard party, aiming at state power. The pessimists tended to the idea of

[96] Hyman R, 1971, *Marxism and the Sociology of trade Unionism*, Pluto Press: London,

[97] Ibid

[98] Ibid, page 4

[99] Ibid

integration advocated by Lenin: union activity does not pose a fundamental threat to the stability of the capitalist system, and can even be counter-revolutionary when the time matures for a revolution. He distinguished between "trade union consciousness" and "socialist consciousness", and maintained that unions only possessed the former, while the latter, necessary, outlook was the preserve of the vanguard.

Hyman, however, using Rosa Luxemburg, suggests that trade union activity brings socialist consciousness as well as "trade union consciousness". He concluded by arguing that you cannot separate the struggle from the development of consciousness, and maintains that what will bring about the revolutionary hour in trade union activity is subject to contextual peculiarities as opposed to unions' inherent limits in terms of their potential to assault capitalism.

He also disputed Michels' (not a Marxist himself) "iron law of oligarchy": the few at the top in unions could face democratic overthrow from below by the rank-and-file if they failed to deliver as expected. Unions are never quite "incorporated"; even in ideal situations of high wages etc., unions can be suprising radical. This leads Hyman to conclude that pessimistic views are "...one-sided, merely one moment in what best be regarded as a dialectical relationship between trade unionism and capitalist society"[100].

The point is that Hyman does not see trade unions as adequate in and of themselves as tools by which workers can create an alternative society. The (vanguard) party is still needed, and so is state power. This is critical, as the independent Marxists in South Africa should not be mistakenly viewed as advocates of a process where the labour movement leads a societal change to socialism by itself. They do not, as does anarcho-syndicalism, see unions as adequate tools of struggle for a fundamental change of capitalist society. They also differ from the Websterians, however, who argue for labour working within the capitalist state, promoting competitiveness, and class compromise.

The independent Marxists do not favour participation in the co-management of capitalism or the operations of the capitalist state as means towards fundamental change. In a debate with Enoch Godongwana (then regional secretary of NUMSA (1992), now ANC deputy minister of Public Enterprises), Callinicos rejected the very idea of a Reconstruction Accord. He saw this move by

[100] Ibid, page 25

labour as entering into agreements with capital and sharing the responsibility of managing capitalism.

He argued, first, against the perception that South Africa is not ready for socialism, arguing that the country possesses great proletarianisation, industrialisation, and a big socialist constituency, reflected, for instance, in the membership of the SACP. The possibilities of a socialist transformation are available to be exploited[101]. He is confident that labour carries seeds for a new society, and this must not be left to the future, as participation in managing capitalism will take this power away. He was "optimistic" about COSATU, and recommended instead of a social contract that the union should refrain participating in co-management of capitalism, calling for "militant abstentionism"[102]. By this he means "...combining the development of strong workplace organisation with the refusal to take any responsibility for the management of South African capitalism"[103]. He says "...the embryo of an authentically socialist form of society exists in the workplace and delegate based democracy that has evolved in the unions"[104] (although such an embryo of socialism, according to Callinicos, must be brought to term by a vanguard party).

Furthermore, he recommends that unions or labour should strike an international alliance with other unions from the rest of the world as the victory of one country will not suffice for the sustenance of the victory itself. He finally argues that the ideological creativity or what he calls "crisis of ideas" can be revived by a strengthening of shop floor activism without participating in the co-management capitalist state, a "socialism from below" existent in trade union activity and struggle, characterised by Neocosmos as "politics from below"[105]. Thus, for Callinicos, labour's "agency" is not undermined by the transition; it is its decision to manage capitalism that weakens it[106]. "Dual power', as described by Grtamsci, as opposed to "dual emphasis" as seen by the Websterians, was needed.

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[101] Callinicos A, 1988, *The Agenda of the South African Left, Between Apartheid and Capitalism, Social Contract or Socialism?* Bookmarks: London

[102] Ibid, page 152

[103] Ibid

[104] Ibid

[105] Neocosmos M, 1996

[106] Callinicos A, 1992, page 153

2.7 Radical Unionism in South Africa and research practice

An edited collection by Barchiesi and Bramble makes a significant contribution to this interpretation. This starts by arguing that we have seen, "in parallel with the legalisation and rise to power of the ANC, the predominance of a nationalist-oriented current of analysis"[107]. This is seen in the identification of democratisation with the ANC, as well as, they continue, comes "with an overwhelming emphasis on COSATU to the detriment of other union traditions", and] "focused on the role of trade union inside national liberation" and "defining the political role of the unions in democratisation and capitalist modernisation"[108]. They maintain that this tradition reveals "a scenario of contradiction between unions' policy ambitions on the one hand and political marginalisation on the other, a situation whose social and economic roots remain totally unexplained" by Webster et al[109].

They speak for a different approach to trade union studies, which goes "beyond assuming a 'double' identity of the unions, as collective organisations and as movements for social change",[110] which they attribute to the Websterian literature. They argue that this tradition has emphasised the institutional politics of unions as opposed to studying grassroots militancy, and the working class in its own right. The latter is merely seen, by the Websterians, as possessing "nebulous disruptive tendencies to be controlled", or as "a passive mass to be mobilised by the union leadership to reinforce institutional positions and policy influences"[111].

Their study then seeks "to open a new line of enquiry that investigates the impact of the social foundations of trade unions of the shifts that are now under way in the structure of the black working class"[112]. In addition they discuss "challenges facing organised labour as a political and institutional actor"[113]. They are explicitly critical of the approach taken by the "radical reform" social democrats: they extend their different approach to include an enquiry into the challenges

[107] Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), 2003, *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, Ashgate Publishing: USA, page 4

[108] Ibid

[109] Ibid, page 6

[110] Ibid, page 5

[111] Ibid

[112] Ibid, page 3

[113] Ibid

facing labour as an actor. That is to say, they do not dismiss the fact that labour is in these structures, but they also they do not assume that the current strategic unionism pursued by labour is an inevitable (let alone desirable) outcome of the democratic transition or the global exposure of South Africa's capital. This tradition, then, examines COSATU's strategic unionism without assuming its inevitable. It further gives insight into some of the grassroots explanations of some of what seem to be challenges to COSATU unionism. These are briefly considered below, with a view to demonstrating the strength of their critique: that is, labour's choice in becoming part in managing capitalism has yielded its defeat.

2.8 Case study for radical unionism: NUMSA in the East Rand

Tom Bramble assesses "Social Movement Unionism since the Fall of Apartheid"[114] using NUMSA in the East Rand as a case study. He aims to focus on what he believes is central to this type of unionism: "...the presence of representative and participatory democracy (including factory-level membership mobilisation). Consideration is also given, however, to independence from political parties and links to non-workplace political struggles."[115] In so doing he seeks to examine the fate of SMU and the tradition of worker control.

He notes the changes that occurred in membership between young and old, as well the role of unions. He notes that the sacrificial spirit of the 1980s where members are spontaneous and interested in participation has been replaced by dependence on shop stewards, as well as union organisers. Shop stewards, further, spend less time on the shop floor and more in union workshops and conferences, resulting in a gap between them and members. He concludes that the information gathered through interviews indicates that

> ...participatory democracy and membership mobilisation are now under significant threat. Although formal structures continue to exist and much of the rhetoric of mandate and accountability is apparent, the participatory element of

[114] Bramble T, 2003, *Social Movement Unionism since the Fall of Apartheid: the Case of NUMSA on the East Rand*, in Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New, South Africa'*, Ashgate Publishing: USA, pages 180 – 204

[115] Ibid, page 191

> democracy that animated the unions in the 1980s – grassroots mobilisation – appears to be in the process of slowly disintegrating.[116]

Bramble suggests a link between this "disintegration" and NUMSA's radical reform and "strategic unionism". Bramble, quoting Hirschsohn, says: "Whereas SMU involves mobilisation around a common set of demands, strategic unionism requires commitment to a coherent developmental vision and a paradigm of economic, social political transformation."[117] He notes that that this strategy has indeed changed the union: for instance, on organisers, "Their work is increasingly tied up in preparing for legal cases, and they are required to spend a considerable amount of their time preparing for appearances before the Commission of Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration [CCMA], rather than factory-level organising."[118]

As for "independence from political parties",[119] he notes that "NUMSA's leadership is ideologically and personally predisposed to close ties with the ANC Government, but must contend with a more critical minority current within the union which is able to count on the support of many thousands of rank and file members who are sceptical, if not completely hostile, to the neoliberal drift of ANC Government policy"[120]. This results in a situation where the union does not too easily identity with government. The unions' involvement in the tripartite Alliance makes it difficult to identify and engage with new social movements in the community, like the Anti Privatisation Forum, which battle with the ANC government which the union is in alliance with. He concludes that SMU in democratic South Africa "...appears to be giving way to the type of social partnership unionism common to Continental Europe"[121] as Callinicos predicted. He says that taking into consideration the continuing exclusion of the majority of working class from the national pie, the result may be a "...return to some of the organising principles of SMU used with such success in the struggle years and which contributed immensely to the destruction of apartheid"[122].

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[116] Ibid. page 199

[117] Ibid, page 188

[118] Ibid, page 199

[119] Ibid, page 199

[120] Ibid, page 201

[121] Ibid, page 204

[122] Ibid

A similar impression is given of the effects of radical reform on CWIU. When John Appolis, the regional secretary of CEPPWAWU, interviewed in the Barchiesi and Bramble collection, was asked "...what has been the impact on trade union grassroots structures of … processes involving the leadership, which becomes a partner in policy-making and restructuring processes",[123] he had the following to say:

> The… important thing that has emerged is in fact that in most cases, not all, workers and shop stewards are mere spectators in terms of the issues that are negotiated around at NEDLAC. If you take this over the past two to three years, particularly around the labour law amendments, it is when there is no agreements with the other side, when the employers and the state dig in their heels, that you find that the leadership will be mobilising. But as soon as the door is open, the whole process of workers being part of the process in no longer present. The fact is the workers and shop stewards are merely spectators, or are used as battering rams to open the door, or make a movement around some of these areas.[124]

This manifestation in the unions of distance between leadership and rank-and-file membership, the role of membership as an audience for a change to be inaugurated from above, and not as participatory or as determining as it used to be in the 1980s, is thus certainly attributable to the way the unions choose to conduct business. The Websterian tradition insist on sticking to the strategy beyond its effects on the internal union dynamics, or its proven failure to resist government from taking a neoliberal route; but the trade union movement's influence measured against its vision of socialism, is certainly in decline.

That said, there is to date no serious case study of how these processes have played out in CWIU similar to those undertaken by Buhlungu and Bramble on NUMSA. Nor is there, as previously noted, any overall study of the CWIU strategy in and of itself over a long period of time, despite the intriguing points by Appolis.

[123] Ibid

[124] Ibid

The emphasis made by classical Marxists boils down to a return to the type of unionism that characterised the 1980s, where unions were independent, outside and against the apartheid state, engaging in politics from below.

2.9 Radical unionism tradition and anarcho-syndicalism

In this respect, Van der Walt is also in agreement, although he stands on a different theoretical framework. The report will delve into his theoretical framework to demonstrate that a larger pool of possibilities exists for labour. Moreover, it sheds a light on the question of union strategy and the critique of the Websterians that is slightly different to the other traditions.

In his assessment of the Websterian interpretation approach to unionism in South Africa, Van der Walt argues against corporatism: not only does it weaken the labour unions, and empower the leaders at the expense of the rank-and-file, but in addition, it is not a viable strategy for creating a fundamental change in South African capitalist system[125]. Van der Walt rejects both the Websterian approach of radical reform to secure a "left version of social democracy", and the Marxists' stress on subordinating the unions to a vanguard party aiming at state power. He examines how corporatist trends have developed in South Africa since the 1980s in the form of partnerships between labour, state and business, and he insists that corporatism is not the inevitable (let alone ideal) approach.

Labour's participation in NEDLAC does not translate into improvements of living standards for the broader working class people[126]. It is often assumed by Websterians that corporatism leads to economic growth by promoting industrial stability, and that it then enables social democratic gains for workers, like increased welfare. Van der Walt disputes this, suggesting that economic growth does not arise from corporatism, and that corporatism outside of specific historical epochs in the political economy of capitalism associated with growth, cannot deliver even modest reforms.[127] In other words, it is not corporatism that leads to social democracy, but a powerful working class in the context of a capitalist boom that makes some social democratic

[125] Van der Walt L, 1997, *Against Corporatism: The limits and pitfalls of corporatism for the South African trade unions*, paper presented at the African Studies Association of South African Third Biennial International Conference: Africa in a Changing World: Patterns and Prospects, Magaliesberg Conference Centre: Broederstroom

[126] Van der Walt L, 1997

[127] Ibid

reforms possible. South Africa has a powerful working class but no boom, and so its corporatism cannot possibly deliver on its promise of radical reform. In other words, it is perfectly possible for corporatism to exist in a context where labour is on the retreat, and COSATU's participation in NEDLAC in no sense denotes the rise of a "left version of social democracy".

No matter the situation, however, corporatism also weakens labour, says Van der Walt, in the form of a widening gap between labour leadership and the rank and file. This is not, contrary to Michels, inevitable in unions, but the *consequence* of strategies centred on corporatism. The problem with this is that unions become weakened as forces of change. There is, in other words, a profound contradiction, rather than a productive synergy, between labour being "on the streets" and "inside the centres of power".

Since Van der Walt places no faith in corporatism or the other aspects of radical reform, he then argues that unions should focus "on the streets" and leave "the centres of power". It is "on the streets" that the unions must focus: as an anarcho-syndicalist, he sees mass action as the heart of union power, and insists that unions can create socialism, from below, through participatory democratic unionism, aiming at the seizure and self-management via union structures of the means of production. In conclusion, he makes a proposition different from the Websterians and classical Marxists. He says:

> A strategy which combines building of a strong workplace organisation, mass struggle as a key tactic for pressing demands, and a refusal to identify with the goals of capital may be a more rational approach to the struggles of the broad South African working class. Trade unions should not necessarily confine themselves to simple economic demands. The hegemony of capitalism in South Africa, and the necessary acquiescence of State in that domination indicates that unions should address both 'political' and 'economic' issues, and struggle for both immediate reforms and broader anti-capitalist project. What this project could mean in the 1990s is unclear – one possibility could be… "Libertarian

> socialism" (anarcho-syndicalism) – but the key issue is surely that it is chosen through democratic union processes. A free future demands no less.[128]

This proposition suggests a different theoretical framework to the one underlying the Websterian interpretation, as well as the Marxists. It requires a development of anti-statism within the political culture and vision of unionism, against not merely the capitalist state, but all forms of state – anarchism. He could only reach this proposition using this framework as it advocates for organising outside and against the state and the vanguard party. The key is not to influence the state, a task that he suggests (looking at NEDLAC) is futile; the key is to build organs of counter-power that can enable the revolutionary break with capitalism *and* the state that he claims is essential to any substantial economic or social advances for the black working class.

Rudolf Rocker, in his work on *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, provides the framework underlying van der Walt's proposals. In this book his central argument relating to this discussion is that participation in the state will yield no fruits for labour; rather labour ought to organise outside and against the state through the principles of anarchism. He argues that the role of the union should be as a "fighting organisation for the safeguarding and rising of living standards"[129] and a "school for the intellectual training for the management of production means".[130]

There is substantial support for these claims in radical analyses of the transition to democracy and the role played by labour, which hold that if social movements were critical to enabling the transition, they were also weakened by it. The work of Michael Neocosmos, *From people's politics to state politics: aspects of national liberation in South Africa,* is the best example; his analysis is consistent with the anarchist tradition. The question he is centrally dealing with in this paper is what accounts for the change from a people-oriented, bottom-up-driven kind of politics embodied in the 1980s UDF and COSATU, to a top-down state and elitist kind of politics, emboidied in ANC/SACP and the new state. In so doing, he also deals with the question of the transition process, which yields a statist politics and society. Neocosmos argues that no

[128] Ibid, page 16

[129] Rocker R, 1938, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice,* AK Press: Scotland, page 57

[130] Ibid

understanding of the transition can be complete without clearly understanding this arena of politics[131].

He argues: "Statism was not an inevitable outcome of independence. Rather, its features… have their origins in… the defeat of popular movements in the period of transition from colony to independence."[132] He then sets out to account for these features in the South African case, in how they too, despite their uniqueness, are asphyxiated by a more statist political approach. Neocosmos structures his argument by a brief descriptive of the UDF and the labour unions in the period 1984 to 1994, and a theoretical formulation of ideas and structures of the two. In his view, there was an "elite pact" in the early 1990s, which could only succeed by *statising* "popular movements", limiting them, and inaugurating change from above, shifting political action from a "people's orientation" to a "state orientation" as a key to the success of transition. . This does not mean the masses were completely left out; rather, their role is changed from one of *self-management* to dependency on a *minority* to lead and initiate transition and democratisation. The success of this shift depends centrally on state incorporation. Indeed, any state must be legitimised by organised popular movements for its existence.

If we apply Neocosmos' interpretation to labour, then we have a rather different view to the Websterian interpretation, which stresses the role of unions in the transition[133]. Rather than praise strategic unionism as an innovative union response, his approach suggests that "the historic compromise between capital and labour", embodied in the entanglement of unions in the new state ("using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial relations system and beyond"[134]), was part of the "*defeat* of popular movements in the period of transition" and the victory of "Statism"[135]. This interpretation argues that grassroots politics have been asphyxiated even as workers work within a framework of loyalty to democracy through their leaders from above; they have lost out, in that "politics" are oriented and located above, and the decisions of societal change centre on an elite, top-down orientation.

[131] Neocosmos M, 1996, *From people's politics to state politics: aspects of national liberation in South Africa, 1984 – 1994*, Politeia, Vol. 15, No. 3. pages 73 – 119

[132] Ibid

[133] Adler G and Webster E (eds.), 2000, page 6

[134] Adler G and Webster E, 2000, page 18

[135] Ibid

This thinking or interpretation is what underlies Van der Walt's claims, and is grounded on a different political outlook altogether to the Websterian and classical Marxist interpretations. It sees the space of unionism as a space of the workers' preparatory stage and thus negates the need for a party as well as a need for participation in the state – not merely a capitalist state, but all states. Inevitably this will be a movement rooted in grassroots, shop floor activism, a movement of self-government from below, created in class struggle, and that will create a new society. As Schmidt and Van der Walt put it: "What is critical is that reforms are won from below: these victories must be distinguished from reforms applied from above, which undermine popular movements."[136].

Van der Walt sees this as a necessary condition for a socialist change[137]: that unions must be independent, militant and democratic, and not be led by an external political party. Underlying this understanding is that the state is a social force, in and of itself inhibiting unions' revolutionary potential; not a simple instrument that can be wielded via a "strategic use of power", the state is a hierarchical, elite class organisation necessarily at odds with the potential is inherent in the unions' bottom-up democratic tradition and socialist demands. Corporatism directly requires unions to assimilate to the tendency of centralism inherent in the state. Thus unions should be against a state, as opposed to one form or another (e.g. the capitalist state). Hence there arises a broader question, which the anarchist tradition asks: how is participation in the state as a social force in and of itself a benefit to the working class?

In this tradition are two important issues for the discussion at hand, which is how unions participate in the political conflict resolution in a capitalist society. One is non-appropriation of the state or integration into the polity; the other is defence and improvement of workers' conditions of living from below. Rocker argues when looking at the Spanish and German experiences that "...a new state which has been brought into existence by a social revolution can put an end to the privileges of the ruling class, but it can do this only by immediately settling up a new privileged class, which it will require for the maintenance of its rulership"[138].

[136] Schmidt M and van der Walt L, 2009, *Black Flame: the revolutionary class politics and anarchism and syndicalism*, Oakland; AK Press, page 20
[137] Ibid, pages 138 – 144, pages 47 – 48, pages 211 – 233.

[138] Ibid, page 13

Adler and Webster stated that "...pacting should not be seen simply as a function of the consolidation of democracy, but as a conflictual process of class compromise, the result of which may produce workers loyalty to democratisation"[139]. However, it could be added, workers will remain only as loyal as this democracy serves their needs, but beyond mere improvements of working conditions is a political economic logic that these classes cannot stay in one entity working together for far too long, as they are fundamentally antagonistic.

Indeed, radical reform has already proven to be unable to secure those needs, as demonstrated in the adoption of GEAR, and the weakening of unions insofar as members are in control of their developments: unionism comes to resemble a local government that is elected by the people and then offers service delivery to them. How will unions resist being a disciplining force for the bourgeoisie, if they persist in applying these methods regardless of securing nothing else except destruction?

The other type of participation is the one with the objective to reach preliminary compromises – such as minimum wage and minimum dignified human working conditions. It is critical to firstly realise that this can be done without establishing bodies such as NEDLAC or participating within them, thus legitimatising capitalists and the state. As van der Walt puts it labour needs to combine "...building of a strong workplace organisation, mass struggle as a key tactic for pressing demands, and a refusal to identify with the goals of capital"[140].

Thus, anarcho-syndicalists and the Marxists, even as they differ on the question of the state and the party, share an emphasis on the point that labour should not participate in coordinating capitalism alongside the state and capitalists. The contention is that the recommendation by social democrats that labour participates in structures of power for policy contestation and uses its mass base to persuade its interests on these structures weakens its revolutionary potential – turning it into an organisation that provides left cover for neo-liberal policies[141]. In addition, it has asphyxiated a type of politics that lays the basis of societal change from below.

[139] Adler G and Webster E (eds.), 2000, page 3

[140] Van der Walt L, 1997, page 16

[141] McKinley D, 2003, *COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance since 1994*, in Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, Ashgate Publishing: USA, pages 43 - 62

While the conclusion drawn by Bramble and Callinicos seems at least likely to confirm Rocker and van der Walt's prognosis, in that they suggest that co-determination has strangled the revolutionary potential of unions, there is to date frankly not much research using this approach in South Africa. In addition, within the period of the rise of the African trade union movement, 1973 to 1999, at least the time this study is looking at, the tradition of anarchism is not influential within the trade union movement, or in the South African labour scholarship. Likewise, Neocosmos' study is also very suggestive of this trajectory, but much more focused on community organisations. This is a pity as this tradition seems to have some insights.

Chapter 3

Trade Union Strategy, 1987 - 1993

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to give an account of policy positions characterising CWIU's strategy between 1987 and 1993. This era was preceded by two significant periods in the labour history of South Africa. The first was the rise of independent African trade unions characterised by recruitment and recognition battles. This period came after the 1960s, the pseudo-peace period in political and trade union resistance which saw the brutal repression of resistance politics, coupled with a booming economy which began to break down in the 1970s. The Gross Domestic Product had been growing with an annual rate of 7.3%; the growth rate began to fall to 4% in the first three years of the 1970s, falling to a low of 2.5% between 1973 and 1980[142].

The accompanying rise in unemployment and inflation, with real wages amongst black workers dropping, placed a heavy burden on survival, leading to the Durban strikes of 1973 that gave birth to the new independent African unions, including the CWIU, which was established in 1974[143]. These new unions, however, operated within oppressive conditions imposed by the then labour relations system, often resulting in arrests of organisers and fear amongst workers to join them. The African workers were governed by a separate industrial relations system which rested in the 1953 Black Labour Relations Act; this did not recognise African trade unions, whilst the whites, Indians and coloureds were covered by the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act, which provided statutory bargaining rights. Nevertheless, most unions still made progress in recruitment, although not as rapid as seen after 1979 with the formation of FOSATU[144].

The second period is after the Wiehahn Commission in 1979 which initially aimed to only give rights to certain categories of African workers, and also sought to maintain racial divisions by not allowing racial mixing in unions. Unions contested this, resulting in more unrest in many industries[145]. The period of early and mid-1980s would be characterised by the rise of what

[142] Webster E, Alfred L, eds., 1994, *Work and Industrialization in South Africa: An Introductory Reader*, Ravan Press: Randburg, page 237

[143] Ibid

[144] See Friedman S, 1987, Baskin, J, 1991

[145] Baskin J, 1991, *Striking Back: A History of COSATU*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg, South Africa

Webster conceptualised as "social movement unionism",[146] a trade union practice where unions were involved in non-workplace struggles and in alliances with community organisations. This is after the 1973 unions had resisted participating in community struggles over fears of their independence and workers' unity, prioritising building their unions, thus focusing much organisation on workplace issues.

The rise of unrest in communities where black workers lived, mainly around issues that affected them directly, for example education, rents and police brutality, led many to argue for the joining of hands to form a united force against the state and capital. Thus, in her study of the CWIU, Rosenthal uses a major battle at SASOL ca. 1984 as a paradigmatic example of workers uniting with community struggles to combine workplace with non-workplace struggles[147].

In the period of formation and union building, the energies and efforts of members are focused on ensuring that it becomes a power to reckon with in industry. The victories of recognition in companies like Colgate and Revertex inspired ways towards organising in big firms in the industry. As one of the CWIU workers at the time put it:

> It was felt that we were not making any headway, because we were tackling the smaller companies and leaving the giants out – like AECI and Sasol. We had to concentrate on the bigger ones in order for us to win our rights to negotiate at plant level as well as to have our union recognised. And also build the union in general to be strong, to be built to a national union and so provide all the basic services that we needed to our members.[148]

SASOL in particular was a national interest: "...the pride and joy of whites patriotic to the Pretoria Regime. It was a symbol of South African independence, South Africa's answer to the oil embargo"; thus "Afrikaners said '*Sonder die Arabiese sal ons lewe'* ('even without Arab oil,

[146] Webster E, 1994, *The rise of Social Movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa*, In Webster E, Alfred L, eds., *Work and Industrialization in South Africa: An Introductory Reader*, Ravan Press: Randburg, page 281

[147] Rosenthal T, 1994, *Collective Action and Worker Consciousness in the chemical industry*, Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

[148] Ngwane D, in Rosenthal T, 1994, *Struggle for workers rights*; page 28

we shall live')"[149]. The success of the Vaal Stayaway (1984) could therefore be seen to have a national impact with the disruption of SASOL, a state enterprise that was completing a process of privatisation. In addition, these stayaways (or general strikes) in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region were often led by workers: for instance, in the East Rand, workers were often in the forefront, an understanding that youth and community organisations stressed[150].

This period saw the launch of the biggest trade union movement ever in the country in 1985, COSATU, which adopted the ANC-identified Freedom Charter in 1987 and also combined forces with the UDF. The mid-1980s also saw massive state repression through two states of emergency, leading to widespread arrests of activists in community organisations and in unions. The *South African Labour Bulletin* reported that "about 2 700 trade unionists and workers"[151] were known to be detained in the 1986 State of Emergency, with 15 officials of the CWIU included[152]. The unions nonetheless still grew large with mergers and more members joining following the successes of COSATU affiliates on many shop floor battles, including the CWIU. The CWIU grew from 16 551 in 1985 to 36 062 in 1989, with ongoing increases in membership throughout these years[153].

By the late 1980s and early 1990s the economic crisis had taken its toll, with massive retrenchments taking place and a fall in standards of living. The period was also accompanied by change in regime practices with the removal of PW Botha giving way to FW De Klerk, who went on to unban proscribed political parties and release political prisoners, announcing a new era for negotiations for a new South Africa. This signalled a new period which can be considered as the era of the fall of the apartheid government, thus the beginning of transition to democracy.

For the CWIU 1990 was particularly significant, seen as a year of "great jubilation and also great sadness".[154] This "jubilation": referring to the unbanning of the ANC, the SACP and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the fact that the ANC had launched hundreds of branches in the

[149] Rosenthal T, 1997, page 80

[150] Webster E, Alfred L, eds., 1994, pages 266 - 281

[151] Green, *Trade Unions and the State of Emergency*, South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 11, No. 7, August 1986, page 75

[152] Ibid, page 80

[153] Rosenthal T, 1997, page 38

[154] Ibid

country, and the rapid progress in cementing the tripartite Alliance between the ANC, SACP and COSATU.

These developments, however, involved "sadness", for these advances "...were shadowed by the violence that swept across the country"[155], particularly Kwazulu-Natal and Transvaal, with violent clashes between ANC and anti-ANC forces, as well as security forces: these left thousands of people dead[156]. The violence had a big impact on the unions, as some of the people who were dying in these conflicts were union members, many at the forefront of "...digging trenches and organising community self defence" during the clashes[157].

Nevertheless, the union reported that it "...continued to set the pace in winning the highest wages in the country,[158] the average wage [of] R6.28 per hour, higher than any other union in South Africa..." In addition the "...CWIU had the second highest number of strikes in 1990 in South Africa" with "membership crossing 40 000 threshold"[159]. If workers in "...some companies... had still not won reinstatement after being dismissed earlier in the year"[160], the overall picture was very positive.

This period was, Von Holdt notes, also the era in which the new type of unionism emerged, strategic unionism[161]. This unionism drew on the older FOSATU and COSATU willingness to use negotiations and state structures to further union and working class interests, but now developed these into a coherent strategy to address the new context, and secure long-term goals of radical change.

This unionism was shaped by a drastically changed political situation with the government more willing to work with labour and political parties in determining a host of policies. There was a proliferation of tripartite bodies and commissions, in which unions played a key role. The formation of new forums, like the National Economic Forum (NEF), and ongoing participation

[155] *CWIU Flame, "Build on 1990 in 1991; High and Low point of 1990"*, Issue Number 27, January 1991, page 1

[156] Ibid

[157] Baskin J, 1991, page 427

[158] Ibid

[159] Ibid

[160] Ibid

[161] Von Holdt K, 1994, *What is the future of labour*, in Webster E, Alfred L, eds., *Work and Industrialization in South Africa: An Introductory Reader*, Ravan Press: Randburg, pages 303 - 313

in the National Manpower Commission (NMC), gave labour an opportunity to enter negotiations about legislation, policies and economic vision of the country. Strategic unionism seemed the way for labour to influence the transition, and to radicalise the democracy in the years to come. One outcome was the RDP, successor to the Reconstruction Accord (see previous chapter), which were hoped to, inter alia, replace the "apartheid workplace regime" with co-determination and industrial democracy.[162]

In light of the above background, this chapter aims to provide an account of the policy developments of the CWIU itself. It seeks to critically assess them in light of what they assert and of the socioeconomic developments in the country, which have been introduced earlier. In essence, it will discuss trade union strategy thinking and practice as represented largely by CWIU union official documents and strategic in-depth interviews for the period 1987 – 1993, a period of important changes in the union's approach.

The chapter will begin by defining what trade union strategy is, thus developing a set of criteria upon which it will examine CWIU's strategy, with particular attention to the rise of radical reform and strategic unionism in the transition. It will show how the union strategy changes over a period of time; it will mark similarities, continuities, discontinuities and contrasts in different stages of its development in time.

3.2 Trade Union Strategy

A trade union strategy is the union programme, based on an analysis of the political economy of society, that seeks to alter the relationship of the working class to the means of production and political administration. Lehulere puts it best, arguing that it should respond to the following issues:

> What are the socio-economic conditions of workers in society and identify the sources of these conditions; Identify positions and interest of different social classes and spell out the ones it seeks to represent together with goals and interest of these social classes; It must identify classes or social groups who are actual or potential allies in its pursuit to realise these interests and goals; It must identify

[162] See Von Holdt, 2003, 1994,

> classes or social groups who stand in the way of the realisation of its interests and goals; It must spell out changes in the political economic power relations that are required in order for its goals to be realised; It must spell out practical measures that must be undertaken to realise its goals and interests; It must spell out a political strategy to break the power of social and economic classes that stand in its way to realise its goals and interests.[163]

As shown in the literature review, there is no agreement on what the "political strategy" should actually entail, or even on the potential, revolutionary or otherwise, of trade unions to change society;

3.3 CWIU unionism, 1987 – 1993

Trade union policy in the CWIU is divided in this period (1987-1993) into four areas, as defined by the union itself in its 1987 and 1991 policy resolutions, and elsewhere: political policy, economic policy, social policy and trade union strategy/organisation. This report makes a distinction between all those policy positions that focus on internal organisational development, and those that speak to the unions' policy positions around broad, external, socio-economic issues. This is a distinction that blurs, as the two will overlap sometimes; however, it is useful enough for the purposes of analysis. The focus will be on political and economic strategy, and excludes strategies (or what Von Holdt calls union social structure[164]), which have much less to do with external strategy (pronouncements on alliances, legislation, macroeconomic policy and vision on future society). The report will ensure that the overall ideas and message of the resolutions and policies is not compromised, or at least an attempt will be made to do so.

3. 4 Political Policies

In its political policies, often the opening section in its documents between 1987 and 1991, the CWIU (hereafter "the union") takes an opportunity to establish its positions on national political developments. It establishes this based on outlined principles stemming most of the time out of a

[163] These points are adapted from a chapter by Lehulere O, 2003, *Turn to the right*, in Bramble T and Barchiesi F, *Rethinking the labour movement in the "new South Africa"*, Aldershot, England

[164] Von Holdt, 2003, *Transition from Below: Forging trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa*, University of Natal Press: Scottsville

critique of the political situation itself. In its early stages the union uses an anti-capitalist critique of its political situation and communicates its aspirations, interest, goals and vision in the language thereof. However, in the later stages, the radical rhetoric makes way for a milder, co-determinist rhetoric, emphasising collaboration with capital and the state.

Here the political vision and critique of the CWIU can be summed up in the following broad themes:

3.4.1 Theme one: Socialism, Democracy and Non-Racialism

In the first period, that of 1987 to 1991, the union states its "...fundamental principles [as] worker control, democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism"[165]. Democracy as a vision of future South Africa and as a political practice can be traced to the rise of unions from the 1970s in the national liberation struggle[166]. The same holds for non-racialism and non-sexism[167]. Many identify the feature of worker control (or what Buhlungu called "democratic unionism"[168]) with these unions, and the CWIU would be amongst the foremost advocates of it from its formation in 1974. [169]

The union also maintained a strong commitment to socialism, viewing it as the only viable solution to the socio-political crisis in South Africa. As to what exactly it meant by "socialism", the union's documents remain unclear: there is no time when socialism as a vision is clearly defined. The resolution states that "Only socialism can solve the current political and economic crises."[170] In addition, "...unions in COSATU must participate in the formulation of an economic policy that reaffirms socialism as the basis for restructuring industries according to the needs of the working class and the society as a whole".[171] In even stronger terms, the union resolved:

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[165] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions adopted at the National Congresses in 1987, 1989 and 1991*, 1992, page 5

[166] See Buhlungu, 2001, Ulrich, 2007

[167] See Frederikse J, 1990, *The unbreakable thread: non-racialism in South Africa*, Indiana University Press; Bloomington. Although it not the case that non-racialism appears as an unbreakable thread in the history of the liberation movement, it shows that the idea goes far beyond the 1970s

[168] Buhlungu S, 2001, *Democracy and modernization in the making of the South African trade union movement: the dilemma of leadership, 1973 – 2000,* Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)

[169] Rosenthal T, 1997, Buhlungu S, 2001, Ulrich N, 2007

[170] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions adopted at the National Congresses in 1987, 1989 and 1991*, 1992, page 5

[171] Ibid, page 20

> To commit ourselves to a truly united, democratic, non-racial, just and socialist South Africa by: Educating ourselves on various types of political economies e.g. socialism and mixed economies etc... Carrying out research into planned economies …[172]

It seems the fight for a democratic future was seen as inseparable to the fight for socialism, as a CWIU slogan put it clearly: "build democracy, fight for socialism"[173]. The link is also captured in the union's analysis of the South African socio-economic crisis and massive retrenchments, which are blamed on both the profit-making imperatives of capitalism, and the failures of the apartheid regime[174]. Another aspect related to this articulation is COSATU's adoption of the "...Freedom Charter as a set of basic demands for the removal of national oppression and economic exploitation" in 1987[175], a step towards the achievement of socialism, and not socialism itself. That is, while the union adopted the Freedom Charter, it saw it as too limited – at best it was a minimum, rather than a maximum, programme, and was therefore seen as incomplete by the CWIU's strong "independent worker bloc". As Baskin shows, the Charter was accepted with some reservations, and after a deep heated debate of its role as a stepping stone to socialism.[176] (Baskin captures the developments of this debate in COSATU[177], whereas Rosenthal gives an account of them within the CWIU[178].)

In sum, the union in the late 1980s clearly placed socialism at the centre of its vision for the future society, problematising the socioeconomic situation as *both* capitalist and racist in nature. Much emphasis was placed on the democratic reform of the state with an emphasis on universal franchise and democratic planning of the economy. The "planning" is key: the future, it seems, had to be modelled through socialist principles. The Freedom Charter presented the basic demands for removal of national oppression and economic exploitation, but by no means the

[172] Ibid, page 6

[173] Ibid

[174] Ibid, page 19

[175] Ibid, page 6

[176] Baskin, 1991

[177] Baskin 1991, pages 215 - 217

[178] Rosenthal T, 1994, pages 50 -51

complete aim: a socialist future. The union did not speak in the language of radical reforms, social democracy, or participation in corporatist structures.

From 1991 to 1993, however, the union's strong emphasis on socialism began to fade, compared to the previous period (1987 - 1990), as there is more emphasis on the Alliance and electoral politics, the democratic state and inclusion of worker rights in the new constitution. For instance, in a national policy workshop document, the NEC proposed a "review of CWIU position on how to achieve a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa", and socialism was largely left out in the 1991 resolutions[179].

The later documents do not have much politically radical analysis of developments and there is also less emphasis on working class leadership of the movement. Emphasis is on strengthening participation in restructuring the economy, a point that will be developed in the economic strategy section. In addition, the class character of democracy and non-racialism is not clearly articulated. However, while talk of socialism faded, it was never absent. The idea of socialism is a theme that runs throughout the union's pronouncements, even after 1990, and it will be revisited after examining economic policies, in chapter five.

3.4 2 Theme two: Solidarity and joining forces with community structures

The second theme in political policy is in that the union saw its politics as inseparable from community struggles. It had a commitment to ensure that it practices the type of unionism where workers are leading community struggles and fully participate in the shape of their development. This participation in the community is also seen as opportune to promote union struggles, creating a common understanding of struggle by the broad "working class", resulting in a unity of action and vision. It is critical to note that these are post-1987 resolutions: before then the issues of participation in community struggles were contested, seen also as potentially allying to political organisations, thus bringing divisions in the membership[180]. However, in the post-1987 period, alignment with the UDF had already taken place, also signalling determination to work with the ANC[181]. As Martin Jansen, who was the union organiser in the 1980s, observes:

[179] *CWIU Policies, National Executive Committee Policy Workshop*, 1993

[180] See Rosenthal T, 1994, also see *CWIU Policies*, 1991

[181] See Baskin, 1991

> By eighty six, there was another state of emergency which was very effective along with all the security apparatus of the apartheid regime, detaining people...killing activists and so on. So the mass democratic movement at that point had been in retreat, particularly community struggles and students...[182]

This commitment is in conjunction with the adoption of the Freedom Charter from 1987, seen as a set of basic demands for removal of national and economic oppression. In sum, the conditions of the time of these resolutions, the late 1980s, were such that the union saw it as quintessential to be at the forefront and entrench joint efforts against the state repression that had resulted in more violence.

It is critical to note that a really new form of community politics had emerged in the 1980s where people were engaged in what they characterised as "building democracy today"[183]. This era was of great inspiration for those involved in building working class democratic and self-sufficient structures of governance; it made sense for a union that stressed worker control and socialism to align with radical community structures, many tied to the UDF, that sought to replace state power with "people's power", such as street committees. This is important because the street committees, the people's courts, self-defence units, and people's education structures were experiments of self-help and governance, and radically democratic (although not of course without limitations, including a sometimes repressive character).[184]

This is an important, often less stressed factor in consideration of social movement unionism. That is the similarity of political cultures between communities and unions that specifically stressed bottom-up democratic practices. State repression in many ways eroded this culture that carried strong elements of bottom-up democratic practice and self-sufficiency, followed by the shift towards elite pacting in the 1990s, discussed in the previous chapter – the tradition of "people's power" and the UDF were to give way to more centralised traditions and emerging top-down politics, centred on the ANC and then the ANC government. However, the union's

[182] *Interview with Martin Jansen, Cape Town, 2009*

[183] Seekings J, 2000, *The UDF: A history of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983 – 1991,* David Phillip: Cape Town and Johannesburg

[184] See Seekings J, 2000, Lodge T, 1991, Neocosmos M, 1996, for a proper discussion of the grassroots politics that emerged in the 1980s and the traits that constituted them

own internal democracy remained remarkably strong in the 1980s despite massive repression[185], as compared to the fate of community formations.

The 1991 resolutions were concerned primarily with two problems that it identifies with the state and capital. The first is dividing the working class. This division is understood in collaboration with the "...promotion and development of repressive structures and of undemocratic puppet structures"[186]. Of course, a whole lot of local government structures during apartheid, including the Black Local Authorities, were not based on the will of the people, but were in the service of the apartheid government. Secondly, the union is concerned with the violence performed by the state, to suppress community mutual aid and democratic structures, manifested in "...detentions, criminalisation of political activity, capital punishment and restrictions, which has weakened some organisations and in certain instances crippled them"[187]. The union goes on to note the impact of "...restrictions placed on the labour movement's attempt to take up broader working class issues"[188].

The violence is, in essence, the stress of the union at this point: it resolves that its members should take the forefront in the planning of "...defence activities against all forms of state oppression and violence"[189]. One of the resolutions sums up the objective and spirit thereof, showing a commitment to continue in the traditions of "people's power": "The union must be actively involved in reviving community organisations such as civics and street committees and will encourage... the mass democratic movement to develop a joint programme of action for defending and advancing our struggle and in the process rebuild accountable mass-based organisations."[190]

The union made pronouncements on building alliances with the SACP and ANC separately from building community structures, perhaps an excellent indication of political unionism and social

[185] See Buhlungu, 2001

[186] *CWIU Policies*, 1991, page 14

[187] *CWIU Policies*, 1991, page 15

[188] Ibid

[189] Ibid

[190] Ibid

movement unionism as argued by Seidman[191]. The question is when these two join or co-exist in one era, what unionism results. The next theme looks at political party alliance with unions, and this question becomes even more important to try understanding the development of this time.

3.4.3 Theme three: Transition and Alliance politics

It is in light of the very developments of the late 1980s and the unbanning of the political parties that a shift in political practice and imagination began to emerge. Reforms opened up the possibility of a new relationship to the state. The state's actions emerged as a critical condition for how production and reproduction in political space (geographically), imagination and practice happen in resistance politics of the type of unionism that emerged at this time. The state, as the monopoly power in terms of the means of political administration, specifically security, of course claimed control over South Africa, with all political actors as its own subjects; it acquired legitimacy through their compliance, indirectly or directly, negatively or positively, and such compliance was the key feature of the 1990s, as opposed to the 1980s.

The unbanning of political parties and release of political prisoners by the state should be seen as an activity that can only be performed by the central power with a monopoly of security means, the only power that could deny liberation parties access to the political space (geographically and to some extent ideologically) in the country and keep political prisoners outside the space. This should be understood as such in order to make sense of why it was a significant shift in political practice on the ground for activists and unionists.

The South African transition, and shifts in regime political practice[192], begins in the late 1980s as the government realises it has to deal with its legitimacy being eroded by stayaways (the central one being the anti-LRA campaigns, 1989) and workplace actions that call for its blood, whilst disrupting economic activity in a time of recession. For the CWIU, this shift came largely as an unexpected development that resulted in it increasingly looking upwards, to the state power, for change, as opposed to the earlier focus on the struggles on the ground to drive change.

[191] See Seidman G, 1994, *Manufacturing Militance: workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985,* University of California Press: California

[192] A new state was not established in 1994, rather a new set of political principles and practices to drive the same political machinery with the same economic setup

In most interviews conducted for this research, unionists in CWIU confessed to the view that they "...never thought the ANC could be unbanned"[193]. For instance, Michael Coetzee, member of the union's NEC in late 1980s, argues that the ordinary membership of the CWIU received the news about negotiations with scepticism. He says, referring to negotiations, that the "...the union came a bit late to the understanding, the core leadership in COSATU had understood these things much greater, and were in bigger depth"[194]. This is because they had formed part of the underground processes through several briefings by the ANC. It is interesting that the insistent scepticism of the masses in the CWIU, which did not at the time foresee negotiations, was not reflected in how the top COSATU leaders thought of change. As Coetzee understands it: "The union at that level did not share the same political orientation, you know, where the discourse was still the overthrow of the state, you know, seizure of power; well they did not have the insurrection strategy, how the seizure was gonna take place and how this overthrow of the state was gonna take place, never spelled out in a political program... and their political theory and their ideological positions only believed in workers' struggles."[195]

But most importantly for understanding developments towards this period, Don Gumede, the third president, elected at the 1990 congress, related how choices for joining community struggles and the UDF were seen by some as pushing the union and workers closer to the ANC by "populists in the union movement"[196]. Gumede believed himself to be an ANC advocate within the CWIU, along with Michael Coetzee and Ronald Mofokeng, at odds with the CWIU's strong "independent worker bloc". Stating that FOSATU was a "so-called workerist union"[197] and asked to expand on what this means, he argued that FOSATU:

> ...insisted that we should not join political or form... alliances with political parties and... insisted that unions should be under worker control and... democratic control. But meaning that these were often used as excuse to move workers away from the alliance, particularly the ANC at that time... so now we had a struggle within now the Chemical Workers Industrial Union and then within FOSATU to

[193] Ronald Mofokeng, Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, September 2009

[194] Michael Coetzee, Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, September 2009

[195] Ibid

[196] For an idea of categorisations of camps within unions see Baskin, 1991

[197] Interview with Don Gumede, 2009, Cape Town

> change the outlook of the workers in order to support the alliance... our voice within the union over the years grew, and we used worker control and democratic control in order to have achievement in the direction of the alliance with the ANC[198].

Besides the groups which were confident within the unions of the ANC support and the whole federation's commitment to work with it, there was the violence of the late 1980s and early 1990s which continued to erode freedom of movement and political organisation in townships. In the early 1990s what CWIU captured as orchestrated violence "...perpetrated by state agents, sections of the armed forces, vigilantes and fascists groups"[199] deepened and extended to "workers in factories, on trains and in buses"[200].

The union eventually accepted that the state was seeking to create a "...climate conducive to the negotiations to take place"[201]. It further resolved to "...promote COSATU's participation in the alliance" (1990), with the view that it "...will ensure workers issues are taken to negotiation table through full consultation and based on mandates and accountability, full disclosure of information and no secrecy"[202]. Mass action to put pressure on the state is also proposed to "...create a necessary climate... and an end to violence" for negotiations[203].

The resolutions at the time aspired to broad unity, built across anti-apartheid movements, to culminate into a Patriotic Front. This was a proposed alliance of progressive forces who wish to see the end of apartheid. The union is aware that these could bring about different interests but pushes that COSATU should build the Front, and ensure that it focuses on negotiations and promotion and defence of working class interest[204]. The principles to guide the Front are established as follows: "One united unitary democratic South Africa; A democratic non-racial

[198] Ibid

[199] *CWIU Policies, National Executive Committee Policy Workshop,* 1994, page 12

[200] Ibid

[201] Ibid, page 8

[202] Ibid

[203] Ibid, page 9

[204] Ibid

Constituent Assembly; One person one vote on a common voter's roll; Basic worker rights to be included in a new constitution."[205]

In addition, the Front must commit to engage in militant mass action around the political and economic requirements of the oppressed and exploited masses.

The other initiative that resolutions speak to is the establishment of an All Party Conference. This is how the union proposed that the establishment of a new constitution take place: in the form of a forum that would be a precursor to the constituent assembly with the following mandate: "Discuss the mechanism for the formation of an interim Government; the mechanism for the non-racial elections of the Constituent Assembly; and oversee through the setting of a committee in the creation of a people's army; the setting up of a timetable for the Constituent Assembly."[206]

This model, of a people-driven transition, consistent with the traditions of "people's power", was not successful: negotiations took the form of an elite pact through the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which excluded unions and civics, and only included politicians through their political parties and state structures. It is, however, noteworthy is that by this time COSATU's participation in transition was in economic/corporatist forums, like the NEF and NMC, on specific policy matters, as opposed to the main political table of negotiation.

However, by 1993, the union's documents reflect shifts in political practice as elections for a democratic South Africa drew near. Here are centrally three critical shifts in terms of Alliance politics. Firstly, the union saw electioneering for the coming to power of the ANC as critical for the promotion of workers' interests:

> Alliance implies our involvement in the election campaign. We need to propagate the importance of voting for the ANC... Need to ensure that workers' interests are guaranteed. We therefore need to put human resources into the campaign.[207]

[205] Ibid

[206] Ibid, page 10

[207] *CWIU Report National Policy Workshop*, 5 -7 February 1993, pages 24

The idea of an ANC state that will represent workers, or in which workers' interests will be pushed, is certainly not consistent with how the union imagined the future in the early 1990s. As noted before, the union had believed in a radically democratic state led and controlled by workers, and where working class interests are put above all other interests.

The second shift is in what appears throughout as a broad "working class" interest versus a narrower "workers' interest". Before 1993, there was much discussion in union documents of the interests of the broad *working class*; subsequently the focus shifted to *workers'* interests and the interests of CWIU members, even counterposed at times to a classless "national interest"[208]. The union on the eve of democratic South Africa is working on workers' interests to be pushed in the ANC, in negotiations, the constitution and policy developments.

The sense of working class identification that had been an emphasis in the 1980 no longer appears the same; the union speaks of inclusion of "basic workers' rights in the new constitution"[209] in its 1991 congress resolutions. This shift is discussed in more detail in chapter 4; however, it can be noted here that the union linked this shift clearly to an emerging corporatist approach, focusing on participation under the structures of NEF and NMC, saying that "We should develop and put forward in all forums clear demands around worker interests."[210]

It also stated, resolving on the tripartite alliance that "The CWIU will promote COSATU's participation in the Alliance which will ensure that *workers* issues are taken to the negotiating table through full consultation." (my emphasis)[211].This anticipates radical reform unionism, in that the trade union movement participates in the structures of power, indeed whilst maintaining its independence outside. However the question is will it maintain its worker control and also secure gains for the working class? Is this participation necessary for achievement of whatever gains workers need?

In resolutions around support for ANC in the first democratic elections, the union states that "...alliance implies involvement in the election campaign. We need to propagate the importance

[208] Ibid
[209] *CWIU Policies*, 1991, page 9
[210] *CWIU Policies*, 1993, page 20
[211] *CWIU Policies*, 1991, page 8

of voting for the ANC... We need to ensure that workers' interests are guaranteed."[212] Also pronouncing on elections, they state the need to "...review if and how can the ANC secure worker's rights and interests"[213]. Thus, key responsibility for representing "worker's rights and interests" was given to the ANC. The resolutions in the 1993 NEC workshop note the "positive aspects of COSATU involvement" in the election campaign – "...make sure the interests of the working class are pushed". Even the resolution around involvement with the intended, but unsuccessful Constituent Assembly, which was to pull civics, unions, and all political parties, the union states "ANC will represent the worker's interests"[214].

Asked to reflect, in retrospect, on what effect the transition had on the activities of the CWIU, Martin Jansen responds:

> I do not think there was a direct effect. I think we tried to often radicalise as much as possible what was being negotiated, put demands through COSATU congresses and that sort of thing. But that is as far as it went, most of the things were ignored by the ANC leadership, they just did their thing.[215]

He goes on to specify what was "ignored by the ANC leadership":

> Terms of the negotiations, how soon we should have elections, how should the elections be conducted, time off for workers for example to campaign. The other issue was about old soldiers, apartheid soldiers should be confined to barracks... we didn't believe in the Government of National Unity... we tried to radicalise the negotiations process, but it was fruitless.[216]

He also holds that a number of leaders in the union did not have a problem with the direction of the negotiations, while others conceded on some issues because there was no insurrection.

Nonetheless, the union was taking steps to ensure that a radicalisation of democracy, a defence of a radical interpretation of the Freedom Charter as a stepping stone towards achievement of

[212] Ibid, page 22

[213] Ibid, page 25

[214] Ibid

[215] Interview with Martin Jansen, Cape Town, 2009

[216] Ibid

socialism, and a continued commitment to that broader goal. These steps were deeply shaped by the changing context, and centred on the emerging strategy of radical reform. In the policy workshop in 1993, the union observed was that the "...ANC may fail to deliver... people may have unrealistic expectations of achieving their demands"[217]. This was a strong signal of a changed focus, from a stress on change from below, democracy from below, towards an emphasis on radical reforms led by a few on top.

This does not dispute, though, that the aims of the labour movement ideologically were social democratic or consistent with radical reform unionism. However, what it does is that it refuses us a rich, and indeed real picture of what labour went through in the transition, its influence and positionality in the political landscape. The reality is that labour is consistently undergoing compromises, both in objectives, but also in terms of how the practice of radical reform has impact on the conduct of its politics; transforming from change from below to one from above.

The third shift was related to the above. The unions decided not to seek direct representation in the Constituent Assembly (or the 1994 parliament). Resolutions states that "COSATU should not release people to the CA as candidates because of the problems of accountability. ANC will represent workers' interest."[218] This is an important shift since the union had held strongly to its participation in this process in the interest of the working class broadly. It went on to recommend an election pact, based on a Workers Charter[219] and the Freedom Charter, with a push for job creation, housing and education.[220] These were the positions later captured in the Reconstruction Accord idea, and then the RDP.

In general, these developments have been viewed by the Websterian school as very positive. The problem, however, is that (as seen earlier), the demands of the trade union movement about the transition were not achieved: neither the Constituent Assembly, nor the election pact or Reconstruction Accord, nor the RDP itself were actually achieved. Praise for the radical reform

[217] *CWIU Policy Workshop Report*, 1993, page 24

[218] Ibid

[219] The Workers Charter stipulated the basic rights workers should be guaranteed under democratic South Africa. Adopted at the 1987 Congress of COSATU, the resolution called for the drafting of a workers charter "to articulate the basic right of workers and be 'guranteed by the constitution of a people's government'. A special congress should be launched, culminating in the special congress to draft the charter." – Baskin J, 1991, *Striking Back*, Ravan Press: 353

[220] Ibid

strategy does not consider these weaknesses, presenting an unbalanced, almost super-heroic, image of COSATU and its role. At most, the Websterian account can point to the RDP – yet the RDP itself was contradictory, with important concessions to neo-liberalism, and COSATU was simply unable to defend its Keynesian side despite participation in NMC, NEF and then NEDLAC – the adoption of the RDP *White Paper* shows this.

The unions were, too, worried even at this early stage that the new approach created problems for worker control, and membership participation in political and other transition processes. This concern is strongly expressed in the CWIU's 1993 policy workshop, which argued for the need to strengthen accountability in negotiations and in the NEF and NMC, and to stick to principles of the union[221]. If, as Baskin claimed, the CWIU came from the "workerist" tradition, with its stress on unions and distrust of parties, it seemed that its "workerism" had now been reimagined to allow the Alliance with the ANC, and the reduction of "workerism" to radical reform - still pro-working class and anti-capitalist, it was no longer anti-ANC, nor set on a revolutionary assault on capitalism[222].

In sum, the political strategy of the union captured in these themes signals a union that ensured it seized the times. As political developments altered in the country, so did the union seek to understand them and place itself, its interests and those of workers forward. However, the transition has been steps ahead of the union and came with developments that greatly impacted how politics were imagined and practiced. It is the contention in this report that oftentimes the union reacted to political developments. In addition, the union's political activity; that is its involvement in building political resistance, takes a different role after the unbanning and as a result of the negotiations.

The ANC was now seen to be at the forefront. The unions did not give up on their mass character, but that also changed in important ways. The stress was on mass mobilisation and mass action, rather than on *organisation* via building of working class alternative organs of power. As Neocosmos argues, the organs of "people's power" were sidelined in the 1990s, submerged by "state politics", stripped of their radical and popular character, and denuded of any

[221] Ibid, page 17

[222]For a discussion of workerists tradition and a definition of the term see Baskin J, 199, 101 - 104

real power[223]. What place was left, then, for COSATU to mobilise the masses in more than brief demonstrations? The new South Africa was based on an elite pact, signalled by CODESA, and NEF and NMC. The radical reform approach was part and parcel of this new era: simply praising radical reform can blind us to what it replaced, a libertarian politics based on a working class impulse towards self-sufficiency, creating change from below, a more radically democratic and participatory process. The Websterian praise for radical reform interpretation does well to bring the union into the centre of transition; however it obscures the reality that unions previously *had* alternative plans for how the transition should have occurred – plans that were lost in the negotiations, the decline of the more radical, anti-capitalist, and libertarian "peoples power" and "workers control" politics of the 1980s.

A case can be made that a different route for labour was possible and desirable in the 1990s. Although Callinicos did not consider the dynamics of the transition in the terms presented above, it suffices to say his case against the social contract demands also that labour outside the alliance with the ANC would have introduced a different dynamic to the whole process, perhaps leading to a radically different outcome. The problem for Callinicos (and the independent Marxists) was, however, that the SACP was equally involved in the transition and in CODESA, long in alliance with the ANC, and disorientated by the fall of the USSR. Callinicos' recommendations point to a revolution, but they do not deal with the scepticism that comes with the fall of the USSR for a practical way forward for comrades in the SACP at this time. Given the commitment to negotiations with the apartheid National Party, well-known for its fears of communism, a radical solution was not possible for the SACP; it seems only a non-negotiated transition that demanded socialism would be the way forward.

For the anarchists, labour should have organised outside and against the state, which positions it in a space where the articulations of its demands on the political process may have gained better ground. It need not have entered the NMC and NEF; it need not have argued for a place in the Constituent Assembly; it need not have adopted the route of radical reform. Since the unions were the single most powerful resistant movement in the late 1980s, both political parties and the state would have had to deal with them at the start of the official negotiations, regardless of

[223] Neocosmos M, 1996, *From people's politics to state politics: aspects of national liberation in South Africa, 1984 – 1994*, Politeia, Vol. 15, No. 3. pages 73 – 119

whether they participated formally, *so long as* the unions *demanded* to be dealt with. But given an Alliance that puts the ANC at the forefront, and concentrated discussion on internal debate, it was easy to be marginalised as this set up made the unions dependent on the ANC, rather than independent mobilisation.

3.5 Economic Strategy

The union's vision of changing the economy is directly related to its pronouncements on politics as discussed above, and should not be understood in isolation from these. The economic strategy sections of the union policy documents in the 1980s had a strong critique of capitalism, and revolutionary aspirations based on working class struggle; the economic strategy of the 1990s viewed class collaboration with capitalists as a progressive and necessary, and downplayed working class identity in favour of national unity.

The union believed (up to 1991) that the economic crisis of the time (1970-1990s) had been due to capitalism as well as apartheid: "The underlying cause is the profit motive and the failure of the racist, undemocratic government to redirect the economy in order for it to grow and produce according to the needs of the people."[224] It further noted the following as ways in which capital and the state responds to the crisis: "Retrenchments, privatisation, rationalisation, sub-contracting, union bashing e.g. LRA, restructuring of industries and the economy as a whole, talks on possible social contract". In addition, "...capital and the state's attempt to restructure the economy is not for the people but for profits".[225]

In the strongest terms, it drew the obvious conclusions, with the following economic aspirations: "The unions in COSATU must participate in the formulation of an economic policy that reaffirms socialism as the basis for restructuring industries according to the needs of the working class and society as a whole."[226]

Thus, the first theme that appears here, similarly to the political sections, is socialism as a vision, and as a critique of the economic situation. The working class is seen as the central identification point on behalf of which the strategy addresses itself. The CWIU also subscribed at this time to

[224] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions adopted at the National Congresses in 1987, 1989 and 1991*, 1992, page 19

[225] Ibid

[226] Ibid, page 20

"workers control" - not just of the union, but of production itself, and even at the start of the 1990s, while well aware of the political changes and economic restructuring, still favoured socialism, even if via the Alliance. It is noteworthy that here the union is conscious of what this means as it explicitly defined it as follows: "Social Contracts under capitalism are agreements between labour, capital and the state on wide ranging national social and economic issues."[227] The resolution on the contract is further extrapolated as follows:

> COSATU and its affiliates should initiate discussions and debates within their structures in order to have a mandated position on the Social Contract. Such a contract can only be entered into with a Workers Government where: the interests of the working class are placed above all other interest; workers participate in both economic decision making under the principle of worker control of production and political decision making through their own organisations.[228]

The radical message of the resolutions in this time is so explicit that it is worth quoting them in full:

> We should be involved in the restructuring of the Chemical Industry. The future economy of South Africa must have a socialist orientation based on: production for the needs of the people, the economy to be democratically planned, collective ownership of the means of production, state control over trade, investment and regulation of prices, working class control of the economy and the state at all levels. These principles should be in the preamble of a future South African constitution.[229]

Moreover, resolutions read:

> We must ensure that political developments are inseparable from the economic issues. COSATU must play an important role to fulfil this. That COSATU will only negotiate with the bosses at a national level for specific demands, which must be accompanied by a strongly coordinated programme of action as part of an

[227] Ibid

[228] Ibid

[229] Ibid

> overall campaign. We should demand a living UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund] for the unemployed workers. Part of economic restructuring should be to nationalise the conglomerates.[230]

The union's economic vision went well beyond radical reform here: in essence, it favoured a "Workers' Government", nationalisation of strategic industries, basic worker's rights and other short-term demands, and these merely as stepping stone to a future that has a "...socialist orientation based on; production for the needs of the people, the economy to be democratically planned, collective ownership of the means of production, state control over trade, investment and regulation of prices, working class control of the economy and the state at all levels"[231]. The term "Social Contract" was used, but certainly did not mean corporatism; it appears very radical in relation to what ultimately occurred in the first democratic government in terms of policies and politics. The union saw the "...Freedom Charter as a set of basic demands for the removal of national oppression and economic exploitation",[232] but not as the end goal.

In 1993, however, union economic policy shifts, and not only begins to tone down on socialism and objectives such as a Worker's Government with control of major industries, but emphasises, although cautiously, participating in economic restructuring in protection of workers' interests and not the "working class". Indeed, COSATU, as Von Holdt noted, "...became an active participant in various forums where the new order was being negotiated. COSATU's programmatic vision was crystallised in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) – initiated as a strategy to shape the policies of the ANC"[233], albeit one soon replaced by neo-liberal economic values like market-led growth, foreign direct investment and flexible labour laws. This approach – radical reform via strategic unionism – was directly justified by NUMSA leader Enoch Godongwana as a social democratic strategy of slowly creating "building blocks"

[230] Ibid

[231] Ibid

[232] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions adopted at the National Congresses in 1987, 1989 and 1991*, 1992

[233] Von Holdt, 2003, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa,* University of Natal Press: Scottsville, page 186

for socialism in a vague future[234]. The radicalism of the 1980s and early 1990s had been replaced by radical reform.

Yet in the history and practices of social contracts, which often encompass what the anarcho-syndicalist Rocker called parliamentary socialism, there is never much in the way of a real development towards socialism. Socialism as a vision and dream, on the contrary, fades out, and Rocker insists this has to do with the power and nature of the state. He states that: "Participation in the politics of the bourgeois states has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but, thanks to this method, Socialism has almost completely crushed and condemned to insignificance."[235] He adds that "...it destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity and, worst of all the impulse of self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above".[236] Callinicos, a Marxist, shares some of these sentiments:

> Social contracts require the centralisation of power at the top of the trade union movement, in order to facilitate the process of bargaining with capital and the state. And, in return for whatever concessions the ruling class is temporarily prepared to make, restrictions are placed on 'workers' power and organisation'.[237]

If Rocker and Callinicos might not agree in terms of overall strategy – specifically, in the question of the state and its usage in a revolution to eradicate classes – they have an agreement in that this type of method adopted by the union will not lead to socialism. They both agree that "...gradual transition to socialism by first winning control of the existing state"[238] not only defers socialism into insignificance, but weakens the workers' movement. As Callinicos puts it, "Long term collaboration with capital and the state can only weaken the organised working class, not 'empower' it."[239]

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[234] Godongwane E, *Industrial restructuring and the social contract: reforming capitalism or building blocks for socialism?*, South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 16 No 4, pages 20 -23

[235] Rocker R,2004, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, Edinburgh; Oakland, Ca.: AK Press, page 54

[236] Ibid

[237] Callinicos A, page 151

[238] Ibid

[239] Ibid

The second theme, directly related to the point above, has to do with a democratic state. It relates to resolutions and analysis of the union on taxes and sanctions. The union states that taxes are made of working class wealth and are made up of money from the most exploited, and that they go on to benefit the ruling class more that they do the popular classes. It resolves that sanctions should be supported, and taxes avoided, *until* such a time there is a democratic state: here the union does not refer to working class control, or a Workers Government, but to "control by all South Africans"[240], the "nation", not the "class" (chapter five will expand on this).

One point is worth noting in the 1991 resolutions – especially considering the strategy adopted by the ANC government in 1996. Resolving on sanctions, yet stating that the economic problems in South Africa "...are structural, created by multinational corporations, local capital and Apartheid", the union notes that "...the lifting of sanctions is unlikely to rescue the economy"[241]. The union therefore seeks a democratic state on the basis stated in its political strategy and summed up as follows: "CWIU's resolution links the lifting up of sanctions with the convening of a Constituent Assembly and the adoption of a new constitution."[242]

It is instructive that the 1994 RDP, which is largely a Keynesian policy, does not seek the nationalisation of strategic industries in principle any more, nor did it openly commit to a socialist future. Keynesian economics seek to restart capitalist economies during points of crisis, with a free economy to ensue with very little intervention from the state. This is important as the union does not pronounce on it particularly in light of its initial proposals and vision of socialism.

The class character of the future state, its nature as a state, is left without critique, as is the ANC itself – the language of workers' control and a Workers' Government fades out. The union's early hopes to enter into a social contract on a very radical basis, with a Worker's Government that puts working class interests above all others, is replaced by a certain faith in an ANC that is explicitly ANC is not a workers' party[243]. Indeed, in its own terms, it states:

[240] *CWIU Policies*, page 27

[241] Ibid, page 28

[242] Ibid, page 29

[243] ANC, *The Character of the ANC*, http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/discussion/character.html, 1997

> The movement character of the ANC also relates to our long established traditions of building a 'broad church', a 'hegemonic' organisation that does not seek to define itself in exclusivist, or in narrow ideological terms. The ANC has been, and necessarily remains, home to a variety of progressive ideological currents nationalist, Africanist, socialist and of a variety of different classes and strata, all united behind a common commitment to national democratic transformation.[244]

Finally there are two other components of the economic strategy in which the idea of social contract is further used, which show the drift towards radical reform. The first is investment policy positions in this period leading to 1994; the second is centralised bargaining.

On investment, the CWIU formed part of a group of unions in COSATU which assembled a team to come up with an investment policy to be pushed in the federation. The policy aims to determine a set of principles, a framework within which, upon the uplifting of sanctions, foreign investment will be coordinated. In consideration of the inequalities in income, race and skills, and with the continued rise in unemployment, the policy seeks to benefit workers and the working class. In summary, the following are central issues with which to bind foreign capital:

a) The creation of employment
b) Affirmative Action
c) Respect for workers rights, particularly emphasising ILO standards
d) Training for skills impartation at the company cost
e) Occupational health and safety, also by ILO standards
f) Investment in technological development, whilst capacitating workers with necessary skills
g) Corporate social responsibility[245]

With such measures, the union hopes to create an investment practice that is not oppressive of workers. The union, inasmuch as it seeks the development of domestic industries[246], realises the continued connectivity of South African economy to the world through multinational companies.

[244] Ibid

[245] *Code of Practice for multinationals in post-apartheid South Africa*, 1991

[246] *CWIU Policies*, 1991

Moreover, there are also responsibilities given to the state, expectations that it will intervene on their behalf in implementing this policy, but also that to entice investment to comply, things like tax exemptions will be given[247]. This was a far cry from the notion of a Social Contract with a Workers' Government, and a clear anticipation of the radical reform approach.

Centralised bargaining is viewed as one of CWIU's successes in the federation. A campaign to get centralised bargaining in the industry was started in the early 1990s and sustained until the union got its demand in 1997. At this stage, the stage of inception, the union saw centralised bargaining to have an advantage: "...to unite workers, promote solidarity, combines common objectives, benefits weak and isolated workers, develops control and influence in industry, promotes high levels of organisation, saves time and resources, raises the profile of struggle, places greater pressure on employers, facilitates co-ordination of vacancies and information, mobilises workers more easily nationally".[248]

The union went on to indicate that capital and the state, during crisis, place burdens on workers. Moreover, by the beginning of the 1990s, as stated earlier, the state of working class organisation was low outside the union movement which continued to grow in membership. With violence and reforms taking place, the union wanted to restore activity in mass action and place the working class at the forefront of political development. It notes:

> The decline in political activities, the decline of workers, and the instigated violence has contributed to the non-attendance of union members to union structures. The workers are thus not responding to political challenges of the day; that organised workers and the working class has not taken the lead in this political process; the weak state of working class organisations.[249]

Thus, centralised bargaining was seen as a strategic means for realisation of this objective, through pulling of the workers and community into the campaign. In terms of economic strategy, too, the 1993 resolutions devoted much attention to tripartite bodies, like the NEF and NMC as well as sectoral economic forums. A social contract here must mean one in the standard

[247] Ibid, Section 3.3

[248] *CWIU Policies*, 1991, page 42

[249] Ibid, page 43

corporatist mould, tied to a faith in the ANC. The restructuring of the economy is passed through a "reconstruction accord"[250] which the union recommends as agreement "...that is necessary to have a plan to reconstruct the economy with the involvement of *all major players*" (my emphasis; obviously this includes capital)[251].

The union's policy workshop raises issues around using these forums effectively. On the NEF, the workshop asks members to raise issues that must be pushed in it, calling for improvement of the accountability of COSATU leadership and involvement of membership. As for the NMC, similar points are raised, but members are further asked to propose what should be done should ministers ignore demands and "...how do we prevent the NMC from becoming a committee remote from the members?" Finally, as regards the regional negotiating forums, the workshop asks how much of resources should be dedicated to participation and building of capacity for effective involvement: "How can we achieve a balance between the needs of broader development and the day to day needs of the union?"[252] In sum, the economic strategy of the union can be characterised by the ideas of a social contract and Reconstruction Accord.

Yet the unions' vision of such an Accord was never realised, any more than a formal social contract was ever put in place, even if new institutions were created, such as NEDLAC[253]. Labour made major political shifts, abandoning the notion of a Social Contract with a Workers' Government, yet never achieved corporatist "historic compromise" advocated by Adler and Webster (2000). Despite this, it continued to pursue this goal: the vision of socialism is believed to be unrealisable in the immediate future; thus capital's brutality must be merely contained through agreements and compromises between labour, capital and the state.

Throughout all this, it quickly became clear that the chosen strategy had serious consequences for the unions' organisational strength as a worker-controlled and militant formation. For instance, the CVWIU policy workshop in 1993 documents states: "There will be problems/dangers with union involvement; lack of resources, tensions between interests of members and national interest, secrecy laws in terms of information (price control), effect

[250] Ibid, page 21

[251] Ibid

[252] Ibid

[253] See Adler and Webster, 2000

balance of participation in decision making, union not changing to suit the interests of the members, threat to worker control because of high levels of negotiation, conflict with other sector/industries – inter union rivalry, no coordinated plan for the economy as a whole, government and capital can renege on agreement made with the union, dangers of major compromises."[254]

In the 1993 workshop, there are reports of decline of membership involvement and lack of accountability of leaders. In addition, COSATU is said to develop to be more bureaucratic in its functioning. The CWIU sought to raise this within the broader federation[255] in the 1994 congress.

Yet the union (and the federation) unfortunately did not really undertake measures that will be ensured in order for these limitations and dangers to be averted. Except mentioning them, and raising questions and cautions, the union did not offer ways of bracing itself from becoming less worker-controlled, breeding unaccountable delegates and less involving of membership in decision making around forums such as the NEF and NMC. It asks: "How do we prevent the NMC from becoming a committee remote from the membership?"[256] But it does not answer the question. In assessment of its participation and that of COSATU in the NEF it states that there is a need to address "...the accountability of the COSATU leadership and involving membership"[257]. But how to meet this need was not explained. The union quotes Von Holdt's questions around new emergent unionism in the transition era, saying:

> Participation in the NMC and the campaign for the NEF reflecting a new strategic perspective. COSATU now combines mass struggle and organisation with wide ranging negotiations and participation in tripartite structures. Does this changing of strategy reflect a new and more sophisticated perspective on how to transform society? Or is it now ready for an accommodation with capital and the state? What is the future of labour?[258]

[254] *CWIU Policy Workshop Report*, pages 16 - 17

[255] Ibid

[256] *CWIU Policies*, 1993, page 20

[257] Ibid, page 28

[258] Ibid

But no clear means to effectively "combine mass struggle and organisation" with "wide ranging negotiations and participation in tripartite structures" is spelt out.

3. 6. Conclusion

This chapter has done two things: first, it has provided a history of the development of trade union strategy mainly by looking at union policies over a period of time – 1987 to 1993. Second, it provided elements of critique of the radical reform trade union strategy of COSATU via an analysis of the CWIU, and challenged some of the claims made in South African labour studies. The chapter argues that the history of the union's strategy in this period can be divided into two based on changes marked by political development in South Africa.

The first period is one before 1990 with the beginning of official negotiations, which is a period where the union's strategy is thought to be social movement unionism. The chapter has noted that the union's strategy in this time sought to strike alliances with social movements in the community, but also sought to strike a relationship with the ANC, that these two relationships are different, and that the combination of the two resulted with the centralisation of political leadership in the political party (ANC). This is a precursor to the statisation of politics; the moment of inaugurating changes from above through a single central entity. This development of the union's strategy brings a challenge to traditional ways in which the unionism has been understood under the guise of "social movement unionism" as the blending or coexistence of these relationships is instructive of a more complex and nuanced unionism.

The chapter identifies the second period as that of negotiations for a democratic era and marks changes in union strategy from what is traditionally understood in literature as social movement unionism to a type of unionism characterised by social contract-oriented politics, a type of unionism that saw the union withdraw from the fore on political developments for the ANC to take the lead – radical reform indeed. In this period the union's strategy aims at a radically constructed capitalism with a human face, through social contract: this requires it to enter into partnership with capital and the state. However, in the partnership the union lost out on several of its ambitions; chief amongst these are the Constituent Assembly, nationalisation of strategic industries, and a worker's government that puts working class interest above all others. Indeed, the social contract never formally came into existence; instead, the RDP is understood as the

programme of the Alliance, an electioneering program integrating various interests, ultimately becoming a macroeconomic policy of the 1994 government. Nevertheless, it remained a critical force in the South African politics.

It is the contention of this chapter that there are three different relationships that the union seeks to forge in this period: the first is with social movements/community organisations/civics; here the unions' purposes to be in the forefront of building these structures, which includes radical democratic formations, like street committees. The second is with the political parties (the SACP and ANC) where the negotiations and electioneering are predominant. It is in this relationship that the union makes way from identification with "working class" in terms of its leadership, to "workers'/members'" representations in the Alliance. In addition it shifts from main political developments and makes way for the ANC to representing its workers in negotiations.

Thirdly, the union aims at a relationship with the state in its plans about the social contract: indeed, as Pelelo Magane, a union organiser at that time, well put it:

> ...the way that we started discussing in the union structures we were discussing almost like a government in waiting. You know, preparing for what we will do when we when we have the new government.[259]

Nevertheless, the point is that these organisations (community structures, Alliance structures and the state) inhabit different political spaces; they have different social roles and the nature of their politics is also different, sometimes contradictory. It is not surprising that the union cannot sustain the more radically democratic political activism like the ones needed in community struggles in its relations with the Alliance (ANC and SACP) and the state.

In addition, the union's vision of the transition is strongly linked to ensuring the achievement of socialism, and thus carries radical proposals that constitute popular participatory structures such as the All Party Conference, Constituent Assembly and Patriotic Front. The CWIU also has a radical critique of the economy and it is anti-capitalist, committed to the realisation of socialism. It seeks to participate in the restructuring of the economy through structures such as the NEF and

[259] Peleo Magane, Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, September 2009

NMC and influence the creation of the new order. It is very critical to stress that this restructuring comes out of an anti-capitalist critique and efforts to realise the vision of socialism.

The literature captures the unionism in this period as "strategic unionism"; however, it was a shift from the CWIU's traditional aspirations to the democratisation of the workplace, including "control of production" by workers as part of a core commitment to the realisation of socialism.

Thus, the study of union strategy also highlights the fact of an *existing* alternative to "strategic unionism",[260] by recovering an earlier union vision that did not seek to merely alter racial relations, or create a more efficient or fair capitalism, but the radical alteration of production relations and realisation of socialism as an end goal. From that perspective, short term restructuring plans were to be evaluated regarding how they shift workers closer to controlling production; acceptance of capitalist profit-making was not part of it. This radicalism was lost with the rise of radical reform, but it certainly raises questions about whether strategic unionism was a necessary, let alone a desirable, road for COSATU to take. The older strategy had at least won major victories in the 1980s; the new strategy failed to achieve demonstrable successes from the very start.

The central vision of radical reform via strategic unionism is building blocks for a gradual achievement of a "left vision of social democracy", entailing the usage of legal structures, tripartite and dual alliances as means of securing gains for workers, all of which entailed class compromises and entanglement in the state apparatus. This will continue to be the central concern in the following chapter; it will look at the implications of this shift specifically in terms of the chemical industry.

Essentially, the union identified the positions and interest of different social classes and spelled out the ones it sought to represent, together with the goals and interests of these social classes. It further identified classes or social groups who were actual or potential allies in its pursuit to realise these interests and goals. The UDF, ANC and SACP partnerships are paradigmatic examples. It identified classes or social groups who stand in the way of the realisation of its interests and goals, mainly the bosses and their organisations and the apartheid state. It went on to spell out changes in the political economic power relations that are required in order for its

[260] See Von Holdt, 1994, 2003,

goals to be realised – the democratisation of the state, workers' government that prioritises working class interest above others, nationalisation of strategic industries and economic restructuring on the basis of socialism as an end goal. It came up with practical measures that were taken to realise its goals and interests, for instance stayaways, strikes and boycotts in the 1980s, social partnerships for the defeat of apartheid, and attempts to radicalise negotiations.

This makes the question of unionism even clearer: how do we understand or interpret the unionism that the CWIU reflected in its strategy and practices? The report will, in the next chapter, look at how the shifts identified in this chapter impact on the shop floor and industry level. Part of the central concerns is to see how the union makes shifts in the direction of securing a socialist future through its strategy, and the next two chapters focus on much attention in the period of democracy, post 1994.

Chapter 4

CWIU Policies on Industrial and Plant Based Restructuring

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter ends with an examination of the practice of radical reform and "strategic unionism", a type of unionism that emerged in the transition years in South Africa, the 1990s. This chapter, and the next one, continue to examine this practice by the CWIU, focusing on its successes and failures in securing gains for the workers. The report has treated radical reform as a strategy that was consolidated soon before the transition to democracy, where labour has been using "legal means" to secure reforms, with a long term vision of achieving socialism. It is committed to reforms that must be used as building blocks to the gradual achievement of socialism, meaning really "a left version of social democracy". The strategy is favoured by writers in the Websterian tradition, who argue that a socialist revolution is not possible, and that labour has made gains due to this strategy. The previous chapter showed how the adoption of radical reform marked a major break from its previous anti-capitalist radicalism, a shift from a revolutionary to a more moderate, social democratic position.

This chapter will continue this discussion with a focus on the industrial and plant restructuring strategy of the CWIU. Von Holdt stresses the importance of looking at this tradition in the world of work itself.[261] He poses the challenge here as basically one of overcoming the "apartheid societal order" – rather than both the apartheid *and* capitalist societal orders. Von Holdt argues that the unions responded to democracy with: "…a new strategy of reconstruction for contesting and shaping the process and mode of incorporation … a shift from social movement unionism characterised by the militant resistance of workers excluded both politically and in the workplace, to a new form of unionism characterised by participation and engagement with both the state and management … [with] new strategic elements designed to guide union engagement

[261] Von Holdt K and Webster E (ed.), 2005, *Work Restructuring and the crisis of Social Reproduction,* in *Beyond the Apartheid Workplace: Studies in transition*, University of Kwazulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, page 5

with post-colonial reconstruction on the one hand, and to respond to the increased competitive pressures of globalisation on the other"[262].

This is a somewhat misleading characterisation of what the unions sought through radical reform. The CWIU certainly sought to influence the reordering of society, but never only in order to achieve a deracialised, competitive capitalism. Even if radical reform was moderate compared to the revolutionary outlook of the 1980s, it had the achievement of socialism in mind as an end goal, and sought to use the "new form of unionism characterised by participation and engagement with both the state and management"[263] to put in place radical reforms for a socialist future. If the shift entailed a move from an emphasis on militancy, worker control, and alliances with social and political movements towards participation and engagement with the state and management, this did not come with the rejection of an anti-capitalist critique and socialist future. Nor did it assume that the removal of the "apartheid workplace order" results in a reconciliation of class interests on the shop floor; it was, even if moderate, still a vision of socialism that seeks to transform class relations through building blocks such as the 'reconstruction strategy"[264].

The Websterian tradition recommends that "...labour (should) shifts from deploying its power to impose its will – regardless of the resistance – to using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial relations system and beyond"[265]. It argues that "...this more nuanced use of power – characteristic of democratic polities – involves a shift from the mobilisation of power to the use of influence in the heart of decision making at the enterprise, industry and national level"[266]. Why, however, labour should hope for securing a voluntary consent from business, whose interests are to extract as much surplus value as possible, is left unexplained. That is to say, how can two forces in production relations who seek contradictory

[262] Von Holdt, 2003, *Transition from Below: Forging trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa*, University of Natal Press: Scottsville, page 305

[263] Ibid

[264] Ibid

[265] Adler G and Webster E, 1995, *Challenging Transition Theory: Labour movement, radical Reform, and Transition to Democracy in South Africa,* Politics and Society, Vol. 23. No. 1, Sage Publications, Page 18

[266] Ibid

aims reconcile without one losing out? In this case what is it that labour should compromise and for what gain?

Yet the Websterian tradition not only analyses, but advocates, strategic unionism and radical reform, advising labour to "influence", and build class collaborationist institutions in place of popular mobilisation of social movements. That the unions have adopted radical reform is clear; that the unions *should* do so is far from self-evident. Other scholars[267] have challenged the strategy of radical reform for its very emphasis on "participation within formal institutions of power"[268]. Van der Walt argues that this route leads to the following problems:

> Centralisation and bureaucratisation: policy engagement of this sort generates within the unions a need for a layer of highly trained technocrats, and shifts focus from militant struggle (by the grassroots) to technical talks about "policy" (by the technocrats and their state and capital equivalents)… This danger is usually neglected by the advocates of strategic unionism, who tend to stress the importance of developing research and policy "capacity" and "balancing" union democracy and policy – rather than seeing an inherent contradiction between a technocratic approach and a class-struggle approach.[269]

He adds that it also results in "...political crippling: in taking (or seeking to take) co-responsibility for the existing system, which is anti-working class, the unions (as movements of the working class) find themselves caught in an impossible situation (trying to govern yet also fight the system), while embracing its logic (competition, nationalism, wage labour, market relations etc.) and agreeing to ruinous compromises (in the metal industry, for example, such 'strategic unionism' is usually tied to productivity agreements and 3-year no-strike agreements)"[270].

Which of these two approaches to the strategy, the supportive/Websterian, or the critical, is correct? This chapter will evaluate both cases by examining the strategy of the CWIU in the

[267] Barchiesi F and Bramble T, 2003, Van der Walt, 1997, 2009

[268] Von Holdt, 2003

[269] Van der Walt, 2009, http://www.anarkismo.net/article/12781

[270] Ibid

restructuring of the chemicals industry and workplaces/plants, focusing on the union's own reflections on the challenges experienced. It will also seek to locate the vision of the CWIU in its influencing of policy directions and its participation in centres of power and policy formation.

Restructuring of economies is a factor of capitalism from one crisis to the next.[271] This is the case with the economies of the world from the 1970s to the 1990s; the crisis of capitalism in apartheid South Africa was part of a global crisis of capitalist accumulation. Examining workplace restructuring in South Africa, Webster and von Holdt argue that the South African workplace restructuring is producing a work order with the following characteristics: "...a reduced autonomy in the context of economic globalisation; two dominant trends in formal-sector workplace – authoritarian restoration, and stalemate brought about by ineffective management and resistant trade unions; the persistence and reconfiguration of the apartheid legacy in the majority of workplaces; the differentiation of world of work into three zones (the core, the non-core and the periphery) through processes of re-ordering the lines of variable inclusion and exclusion of South African citizens; the weakening of trade unions; and deepening poverty and exclusion among the great numbers of households, generating a crisis of social reproduction".[272]

It is also important to note that neo-liberalism as a macroeconomic strategy and practice has been the major response to the crisis, both internationally and locally, and has been adopted by both the late apartheid government, and, from 1994, the ANC itself. In South Africa the results of this crisis were: "...the feeble GDP growth rate, which descended from its 5,5 per cent average during the 1960s to 1,8 per cent in the 1980s, eventually plugging into the negative range (-1,1 per cent) in the early 1990s, declining rates of gross fixed investment... and high rates of capital flight, low rates of private investment, which led to underutilisation of manufacturing plant capacity.. and declining competitiveness, plummeting levels of personal savings, which as a proportion of disposable income, dropped from 11 per cent in 1975 to 3 per cent in 1987, very high unemployment and the economy's ability to create enough new jobs to absorb even a fraction of

[271] Lehulere O, 1997

[272] Webster E and von Holdt (eds.), 2005, page 32

new entrants into the labour market, a trend exacerbated by under-investment in labour-intensive sectors; chronic balance of payment difficulties"[273].

The neo-liberal response is constituted by market liberalisation, privatisation, labour flexibility, low tariffs to attract foreign direct investment, and reduced state social spending, all included in the ANC's GEAR. Indeed, such restructurings opened closed markets to the world resulting in stress from increased global competition. Many companies, in order to survive, have to adjust their productivity levels to compete with other goods flowing in the globe. Indeed, those who can produce mass of good at lower prices would make more profits, which make the stress of competitiveness about producing at the possible lowest prices.

The CWIU was faced with the challenge of restructuring in its own sector, the chemical sector, and had to find ways of securing the interests of its members, as restructuring comes with huge retrenchments, outsourcing and casualisation. It was able to respond precisely because \workplace restructuring had not necessarily weakened the unions. In fact Ravi Naidoo shows that the manufacturing sector unions in the period under study, the 1980s and 1990s, actually grew in density even as they decreased in membership numbers; he attributes part of this to fact that most workers who were affected were those with no unions[274]. As indicated in the previous chapter, the weakening of unions has as much to do with union strategy as capital's strategy: we have seen how the shift to radical reform has been associated with a weakening of the grassroots activism that underpins "worker control" and struggle from below. These are attributes that placed the unions as a power to reckon with in the 1980s[275], attributes that emphasised the inauguration of change from below, and that were entrenched in grass roots struggle against capital and the authoritarian racist state.

Thus, the chapter will ask first what the union's understanding of industrial restructuring is, and then go on to discuss its responses to restructuring. It does not base the information on data collected from plants and ordinary members, critical this as it may, but only on official (union) documents, meaning it will use the union's official pronouncements and deliberations on

[273] Marais H, 2001, *South Africa: Limits to Change*, Zed Books: London, 2nd edition, pages 100

[274] Naidoo R

[275] Baskin J, 1991, 2006, Webster E, 1994, Buhlungu S, 2001, Ulrich N, 2007, Von Holdt, 2003, Neocosmos M, 1996, Lehulere O, 1997

industrial restructuring. It will show how the practice of radical reform played out in workplace and industrial restructuring, beginning with an overview of union thinking up to 1991 on strategy around industrial restructuring. Then it shifts to an examination of subsequent approaches to workplace and industrial restructuring. The chapter report will examine what the CWIU understands by industrial restructuring; provide cases to demonstrate this understanding and some of the activities on the ground in branches and companies.

4.2 The union's thinking before 1994: overview

In its 1991 congress resolutions, the CWIU argued that the South African economy was in a "structural crisis"[276]. The resolutions note the consequences the crisis has had for workers, stating that "...the crisis manifests itself in the form of mass retrenchments, poor education, expensive health services, poor infrastructure, a growing inflation rate and exploitation"[277]. It proceeds to note "...the profit motive and the failure of the racist, undemocratic government to redirect the economy in order for it to grow and produce according to the needs of the people"[278]. It blames capitalists for not investing in creating new jobs and recognises "...retrenchments, privatisation, rationalisation, sub-contracting, union bashing, restructuring of industries and the economy as a whole, talks on possible Social Contract"[279] as ways in which capital and the state have responded to the crisis. The union further insists that these attempts are not in the interest of the people but to generate profit.

The union went on to argue against a capitalist solution to the crisis. It advocated the participation of the trade union movement in the formulation of "...an economic policy that affirms socialism as the basis for the restructuring of industries according to the needs of the working class and the society as a whole"[280]. However, it insists that in the process of this participation, union independence must be maintained. The union goes on to state that "...the best

[276] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions adopted at the National Congresses in 1987, 1989 and 1991*, 1992, page 19

[277] Ibid

[278] Ibid, page 19

[279] Ibid

[280] Ibid, page 20

defence of workers' living standards lies in strong organisational and militant action"[281] similar to the grassroots character of the struggles waged by the union at this time.

The resolutions of the union at this stage centre on socialism as the aim in which all developments must culminate. It resolved, as discussed in the previous sections, on a social contract – but of a most radical type. For the CWIU, at this stage, the "social contract" can only be entered with a "Workers Government where"[282]:

a) The interests of the working class are placed above all other classes
b) Workers participate in both economic decision making under the principles of worker control of production and political decision making through their own organisations[283]

Emphasis must be placed in the last words of the latter resolution, which are "worker control of *production* and political decision making through their own organisations"[284].

The union shifted position towards corporatism in a 1993 workshop, which would dedicate a section on industrial restructuring. In this workshop, it reports a resolution taken in 1992, which reads:

> We should be involved (in industrial restructuring/industry policy) to prevent unilateral restructuring of the industry. Demands and policies that will advance interests of workers need to be developed. This needs an industry forum to be set[285].

The workshop goes on the cite reasons for the above resolutions, noting the following:

- Global restructuring of manufacturing on macro level – new production process/technology, decline in manufacturing in terms of employment. Shift in employment to service sector, lack of growth, similar trends in South Africa

[281] Ibid
[282] Ibid
[283] Ibid
[284] Ibid
[285] *CWIU Policies, National Policy Workshop, Section3: Chemical Industry Restructuring*, 5 – 7 February,1993

- Global restructuring on micro level – new manufacturing in plants, reorganisation of workforce – japanisation, core workers/periphery workers (temps, contracts etc), similar trends in South Africa
- Employers are restructuring already without union involvement. Restructuring inevitable
- Major problems in chemical industry e.g. based on coal, firms too small to be competitive in world market, massive capital investments – low capital productivity
- Need to protect workers/community from restructuring on employer's terms (i.e. with massive job loss, misuse of public funds etc.)[286]

The union poses questions in this workshop, with an aim to develop policies towards the above:

> If we do not positively intervene in the process of industry restructuring: What will the effect on the union be? What other options do you propose?[287]

Yet it then notes challenges with involvement of the union as follows: "Lack of resources; Tension between interests of members and national interest; Secrecy laws in terms of information (petrol prices); Effect on balance priorities within the union; Lack of worker participation in decision making; Union not changing to suit the interests of the members; Threat to worker control because of high level of negotiation; Conflict with other industrial sectors/industries – inter union rivalry; No coordinated plan for the economy as a whole; Dangers of major compromises"[288].

The union then goes on to note strategies to face the challenges noted above, saying:

> We need effective research. Thereafter, we must push for state funding of external research; we will need to build our internal capacity by determining our priorities in the union and in the spending of union money; We need a long term education programme; We need disclosure of information and should therefore: – Demand information at plant level, – Push for legislation to ensure disclosure of

[286] Ibid

[287] Ibid

[288] Ibid

> information; We need to maintain worker involvement/control of the process – Demand time off for report backs, – [and] Training; We must stick to our principles."[289]

Significantly, these proposals understated the issues of "Lack of worker participation in decision making" and the "Threat to worker control because of high level of negotiation" – the problems were seen as solved merely by "time off for report backs" and a commitment to "principles". The radical reform strategy was not seen as inherently at odds with workers' control, although the link seems obvious. This obviously shows that the union implicitly chose to adopt peak-level, technocratic, bargaining – here it makes sense to relegate the involvement of workers to giving reports, without clear measures for the effective involvement in determination of processes.

The union, as implicit in the discussion to this point, distinguished two types of industry restructuring. On one point they refer to it as micro and macro; on other occasions, and in rather clearer terms, they speak of "...plant level – worker participation schemes, new technology, productivity, tariffs, training/ABE [adult basic education], retrenchment"[290]. And "Industry level - tariffs, subsidies to Sasol/oil industry, investment, training, job creation, prices etc"[291]. Thus, restructuring as understood by the union consists of changes that are undertaken by capital and the state, occurring at plant and/or industry level. These include technological changes in production organisation, job creation, skilling of workers, outsourcing, privatisation and growth.

The union sought to shape, rather than resist, restructuring. It recognises restructuring as inevitability, and thus seeks ways of engaging to secure the interest of workers. It did not consider, as Callinicos did, that restructuring under capitalism necessarily "...will be at the expense of the workers. They will find themselves having to work harder under tighter managerial supervision, often for lower wages, if they don't lose their jobs altogether."[292] The union appears to think that co-management is a protection against this, which it is not: Callinicos

[289] Ibid

[290] Ibid

[291] Ibid

[292] Callinicos A, 1992, *Social democratic dreams or class struggle*? In South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 6, page 66

maintains that "...workers have to resist restructuring in order to defend themselves"[293] as opposed to co-managing its implementation.

The 1993 deliberations have established depth in the thinking about restructuring as opposed to the 1991 resolutions, indicating a level of preparedness to delve deeper, but also of the increasing importance of confronting restructuring; this is partly due to the massive loss of jobs noted in the deliberations. The union plans on investing time and expanding research, seeking disclosure of information, stressing training of workers, with an admitted danger of the state and capital not sticking to agreements[294].

The union does not, however, say what plans should be put in place to avert capital and the state from betraying agreements. By this stage, as indicated in the previous chapter, the union had passed responsibility for political decision making to the ANC, and placed its hopes in an ANC-led government. Presumably this is what will prevent deals being reneged upon. Yet this faith was ill-founded, for the ANC abandoned the RDP itself. This process Van der Walt calls "political crippling": placing all hopes in the ANC, the unions are continually disorientated by the ANC's overt defence of neo-liberal capitalism.[295]

So, there are two tensions that run in these deliberations by now. One is the claim that "...the best defence of workers' living standards lies in strong organisational and militant action"[296], alongside a commitment to participation in the very structures of power that the union admits undermine that action: i.e. it is feared that worker control will be eroded by "too much negotiation" that come with such participation, yet the union resolves to participate in structures of power anyway.

The other tension, indeed linked to the one above, is between class and nation. The union emphasises socialism as the objective of economic restructuring in the 1991 resolutions and working class interests are placed above others, but by 1993 aspirations to socialism run alongside talk of "national interest" and the need to balance that with (working class) "members' interests".

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[293] Ibid

[294] *CWIU Policies, National Policy Workshop, Section3: Chemical Industry Restructuring,* 5 – 7 February,1993

[295] See *CWIU Policies, National Policy Workshop,* 5 – 7 February,1993

[296] Ibid

The "nation" has not been a key political or economic category in earlier union documents; the union has been largely using the category of "working class"[297], and in other instances it used a similar category, "the people"[298]. It may have referred to the "nation" from one point to the other, but in the official pronouncements interrogated in this study inclusive of congress resolutions, NEC reports, minutes and workshops in the period 1987-1993 there is simply no mention of such concepts. Furthermore, also notable is the unions' shift from speaking of a broad working class interest to the far narrower category of workers, and even merely "members". This shift moves it away from a language of class struggle to a more sectional, narrow shop floor interest. Indeed, a movement that sacrifices political engagement in the interest of co-managing capital as opposed to building union strength on the shop-floor/grassroots like in its early years of inception – the 1970s.

This shift, from working class to national interests, is important. Socialism centres its programme on the interest of working class, not the nation. The nation, however, is a political community characterised by its relationship to a state, it is what a state calls its subject – the nation. Its interest are not necessarily those of the working class[299]: the state's interests are in this category more important – legitimacy being chief amongst them. Thus, for the state to acquire its legitimacy from its diverse subjects, bourgeoisie, working class, races, tribes, gender and age and so on, it needs to create the appearance of interest above all these groups, a "national interest" which pretends to reconcile contradictions when it merely contains them. This is because, should these contradictions spill into a revolution, the state's legitimacy is indeed in danger. Thus, saying socialism on one hand, and balancing this with interest of the bourgeoisie state, results into tensions that may lead to compromises of the core interests of the workers should the state choose to prioritise capitalist interests – as it must, if for no other reasons that in a capitalist society, the state requires revenue generated by capitalist processes.

It is significant that the "national interest" makes an appearance at this stage. The Websterian recommendation that "...labour shifts from deploying its power to impose its will – regardless of the resistance – to using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors in the industrial

[297] See *CWIU Policies*, 1991, (resolutions of the 1987, 1989 and 1991 congresses)

[298] Ibid

[299] See Rocker R, 1947, Bakunin M, 2002, Van der Walt, 2005

relations system and beyond"[300] assumes that working class (or worker) interests not necessarily paramount, but merely part of a society with many "actors". The "other actors" are, of course, in the first instance capitalists, and, in the second instance, the state managers.

The Websterian tradition argues that "...this more nuanced use of power – characteristic of democratic polities – involves a shift from the mobilisation of power to the use of influence in the heart of decision making at the enterprise, industry and national level"[301]. Decision-making does not thus pass into the hands of the working class; the working class, instead, holds hands with the other classes in the "heart" of society, on the basis of a common, "national", interest. A focus on "industrial relations" requires labour act as an interest group – one among many others – and an organisation that seeks its members' immediate wellbeing, rather than position itself as an insurgent force that can radically change society. This is a major shift: the South African black trade union movement has historically largely identified with a broad "working class" well beyond the industrial relations, has treated "industrial relations" as inseparable from the larger political and community situation of the working class as a whole, and has seen the solution in terms of socialism, not class partnership.

This is, for van der Walt, to be understood as the unions facing an "impossible situation", by "taking … co-responsibility for the existing system, which is anti-working class", and in which it is futile to try and balance capitalist and working class interests.[302]. This is exactly what the 1993 reinterpretation of labour's role via radical reform means: labour is seen as part of society, embedded in "members' interests", industrial relations, and participation in centres of power to secure co-management of the system.

Previously, labour's presence on the streets was not only about support of its shop floor concerns, or, indeed, in support of negotiations. Rather, it went to the heart of what confronted working class people as a whole – issues of education, housing, self governance and protection against repressive government – and raised the need for a new social order that could resolve these problems. This political role has, with radical reform, not only been averted, it has kept

[300] Adler G and Webster E, 1995, *Challenging Transition Theory: Labour movement, radical Reform, and Transition to Democracy in South Africa,* Politicsand Society, Vol. 23. No. 1, Sage Publications, Page 18

[301] Ibid

[302] Van der Walt, 2009, http://www.anarkismo.net/article/12781

labour as a disciplined interest group of the workers. As Adler and Webster have it: "A labour movement capable of mobilising and restraining its members opens up possibilities of deepening and extending democracy during this phase of the transition process."[303] Yet the very fact that "mobilising" takes place in a system dominated by another class means that "restraining" members is inevitable, and tends to preclude, rather than "open up", "possibilities of deepening and extending democracy" for the working class.

What Webster *et al* do not consider is what happens when the envisaged voluntary consent is not attained: if labour compromises, and capital does not, how can the compromised labour movements still fight for or defend working class interests? Moreover, where in the world, in the neo-liberal era, has voluntary cooperation with capital led to advances for the working class, rather than the weakening of their agency expressed through their organisations?[304] Indeed, how has the goal of a socialist future been drawn nearer though such effort? Nowhere in the world: so, what is it that South Africa possesses that is so unique[305]? Labour's experience, as seen in the previous chapter, shows less evidence of "possibilities of deepening and extending democracy" than of ongoing retreat on demands meant to maximise working class power, such as "nationalisation" and an open Constituent Assembly to write the constitution.

4.3 Policies on restructuring, 1993 onwards

By 1994, the union was firmly committed to radical reform. In 1994, the CWIU General Secretary Rod Crompton resigned from this position, citing academic pursuits as his reasons. Crompton in his resignation letter makes a proposal to continue being employed by the union on part time basis. He then provided the union with a proposal for the union to establish a "Department of Economic Policy"[306]. The department would be set out to do the following:

> Coordinate CWIU's engagement in NEF and similar bodies through the Industrial Restructuring Committee; To represent CWIU on NEF forums as appointed from time to time along with the other comrades appointed from time to time as has been the case; To work on economic/restructuring issues affecting CWIU

[303] Adler and Webster, 1995, page 77

[304] See Callinicos A, 1992

[305] Ibid

[306] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Plant Based Restructuring and New Forms of Work Organisation*, May 1994 by R. Crompton

> industries; To work on plant based restructuring issues; To attend COSATU workshops/conferences on related issues; To build capacity in these areas. Capacity building is a difficult area which needs careful thought. However in the immediate short term is no substitute for the people getting involved and learning on their feet, attending meetings, attending labour caucuses etc.[307]

Crompton argues in this proposal that "...an important part of the future trade union work will be fighting for economic policies, now that the political battle to remove apartheid is over. Also the emergence of the NEF and other forums it is clear that CWIU needs a capacity to deal with these demands."[308] The proposal proceeds from an analysis that the new government has no industrial strategy for the chemical sector. And thus, its objectives are as follows: "Develop industry strategy for the various chemical industry sectors e.g. explosives, pharmaceuticals, consumer etc. to feed into ANC and CWIU policy thinking; Assist the CWIU and COSATU develop a shop floor response to "new manufacturing techniques" or "World Class Manufacturing"; To interact with and report back to the CWIU and ANC on the research as it develops and the results; To build CWIU and ANC capacity in the area both at the research level and at the union level"[309].

This proposal was adopted[310] and the union set out to negotiate, as proposed by Crompton, that the funding would come from the ANC, CWIU and Industry Strategy Project[311]. Crompton argues that:

> The advantage of this proposal for the CWIU is that it would get, basically free of charge, access to research capability for its sectors and for shop floor level strategy (which is sorely lacking at present). It would begin a trend of influencing ANC researchers and policy planners not to forget shop floor in their approach to economic policy. Also, hopefully, a more union friendly type of industrial policy for the chemical industries and some capacity at low cost."[312]

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[307] Ibid, page 1

[308] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Plant Based Restructuring.*

[309] Ibid, page 3

[310] *CWIU NEC Minutes*, 11 -13 August 1994 meeting held at Parklane Hotel, Johannesburg, page 3

[311] This is a tripartite structure initiated by government

[312] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Plant Based Restructuring and New Forms of Work Organisation... pages 3*

We see here, again, that the 1994 state has been accepted by the union as an ally and a resource, which can be constantly influenced for the working class. This language of influence is far from attempts of the 1970s/80s, where a radical vision is matched to a pragmatic practice of influencing some of its policies and legislations like with the reforms of the late 1970s on the Wiehahn Commission in order to build more power on the streets[313]. Crompton and the union were now seeing policy and legal influence as an end in itself, as not a tactic, but a strategy. The aim was to participate in reforms, policy formation and determination, and the objective is to influence the state in becoming worker friendly, with a vague notion that such participation will lead to socialism (or at least, a "left version of social democracy"); the bold call for socialism, for a fundamental shift towards a socialist future seen in earlier CWIU resolutions, had disappeared. In its place is praise for a "low cost" engagement in "industrial policy", with ANC monies.

Yet in the same meeting that would adopt Crompton's proposal, the union noted that it had lost people to parliament and many more were leaving for better jobs in government. It noted the limited impact of its radical reforms, and emphasised the need to ensure that ways were found to engage different levels of government in an attempt to push for workers' interests, or "to ensure workers' issues are not ignored"[314]. In addition, the meeting noted that some companies consult state officials on issues that should need the union. The idea of union independence also found prominence as these attempts were made to engage and deal with these challenges, as the item is mentioned under the heading "strategic position of organised labour under the new government"[315]. The minutes read:

> Need to ensure labour movement independence from employers, government and political parties. This should not be confused with political alignment for specific objectives.[316]

[313] See Ulrich N, 2007, *Only can Free the Workers: the origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970 – 1979*, thesis submitted for the fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts to the faulty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, pages 237

[314] *CWIU, Minutes of the National Executive Committee Meeting held on the 26 – 28 May,* 1994, page 1

[315] Ibid

[316] Ibid

As indicated earlier, the union does not proceed to say how this would be ensured. However, it is critical to note that the union is conscious of these challenges even as it seeks to interact with stakeholders on a more professional basis through research and forums. The participation of workers is still not addressed in more coherent ways, even though a threat of their distancing from the rank and file is noted. This is further demonstrated by research emphasis which aim to open groups or individuals to lead research and contribute to policy formulation in forums such as NEF, specifically exemplified by Crompton's proposal.

Nevertheless, we must to ask how the structures of research and the objectives set in this bring about the achievement of the union's earlier claim that "Only socialism can solve the current political and economic crises"[317], that socialism is the basis for restructuring industries according to the needs of the working class and the society as a whole,[318] and the union's commitment to a "socialist South Africa" and "research into planned economies"[319].

It is clear that the union's research was now targeted into a rather different alternative; it no longer put research into charting adirection towards alternative economies, but to formulating policies with a bourgeois state and business.

> [We] need effective research. Thereafter, we must push for state funding of external research; we will need to build our internal capacity by determining our priorities in the union and in the spending of union money[320].

The challenges of this time, as noted by Crompton's document and the union's agreements upon it, are not different from the ones upon which the discourses as seen in the union resolutions are based in the 1990s. These are restructuring, globalisation and the resultant consequences: privatisation, retrenchments and outsourcing. The difference is in the nature of the state; the change in political machinery from authoritarian racist rule to democratic non-racialism, yet remaining bourgeois in character. It is perhaps equally imperative to delve into the activities of the union's research units, or pillars as they call them, which came out of the Crompton proposal before drawing deeper conclusions. It will be clear that the strategy of "radical reform" aims at

[317] *CWIU Policies: CWIU Policy resolutions*, 1992, page 5

[318] Ibid, page 20

[319] Ibid, page 6

[320] *CWIU Report on National Policy Workshop*, 5 -7 February 1993, page 17

building blocks to the realisation of socialism, yet socialism itself is fading as a concrete objective; the immediate aim is to repair capitalism. It appears asphyxiated in the lungs of the union, as its body treads the line of bourgeois acquiescent unionism.

4.4 The Industrial Relations Pillar Activities and the Pursuit of Worker Friendly Reforms

The new approach played out in the different research units established to develop programmes for both the collection and creation of knowledge for policy engagement purposes. These would in turn be used to advice on strategy and in training different leaders, from shop stewards and the national executive committee to staff. The union had Industrial Restructuring (IR Pillar), Health, Safety and Environment, Education (Adult Basic Education), Women. This section focuses on the IR Pillar activities in the period 1994 – 1999, which, as Crompton's proposal indicates, worked also as a resource to those who were in tripartite structures and forums such as NEDLAC. It will first outline the industrial restructuring strategy and how its practice is envisaged, give key cases that the union dealt with in this period (including tripartite structures), and then provide some of the branch reports on plant level restructurings.

The union distinguished between two levels of restructuring in the chemical sector as earlier indicated: industry level restructuring and plant level restructuring. Noteworthy about this separation is that it was possible because of the possibility of tripartite bodies that gave union the platform to influence policies and legislations. Thus, here they deal mostly with industry based legislation, policies and activities which often involve the state and business, chief amongst which is the Liquid Fuels Task Force (LFTF) established by government and including business, state and labour to look into the restructuring of the liquid fuels industry. The other level is plant restructuring encompassing individual companies and factories in different sub-sectors of the industry. Here the union deals specifically with each company's policies. These activities, at industry and plant level, demonstrate the unions' contestations of the "world of work" and "workplace order" as Von Holdt calls them[321]; moreover, they tell the type of union CWIU is, how it understands itself and its role in society.

[321] Von Holdt K, 2003, *Transition from below; forging trade unionism and workplace change in South Africa*, University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg; also Von Holdt K and Webster E, 2005

4.4.1 Industry Level Restructuring

At this level the union contested legislation formation and policies that were channelled by the state. Crompton's proposal, as shown earlier, reports his attendance of the Chemical Engineers Conference about "the new government's views on the chemical industry"[322] in 1994. In this conference, Crompton reports that the ANC government had no strategy for industry and it was important to ensure it did soon. This is understandable as business might have the upper hand in the inevitable reform process that had to take place in the new democratic order, unless the union, which was in a better position compared to the ANC, rescued it to come up with a strategy. The union was also part of the government initiated task forces looking at building consensus around policy direction; Trade and Industry Task Force (TITF), Liquids Fuels Task Force (LFTF) and the Petrochemicals, Plastic and Synthetic Fibres cluster. Here we consider the LFTF only.

4.4.2 Liquids Fuels Task Force

The body was established under the NEF and included business, the state, ANC and labour. The union reported in a 20 page document (authored by the ANC, Minerals and Energy Policy Centre or MEPC, and COSATU) that there was a push to lower protection of the oil companies, including SASOL and for "…future control of regulation and price setting to be taken out of the hands of the department of Minerals and Energy (depoliticised) and put into the hands of new Independent Petroleum Authority"[323]. Business is said to have pushed for minimum state interference, and bluntly put their positions on the suggested independent regulation authority as "*fok of*" *("fuck off")*[324], directed in no small part at the union. The union goes on to note two issues that need attention and hope can be resolved through negotiations, "a Petroleum price hike together with restructuring and a possible implosion of the entire industry"[325].

Without delving into much detail, the union is convinced that the problems of the rise in international petrol prices and the weak rand have potential to lead to chaos in the industry with deregulation possibly leading to some companies closing and others retrenching workers. The

[322] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Plant Based Restructuring and New Forms of Work Organisation.*

[323] *CWIU, Industry Restructuring, Report to CWIU National EC,* 26 May 1994, page 2

[324] Ibid

[325] Ibid

idea is that some companies will not increase their prices and worries if the ANC government, with its preoccupation with foreign investment, "…want, as its first action, to force a small retailer to put up petrol prices"[326]. This is because when it last happened, the apartheid government used the "Petroleum Products Act to force companies on line"[327]; however, the new constitution might not do the same due to "its rights of economic activity"[328].

In the next meeting of the task force following the one reported in these minutes, the union argues that there was "no substantive progress... since"[329]. It says "…a new pricing mechanism, which would adjust the pump prices every month" had "been agreed to and implemented"[330] but only in the interim. The union also reports that:

> We have made little progress on other issues... given the general lack of progress... the oil companies suggested that a 'Scenario building' workshop be convened in Cape Town to try and break the deadlock in the forum, and develop a plan to restructure the industry. While this workshop was valuable in certain areas, such as the development of a social plan for service station workers and in finding ways of opening the retail market to new participants, it was far from victory for labour. The views of the oil companies predominate in certain crucial areas, including the deregulation of the petrol price – the element of the current system on which everything else rests. If the oil companies' proposals are implemented the industry will be deregulated within two years.[331]

Taken this account the report recommends that

> The union needs to discuss whether we should continue participating in this process and if so, based on what terms of reference. If we refuse to be part of the nest Scenario workshop, we will be back where we started in the LFTF. In all likelihood the task force will collapse, and the pressing decision which must be

[326] Ibid, page 3

[327] Ibid

[328] Ibid

[329] *CWIU, NEC Report: Industry Restructuring*, 10 November 1994, page 1

[330] Ibid

[331] Ibid, pages 1 - 2

> made about industry will be dealt with by politicians. We need to determine whether we stand to gain more from leaving the restructuring of the industry to government, or whether we can go back into the workshop, continue with those issues where we have made progress and try to rectify the areas where our positions have not held sway.[332]

The union's NEC went on to note the issues raised by the report referring discussion of the recommendation to a preparatory workshop. It further reaffirmed its opposition to deregulation, and noted the labour opposition of "a permanent price regulating authority which will be independent of government"[333]. The union further cast doubts at the government indicating that they are aware of its possible reactionary nature taken its emphasis of foreign investor confidence as stated in the earlier.

Notice that we are now dealing with a union that has proactive proposals and alternative ways in which some of the concrete issues facing industry – implicitly, issues of competitiveness and sustained profits – can be addressed. The focus is on "reconstruction", rather than revolution,

The NEC went into a workshop as indicated, and the workshop served as a platform to reflect on its strategy and find ways of either improving or abandoning it[334]. After an elaborate process, the union emerged with a framework of engagement in the process of restructuring and reform of the industry. It pronounced on plant level restructuring as well, however, pertinent at this point are its reflections on its participation on the liquid fuels task force. It sought to cast an overarching analysis that incorporated plant level activities to evaluate its progress and chant a way forward. The following were therefore some problems it identified in the companies falling under the LFTF: "Job loss and retrenchment taking place in industry; Contradiction between interest of members and wider society; Deregulation – seem to be losing the battle; No link between LFTF and what is happening at plant level"[335].

[332] Ibid, page 4

[333] Ibid

[334] *CWIU Policies, NEC Workshop, February 1995*

[335] Ibid, section 1.4

The union also noted achievements: "Petrol pricing mechanism in place; Saved jobs of petrol attendants; Unions recognised as important players in industry stopped unilateral actions; Opened up 'secrets' – transparent process in place"[336].

The lessons learned were generally seen as a positive confirmation of the radical reform approach: "Being involved in national policy formulation e.g. trade/tariffs, competition, allows us to influence policy; gather information; forewarns us of things to come; Workers and organisers need to be involved in sectors affected by policy as soon as possible"[337].

The workshop then came up guiding principles for its involvement in industry restructuring. It is perhaps of critical importance for our discussion to cite some of the principles.

> The primary objective of industry or plant restructuring should be to promote/defend the interests of workers (working class); Restructuring should not lead to job losses. Restructuring should maximise job security and job creation; Restructuring should not lead to 'outsourcing' or subcontracting; Change of ownership in favour of workers through mechanisms such as nationalisation should be a goal of any restructuring; There should be worker involvement in all levels of negotiations with full time off for attendance, mandating and report back[338].

In 1995, the important test for the union's ability to actually "promote/defend the interests of workers" by "Being involved in national policy formulation" was provided by attempts by government to privatise MOSSGAS.

The union's initial position was the setting up of a national oil company incorporating SASOL and all other state oil assets, including MOSSGAS and SOEKOR (these were later merged to form PetroSA in 2002), which would be called "South African National Oil Company" (SANOCO)[339]. In the same meeting John Appolis (an executive member from the powerful CWIU Wits Region) introduced a discussion document on industrial restructuring. This

[336] Ibid

[337] Ibid, section 1.5

[338] Ibid, section: Workshop recommendations – Industry/Plant Restructuring, (a). 1, 3, 4, 8, 10

[339] *CWIU, NEC Report: Industrial Restructuring Pillar*, 5 December 1995

document rejected the dominant approach, radical reform, positioned restructuring in a broader capitalist crisis and called, echoing the union sentiments, for nationalisation of strategic assets of the state as mentioned above. It went on to emphasise worker control of activities in the restructuring of plants and broader industry, an aspect that remained missing in the Pillar activities throughout, even if constantly hoped for. The document seemed to stress that the reform taking place must be worked from below as opposed to above[340].

The meeting's response was, however, to reaffirm radical reform. There seems to have been an attempt to establish Pillar activities at a branch level. In 1996, the privatisation of MOSSGAS was underway; the union, in the spirit of helping manage the restructuring, even conceded that it will not oppose voluntary retrenchment by workers "…in exchange for management's commitment to full negotiation over future of retrenchment in structures set up in terms of the national framework agreement"[341]. This was an abject failure, the union reporting the following outcome:

> Management totally abused the agreement – nearly 150 more workers were retrenched with the voluntary package than was agreed to and senior managers used the packages to award themselves golden handshakes... generally there is poor communication between branch and Head Office which has hampered our ability to respond to development at Mossgas coherently. In addition, we have not been able to develop the idea of SANOCO as endorsed by the NEC. Our vision for the future of Mossgas and for restructuring in the industry more broadly is still vague and unhelpful.[342]

Here we can see that the union finally puts thought into the idea of nationalisation as envisaged in its congress resolutions and workshop as earlier outlined. However, there still needed to be efforts to outline the idea of SANOCO more explicitly and put resources into pushing it both within the alliance and in society broadly. MOSSGAS, however, at this period remains in the process of being privatised and the union reports failures in averting this. Parallel to MOSSGAS

[340] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Industrial Restructuring*, 1 December 1995 by J Appolis

[341] *CWIU, IR Pillar NEC Report*, April 1996

[342] Ibid

was also a SASOL restructuring process, which entailed the retrenchment of over 100 workers, and the union agreed to put on hold until the end of 1996.[343]

Meanwhile, at a national level, the government adopted GEAR with its market-led frameworks for running, restructuring and expanding South Africa's economy. These had been policies that the union movement as a whole had long been opposing; now they were being adopted by the very ANC government they had helped put into power, that they given the mandate in negotiations to represent interest of workers, and that they had helped release from prison in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The union developed its response in a document it called "Restructuring of State Assets". In this document, the union observes that there is a clear commitment on the part of the ANC government to privatisation, deregulation and market-led growth. It further problematises the alliance that COSATU, SACP and ANC share, and resolved to reaffirm its original positions on restructuring; anti-privatisation being chief amongst them[344]. MOSSGAS continues to receive central attention; however, more efforts are sort to involve ANC, although it is clear, even acknowledged by the union, that it pursues privatisation.

In the July Secretariat Report, it is noted that government has finally decided to "…invent about R910 million of MOSSGAS profits to keep it open until end of the year. The option of selling it or finding a business partner has not been abandoned."[345] On the same note, SASOL is reported to be "…restructuring and about 1 600 jobs could lost in December"[346] that year. And more plans are made to negotiate with the companies. However, the IR Pillar reported MOSSGAS plans for privatisation to had actually flopped as "…no-one came forward with enough money, so this is a sort of victory for the union"[347]. The pillar further recommended that more resources had to be put in developing the idea of SANOCO.

[343] Ibid

[344] *CWIU, Restructuring State Assets*, April 1996

[345] *CWIU, Secretariat Report, NEC* Meeting, 25 – 27 July 1996, page 1

[346] Ibid, page 2

[347] *CWIU, IR Pillar Report,* July 1996, section 3.1.2 page 2

The November NEC meeting would receive a report from the IR Pillar of government's commitment to deregulate the liquid fuels industry. Again, there is little evidence that radical reform was working, the report stating that:

> Despite repeated requests and enquiries, the department of Mineral and Energy Affairs has made no attempts to discuss restructuring with the union or reconvene the Liquid Fuels Task Force. There is a growing concern that the department will buckle under pressure from the oil industry and deregulate the industry.[348]

From henceforth, the LFTF would appear in union minutes as a dead structure, and restructuring issues in this industry at this level were not much discussed in NEC meetings. In 1997 there were developments with the discussion of the Liquid Fuels Policy that seemed to suggest improved fortunes. The union noted interactions with parliamentary portfolio committee on Minerals and Energy Affairs, and the ANC caucus in parliament, highlighting the following points: "Revival of the Liquid Fuels task Force; Research to be jointly commissioned into the implications of various policy options; CEF [Central Energy Fund] restructuring in terms of the National Framework Agreement; Social plan to be negotiated for the Liquid Fuels industry; Advancement of policy through united action by union and progressive organisations; Restructuring of the CEF Board"[349].

There is no space to elaborate on most of the developments, or on each resolution. However, the minutes reflect that upon the dissolution of the LFTF a different team within the union was developed to deal with liquid fuels issues on industry level[350]. The union would therefore use this team to develop the above engagements with parliament.

In short, we can see how the union was now a strong advocate of radical reform. Although very aware of the pitfalls of this strategy, the union still prefers to go with it to influence policy developments. The union at least reflected on the decline of worker control, demonstrated by both Appolis' discussion document and union reflections, resolutions and several workshops in 1993, 1994 and 1996.

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[348] *CWIU, IR Pillar Report*, November 1996, section 3.1, page 2

[349] *CWIU, Report of the Industrial Restructuring Pillar to the NEC*, April 1998, section3.2 a, b, c, d, h, i

[350] See *CWIU Minutes, NEC April 1997*, submitted in NEC Meeting in November 1997

Regarding the success of the radical reform approach, the LFTF case shows that the union did not score fundamental victories except saving jobs of petrol attendants and stopping retrenchments in the short run. The union did not get the proposal of a national oil company, SANOCO, adopted by anyone. The privatisation of MOSSGAS showed that state policies developed to the right and in the interests of business.

The practice of radical reform as reflected by the activities of the LFTF is based on research, negotiations, and seeks to influence policy, resulting in co-management of capitalism in ways that only temporarily and partially avert its most dire consequences. Hence the agreements to stop retrenchments in the short run (Engen, SASOL), or privatisation in the short run (MOSSGAS), but no progress on nationalisation (SANOCO), or shifting the state from its commitment to deregulation.

The union raises challenges with its strategy, its limitations and disadvantages, but continues with it, despite resistance from the state and business on core issues – and despite its demonstrable failure. It also insists that restructuring is inevitable, but also assumes this implies co-management of capitalism. This idea moves from one where there is emphasis and expectation of a Workers' Government, as shown in chapter 3, that puts the interests of the working class above all other interests, to one that is on the retreat from a pro-capitalist, post-1994, ANC-led state. This raises the question, therefore, of why the union sticks to this strategy despite its failure – a failure that the union's own reports admitted.

The issue of choice is critical. It may be that, through corporatism, a neo-liberal state seeks to "…conceal the centrality of conflict in the fundamental structures of capitalist relations of production"[351]. However, it does not follow that the unions are simply absorbed without choice. This chapter shows that the union is consciously *choosing* to cooperate with business, and rejecting the alternative – the militancy associated with it in the 1980s.

The literature on social movement unionism also tends to efface this element of choice. In Webster's classic formulation, the militancy of black trade unions is the product of their exclusion from the political system; this is the exceptional condition that prevents the unions

[351] Catchpowle L and Cooper C, 2003, *Neoliberal Corporatism: Origins and Implications for South Africa*, in Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa', Ashgate Publishing: USA, page 17

from following the classical path of "maturing" within a formal industrial relations system under democracy.[352] As noted in chapter 2, this explanation does not really question the maturation thesis, as suggest its inapplicability in certain eras in certain Newly Industrialising Countries; if democratisation occurs, it would seem normal that the union movement now tends to a "mature" approach, and "…shifts from deploying its power to impose its will … to using its power to secure voluntary consent from other actors"[353].

Unions, anarcho-syndicalism suggests, are *potentially* revolutionary, no "mere transitory phenomenon bound up with the duration of capitalist society", but the "germ of the socialist economy of the future"[354]. That potential is shaped by the political outlook of unions, and their methods of struggle and organisation.[355] A reliance on the state creates a type of unionism that downplays "the necessity of constructive socialist activity" and "the impulse to self-help", breeding a union bureaucracy and a passive membership[356]. But since union oligarchy is therefore the *consequence* of a particular strategy, then the *choice* of strategy is the ultimate cause of union bureaucracy itself. The state may be seeking to co-opt labour, but labour's own strategy helps or hinders cooption – and in the case of CWIU, it was labour's adoption of radical reform that was crucial.

To also attribute blame for union failures to a powerful and cunning state (or business sector) blinds to the responsibility of the union's own strategy for those outcomes. It was the decision to undertake strategic unionism that led directly to efforts at the co-management of capitalist crisis, as well as the rise of a technocratic leadership specialised in research and negotiations rather than "class struggle"[357] to achieve victories. Chapter 5 will specifically deal with the question of why

[352] Huntington S, 1968

[353] Adler G and Webster E, 1995, *Challenging Transition Theory: Labour movement, radical Reform, and Transition to Democracy in South Africa*, Politics and Society, Vol. 23. No. 1, Sage Publications, Page 18

[354] Ibid, page 59

[355] Schmidt M and van der Walt L, 2009, *Black Flame: the revolutionary class politics and anarchism and syndicalism*, Oakland; AK Press, page 20

[356] Ibid, page 54

[357] Van der Walt, 2009, *Saving jobs in South Africa in the crunch: 'engage' or revolt*? http://www.anarkismo.net/article/12781

labour sticks with this strategy when it clearly demonstrated no usefulness both for defending its gains and drawing to the direction of socialism.

4.4.3 Plant Level Restructuring

The reorganisation of work in South Africa is linked to the apartheid system, which prioritised whites at the expense of blacks. The apartheid workplace was as characterised by white domination, as other aspects of apartheid society[358]. This is exemplified by the strengthening of homeland policy in the post-1948 period which exerted "…tighter controls... to safeguard the continuing supply of cheap migrant labour for South African industry"[359]. Thus, the workplace "belonged" to whites and not blacks who were cheap, often unskilled, and often coerced into working in dire conditions, while whites generally earned relatively high wages, had secure jobs, were often skilled and dominated the cooperate hierarchy; that is not to say that working class whites were in charge of the system, and were not also victims of extraction of surplus value.

However, the struggle against apartheid, contrary to the Websterian emphasis, was not against this racial order only, but also against waged labour and capitalism itself. The order that lay at the core of the workers' struggle is that of capitalist exploitation and extraction of surplus value. The reconstruction of the plant/workplace in the 1990s is the subject of this section, particularly how the CWIU understood and envisioned its development.

The union since the early 1990s demonstrated an understanding of what plant level restructuring entails, best captured by a document which the IR Pillar would develop to assist plant level players to use as a resource in dealing with their challenges. Efforts are made, often with little success throughout this period, to have a strong link between activities at the plant level and national IR Pillar level, discussed earlier. However, this report will not delve much of the details of these developments. In addition, it is imperative to note that the information used here is gathered from union official documents, as opposed to interviews of shop stewards or workers on the ground. Therefore only an outline of the policy on plant restructuring and selected cases as reflected in minutes and reports are used as tools to draw an understanding of what occurred and how it was captured by actors then.

[358] Von Holdt, 2003, Von Holdt and Webster, 2005, Adler and Webster, 2000

[359] Catchpowle L and Cooper C, 2003, page 20

Crompton wrote a discussion document after the proposal he had tabled on industrial restructuring. The document tabled to NEC in May 1994, entailed "Plant Based Restructuring and New Forms Work Organisation"[360], argues that from the 1980s management moved from "scientific management" and Taylorism[361]. It stated the reasons for this to be as follows: "Increased global competition – with an emphasis on price, quality and rapid response to customers' needs; Increased technological complexity and speed of change required flexibility workforces; Speeded up information systems required more rapid responses"[362].

In short, the document stated, "…firms have to change faster than their competitors"[363]. It argued that there were new forms of work organisation, that is, "World Class Manufacturing" or "Total Quality Management" or "Lean Production" and these had a "twin thrust":- "Human Resource Management techniques; Manufacturing techniques".[364]

It maintained that the unions in South Africa were faced by challenges that came about from these new forms of work organisation and had no answers to them. Human Resource Management techniques stressed "…careful staff selection, communication with workers, involvement of workers, individual at expense of collective, fewer grades for flexibility, better training , fewer layers of management, use of temporary workers"[365], whilst manufacturing techniques stressed "…statistical process control, multi-skilling, team work and autonomy, quality self inspection, total preventative maintenance, internal and external customer suppliers relationships, few suppliers"[366].

The document argues that the challenge is in "…how we should respond or what counter proposals we should put on the table. That we need to develop them quickly is imperative for the survival of the unions as we know them. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we cannot respond quickly to such issues"[367]. The document proceeds to say many in the union do not

[360] *CWIU, Discussion Document, Plant Based Restructuring and New Forms of Work Organisation*, May 1994 by R. Crompton

[361] Ibid, page 1

[362] Ibid, pages

[363] Ibid

[364] Ibid

[365] Ibid

[366] Ibid

[367] Ibid, page 2

understand these developments and "…try to attach political agenda which is not helpful", but does not say what these agendas say and why are they not helpful. However, the document makes proposals as follows:

> Leadership of the union, (staff and NEC) should learn what these issues are and begin to understand them. This means running seminars...; the leadership should begin to fashion counter proposals. This would run in conjunction with the research proposal (if accepted) by Rod; Interim guidelines. These are urgently necessary as a lot of these developments are taking place in the factories, indeed have already taken place[368].

Crompton's proposals, as demonstrated above, stress expert leadership and peak-level bargaining, and have no real mention of "worker control". The guidelines he refers to would be adopted as follows in 1995: "Restructuring must not result in job losses; Restructuring must improve the employment conditions of workers; There must be full information disclosure in any decision making structures in the restructuring process, not just consulted; Before the union engages in a restructuring exercise, the industrial restructuring pillar should be informed"[369].

In 1996 the union would compile a document in which the strategy and practice of plant level restructuring is packaged for workers or shop floor activism to refer to. Note also that shop floor activities are not only to consult the IR Pillar, but are deemed not to understand restructuring. On what basis Crompton assumed that workers on the ground did not understand workplace restructuring is unclear. Masondo's recent work on NUMSA at BMW in South Africa shows, indeed, that workers' knowledge (accessed through "workers' participation") has played a key role in improving productivity (and the extraction of surplus value)[370].

In the document entitled "Defend, Empower, Advance: Responses to Plant Level restructuring"[371] CWIU makes pronouncements on "…management restructuring programs,

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[368] Ibid

[369] *CWIU, Minutes of the National Executive Committee,* 18 – 20 May 1995, page 17

[370] Masondo D, 2005, '*Trade Liberalisation and Work Restructuring: A case study of BMW,* in Webster E and von Holdt (eds.), Beyond the apartheid workplace: studies in transition, Work restructuring and the crisis of social reproduction, UKZN Press: South Africa

[371] *CWIU, Defend, Empower, Advance: Responses to Plant Level restructuring,* November 1996

retrenchments, outsourcing and casual labour, company mergers, take-overs and relocations, flexibility in working hours, gain sharing schemes, the introduction of new technology, team work"[372]. Without going into too much detail, the document in its strategy deliberations does not depart at all from the guidelines as mentioned above. Critical to note are its insights on what has been the impact of restructuring in the manufacturing sector. The document indicates the following:

> South Africa's manufacturing sector has been in crisis for over a decade. Nearly 100 000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1984 and 1994... The most important threat is from imported products which are becoming cheaper as the government reduces tariffs[373].
>
> Over the past 10 years, there were different employment trends in the CWIU's sectors. Look at these figures from the Industrial Development Corporation[374]:
>
> 23% of jobs in the rubber sector were lost; Petrochemical sector employment fell by 6%; There was little change in glass and consumer; Plastic employment increased by 60% … [375]

The document notes expectations that these figures would only increase, thus they set the union to strongly oppose retrenchments by negotiations, looking at alternative options like taking workers to other plants in the company, reducing management benefits such as "…cars, business lunches, reducing dividends and profits paid to shareholders, cut social responsibility budgets, finding ways of reducing waste, downtime and other wasteful practices"[376]. These are a clear statement of the union's commitment to improving competitiveness – and its aspiration to run the company, on that basis, yet to do so even better than the capitalists. The document also recommends "solidarity action"; here the union will engage in blacking action which puts companies against the wall to negotiate.

[372] Ibid, page 2

[373] Ibid, page 8

[374] Ibid

[375] Ibid

[376] Ibid, page 13

On outsourcing, the union resolved on three strategies, the offensive, preventative and defensive strategies. On the offensive strategy, the document says "…the union must get a regular agreement from employers that they will not outsource jobs or departments. If the union negotiators cannot win this, then they must negotiate that short term or contract labour must not undercut permanent labour."[377] In the preventative strategy, "…the union must fight to keep the department that the company must release information on the motivation, results and alternatives to be released by the company and negotiate on this information"[378]. Then the defensive strategy comes in "…where the union cannot stop outsourcing, the union must first insist that workers are transferred into new positions in the company with the same pay and conditions. If the union cannot win this demand, then it must demand that workers keep their jobs at the same wages and conditions with the contractor and that these workers must continue as members of the unions."[379]

The union goes further to elaborate on other aspects of outsourcing such as team work and company mergers. In addition, the document stresses the strengthening of union structures. Here the document highlights the threats of dividing workers, but also weakening union structures. The strategy prioritises negotiations as we have seen; however, the question is whether at the plant level there were successes. In an attempt to answer this question it is critical to re-emphasise that this research is unable to see the concrete relations on the shop floor as this would require a more bottom up driven research. Nevertheless, that be as it may, an overview of some of the reports from branches on activities on the shop floor may be useful to further demonstrate the practice of radical reform in the CWIU.

4.4.4 Company Restructuring, some cases

In the November 1997, the IR Report gave a rather detailed report of branch level activities regarding company restructuring. These are factories and companies that have restructured and branches had just been told to report on these, without reflecting on dynamics per se. Overall, the reports reflect a combination of failures, success in short term basis and small victories. The following are some of the reports from branches.

[377] Ibid, page 18

[378] Ibid

[379] Ibid

The Eastern Cape branch reported that in Dimbaza Fibres, a company that buys and sells textile fibres and by-products, "92 workers were retrenched for economic reasons. Financial information showed no reason for the company to retrench but it went ahead. Conciliation at CCMA failed and the matter has been referred to labour court."[380] In Rope Laboratories the reports says "57 workers were retrenched in September, in addition to the 45 that were retrenched in July for economic reasons. The branches view is that the company's problems are not economic, and is planning to discuss restructuring with the company in order to avoid further retrenchments. Part of the plan includes doing research."[381]

In the Wits Branch, Consol Clayville, a glass manufacturing company, is reported to have retrenched "70 workers" and had been taken to CCMA. In Millrox, which, amongst other things, deals with supply of industrial thermal and dry process equipment, "57 workers were retrenched"[382]. The company is reported to have given reasons of a failed business deal and was in danger of closing down. While "Mineral Binders and Clays closed down after owner committed suicide"[383], Paragon Rubber closed down and the union was consulted. Finally the Atlantic Manufacturing also closed and the reports says about 70 workers were affected[384].

In the NET Branch, SASOL's process of restructuring which had taken two years affected about 636 workers. "149 were re-deployed and 501 took packages – some packages were compulsory because workers did not want to be re-deployed."[385] The report notes that the "…majority of membership is losing hope and do not trust the union. Nationally the union should assist to build the local."[386] It adds: "The feeling then was that the agreement was the right agreement, but it had to be implemented and monitored. Problems included the agreement not being implemented, the size of SASOL, and shop stewards deciding to take packages."[387]

[380] *CWIU, IR Pillar Report*, 4 November 1997, page 8

[381] Ibid, page 9

[382] Ibid, pages 10 - 12

[383] Ibid

[384] Ibid

[385] Ibid, page 13

[386] Ibid

[387] Ibid

AECI Mankwe, which is in explosives and accessories, is reported to be closing down at the end of 1997, with "about 500 workers"[388] being affected; the reason is that it had "…duplication of activities with Mankwe and Modderfontien, another company in the same field. Multifoil on the other hand, suppliers of aluminium would relocate to Zimbabwe due to competition and 140 workers would be affected."[389]

The above reports do not tell us how the union dealt with these situations in detail, particularly in relation to its strategy on restructuring, except appeals to legal bodies in the formal industrial relations system. However, this report situates them as examples of restructuring that have taken place in which the union intervened. The examples chosen show that in some instances (Rope Laboratories), the union could not save the retrenchments, and plans are made to put more research and discuss restructuring with the company. In other instances (Dimbaza Fibres, Consol Clayville) after failed attempts to prove the management wrong on falsity of financial limitations as reasons, the union sets to proceed to use legal measures for conciliation and mediation.

In other instances, companies were closing down and the union reports being consulted (Paragon Rubber), whereas in other instances the union was not informed (Mineral Binders and Clays). In similar cases, the union would be fighting legalities till the company is closed down and no more (an example is KBS which "…closed and 31 workers were retrenched... the company applied for liquidation order without informing the union. The issue went to dispute resolution, and additional one week per completed year of service was negotiated. At that stage, the company had ceased to exist."[390]) In SASOL, implementation and monitoring of the agreements are noted as problems.

The essence of these examples, which simply serve to give a sense of some of the developments reported in meetings, is that they indicate very little success was attained with the strategies noted. The union's commitment to "…finding ways of reducing waste, downtime and other wasteful practices"[391] did not save a single job. Indeed in other instances the strategies would

[388] Ibid

[389] Ibid

[390] Ibid, page 11

[391] Ibid, page 13

yield good results: an example is in the case of FOSECO, which supplied consumable products for use in the foundry industry. The union details the process as follows:

> The holding company is embarking in international restructuring. All manufacturing plants are being rationalised and made to compete with one another. Company has closed one division and sold it to ISCOR – which is producing more volume and needs FOSECO technology. Another division is going to be mechanised. Job losses are inevitable on both the mechanisation and subcontracted out. The union was invited to make input. The organiser and branch pillar coordinator are to draft a response. Divisions and tensions amongst shop stewards and workers need to be resolved before plans can be implemented ... The company negotiated the sale of Steelmill department to ISCOR. Reason: business was lost to Alusaf. ISCOR has indicated it will be able to accept affected workers. A number of workers proposed to volunteer to retrenchment – they are close to retirement age. Negotiations on alternatives are continuing and workers have agreed that only after alternatives are exploited, will packages be discussed.[392]

Indeed a sense is that much of the strategy is implemented; somewhere the process of restructuring, which has been taken as an inevitable outcome by union policy, takes place with less harsh consequences; yet by and large workers are getting retrenched. A report published in 1999 by the National Labour & Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), a research wing of COSATU, supports this. It states that "…manufacturing unions have declined in actual membership, and compared to other COSATU unions... The decline in manufacturing unions mirrors some of the changes occurring in the economy. Changes in employment in these sectors are occurring on a wide scale and at a rapid pace. Slow economic growth and industry and workplace restructuring have resulted in job losses of about 3% to 5% each year since 1996."[393]

The report proceeds to add that "…unions in manufacturing have entered a new terrain of struggle: they are organising in a declining and rapidly restructuring sector"[394]. However, it shows that COSATU unions did improve union density in this sector "…from 39% of all

[392] Ibid

[393] Naidoo R, (ed), 1999, *Unions in Transition: COSTU into the new millennium, NALEDI*; Johannesburg, pages 11 - 12

[394] Ibid

workers in 1994, to 45% in 1999"[395]. The report argues that partly this is because most retrenchments affected un-unionised workers[396].

Nevertheless, these developments, like job losses, also reflect the failure of the broader policy positions of the union movement, which seek building blocks for socialism through the co-management of capitalism; the question is how the developments are leading to this end. Indeed, the data shows the union to have lost to job loss, and to casualisation, although its density increased in this regard. Moreover, much is stressed on negotiations without militant action like strikes and boycotts; this factor can be understood with the union's acceptance of restructuring as inevitable, all of which tells how the union practices radical reform. Labour's participation only comes at a cost that does not translate into improvements of living standards for the broader working class[397].

4.5 Conclusion

The CWIU comes out as a strong union in this period, post-1994, yet professed difficulties of consolidating its base level structures and ensuring worker participation, all pointing to "political crippling". Union officials' views on restructuring, and the practice of strategic unionism in industry and plant restructuring, necessarily emphasise negotiations, research and influencing policy formation, over the militant style of politics associated with unions in the 1980s. Unions do not plan to deal with restructuring through combining efforts with social movements, boycotts and strikes, but emphasise scoring victories with legislation, policy and monitoring restructuring with companies (like in the case of SASOL) – co-managing the crisis the union has attributed to bosses.

The union's perception that restructuring is inevitable and potentially beneficial to workers leads it to see corporatism or co-management of capitalism as the way to deal with it. This does not follow. The union's history is indeed one of militancy and mass mobilisation as shown by the

[395] Ibid

[396] Ibid

[397] Van der Walt L, 1997, *Against Corporatism: The limits and pitfalls of corporatism for the South African trade unions*, paper presented at the African Studies Association of South African Third Biennial International Conference: Africa in a Changing World: Patterns and Prospects, Magaliesberg Conference Centre – Broederstroom

SASOL action in 1984[398]. However, Crompton's discussion document set the militancy aside, arguing that now that apartheid is removed, the way into making gains around the challenge of restructuring is influencing policy developments, particularly because the ANC is understood not to have an industrial strategy, the union sees an opportunity take it into the road that is labour friendly.

Despite a call by Appolis and others for a return to a more worker controlled activity in its approach to restructuring, the union failed to balance radical reform with a strong shop floor. On the contrary, CWIU is one of the unions who "…have responded to lean production as a threat but who have in varying degrees accepted its inevitability. However they argue that there is a dialectic of development acting as well and that by contesting the terms of lean production there can be many gains to be made for the trade union movement in this period."[399]

Appolis further argues that "…the other thing that has emerged is the fact that in most cases, not all, workers and shop stewards are mere spectators in terms of issues that are negotiated at NEDLAC"[400]. In addition, he says "…there is no longer that notion that we can struggle and defend our gains in spite of the law"[401]. Indeed, this notion epitomises the *zeitgeist* of the historic militancy associated with the union even at the turn of the decade (e.g. anti VAT strike[402]).

The data, overall, does not confirm the optimistic assessment of radical reform presented by the Websterian tradition. On the contrary, it bears out the critiques of that approach by scholars who see the approach as unable to yield fundamental results for the trade union movement[403]. It supports Callinicos' warning against "…unrealistic [expectations] that organised labour can

[398] Rosenthal T, 1994, 1997

[399] http://www.ilrigsa.org.za/index.php?option=com_rokdownloads&view=file&Itemid=71&id=39:trade-union-responses-to-lean-production, page 5

[400] *Pressing Challenges Facing the South African Labour Movement: an Interview with John Appolis and Dinga Sikwebu* in Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New, South Africa', Ashgate Publishing: USA, page 207

[401] Ibid, Appolis J, page 213

[402] Ibid

[403] Catchpowle L and Cooper C, 2003, Van der Walt, 1997, 2009

count on the ANC's support when it bargains with capital"[404]. The ANC not only did not stand with labour in bodies like the LFTF, but also sought privatisation (MOSSGAS). Furthermore, it adopted a macroeconomic strategy that confirmed business in its restructuring through privatisation, retrenchments and outsourcing. The data supports Van der Walt's view that corporatism will deliver no gains, but many defeats, for the unions, and suggests consideration of his claim, looking at the occupations in Daewoo plants in South Korea in 2001, that "…current struggles demonstrate there is a serious alternative means to save jobs as the crisis bites: occupation and the *refusal to be retrenched*"[405].

In the following chapter the report will focus on reporting on the 1997 congress in light of the developments in the post 1994 socio-political context as exemplified by deliberations in this chapter. The chapter will delve into the discussion of macroeconomic policy shifts by government, seeking to situate deliberations in the 1997 congress in the context of the realities of the time. The question, as posed earlier on, is why the union stuck with radical reform even when the government decided against its core principles. This question will be entertained in detail in the concluding chapter, but it is the role of this chapter and the next one to show the practice of strategic unionism and radical reform by the union, insistence to continue with this strategy regardless of the state's macroeconomic shifts, and the privatisation, retrenchments and outsourcing seen in this chapter.

The contribution of this chapter to the broader report can be summed up as showing the practice of radical reform and strategic unionism in the chemical industry by the CWIU. It has demonstrated how the CWIU practices its unionism, but also shown that in this end, the union makes no gains on its core demands. The chapter adds a piece in the developed picture of this practice in the CWIU from the previous one that looks at the era of 1987 to 1993, and focused much analysis on macro socio-political role of the union. The question it will still confront is what weakens socialism in the union vision and practice, and it will do so in the final chapter.

[404] Callinicos A, 1992, page 148

[405] Van der Walt, 2009

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Radical Reform and the Goal of Socialism

5.1 Introduction

This report has examined the practice of radical reform / strategic unionism in the CWIU, largely using the union's official pronouncements and reflections in reports and discussion documents, as a means to assess the viability of this COSATU strategy. The report finds that in the period under study, 1987 – 1998, the CWIU has not made any gains towards the establishment of socialism via a series of radical reforms. Instead, not only has it watered down its demands (for instance, moving from a union-driven Reconstruction Accord to an ANC-controlled, and, later, ANC-abandoned RDP) but it has consistently lost battles over industrial policy and workplace restructuring (with privatisation, casualisation and outsourcing taking place despite careful union policy interventions through corporatist structures). At the same time, it has been faced with serious internal problems in the form of a growing leadership/ rank-and-file division.

What has been lost has been the older, radical union tradition, based on an anti-capitalist practice and analysis, and tied to an emphasis on self-management, a tradition displayed in the 1980s and persisting into the early 1990s. The Websterian analysis that sees radical reform and strategic unionism as the best possible policy for the unions downplays this break, and its costs, championing a narrow project of national-level policy intervention, international competitiveness, and workplace deracialisation. The break entailed has been obscured; the major shifts involved have been underplayed; an alternative, potential, radical, trajectory has been ignored. Choices were made, and not necessarily the best ones.

At the same time, the Websterian literature has tended to overstate the advantages of radical reform. The COSATU unions, including CWIU, indeed aimed at a gradual transformation of South African society to socialism (or at least, a "left version of social democracy"), and emphasised participation in structures of power as a means to do so. This report has, however, shown that rather than create building blocks for socialism, this strategy did not secure any advances on labour's core demands; instead it has led to dire consequences for workers, in the context of a relentless neo-liberal onslaught that has lasted from the 1980s late apartheid period and straight through into the new parliamentary democracy.

Rather than systematically moving towards the implementation of a "radical version of social democracy",[406] this report contends that in the usage of this strategy, the workers have achieved nothing but met with losses and defeats.

Within the strategy of the CWIU sits an irreconcilable tension. On the one hand, the union pursues "legal means of struggle"[407], moving from merely using a few laws, selectively, under apartheid to make strategic gains, to an overt commitment to corporatism and class partnership through participating in policy formulation. On the other hand, the unions' power (and their appeal as class partners) rests upon their mass base, linked in through a practice of "worker control". However, it is precisely that mass participation that is undermined by the current union strategy. The strategy rests on, yet undercuts, that very power.

The report insists that an examination of the union's own reports on activities reflecting practice of radical reform (for instance in structures like the LFTF, and restructuring agreements in each company) the strategy has made nothing else but losses for the workers. Besides this, the union has experienced problems with keeping the workers in control in the practice of radical reform itself (see chapter 4). This failure, the report argues, should not come as a shock, since emphasising "legal means of struggle", and policy interventions, you require technocracy, resulting in reduced worker control. The report argues that the union is quite conscious of this, yet has chosen to persist with the strategy anyway.

This chapter will bring the report to a conclusion by discussing the 1997 CWIU National Congress Resolutions, specifically to note that the union stuck with radical reform against all the evidence of its failings. It will, following this discussion, try and give light into *why* labour, particularly the CWIU, has persisted in usage of a strategy that results in the weakening of worker's control of the union and its representatives in bodies like LFTF, and failed to defend the workers from assaults by capital and the state in the form of privatisation, outsourcing, casualisation and job loss. It will then proceed to discuss interpretations of this unionism, mainly critiquing radical reform as a strategy.

[406] Adler G and Webster E, 1995, page 80

[407] Adler G and Webster E, 200, page 18

The chapter will conclude by examining the relationship between radical reform, worker control and socialism, reinforcing an argument developed in the previous chapter about a tension in this combination, and advocating the abandonment of radical reform for class struggle based on the principle of worker control for the achievement of socialism. Only in "militant class struggle based on autonomous organisations acting outside and against the state"[408] as opposed to "legal means of struggle" are worker control as well as the defence and procurement of worker's gains possible.

5.2 1997 Congress resolutions: synopsis

The 1997 congress of the CWIU was the last before its 1999 merger with PPWAWU; thus, it is the last congress of the union as we know it since formed in 1974. It underwent several mergers in the 1980s, but these did not result in a name change and largely did not affect the CWIU's structure, or its position as a radical union within COSATU[409]. What the CWIU became after the 1999 merger with PPWAWU is a subject for another dissertation. Overall, the 1997 resolutions do not reflect a fundamental shift ideologically from the previous resolutions (1987-1994). However, there were important reflections on industrial and plant-based restructuring, the macroeconomic strategy, GEAR, and the possibilities of breaking from the Alliance. The union also made pronouncements on legislation, occupational health and safety, environment, and women's challenges in the workplace and in the union.

This section will discuss these resolutions under three broad themes, which come out of selective seeking of parts of the resolutions that best represent union strategy. These are: alliance reaffirmation; rejection of GEAR and stress on return to the RDP; and building organisation and worker control. The third theme must be read in connection to the developments discussed in chapter 4. Essentially, this chapter demonstrates that radical reform is a choice of the CWIU, but sets a ground for a deeper discussion about trade unionism.

[408] See Schmidt M and van der Walt L, 2009, *Black Flame: the Revolutionary class politics and anarchism and syndicalism,* Oakland; AK Press, pages 198 - 202
[409] See Rosenthal T, 1994, pages 37 – 38

5.2.1 Theme 1: Alliance Reaffirmation

In reading these resolutions, it is clear that there was a debate on keeping with the alliance and support of the ANC government. The resolutions thus begin by giving a background to the tripartite alliance:

> The April 1994 elections victory provides a framework through which citizens of our country can collectively determine their destiny as political and constitutional equals. We are called upon to correctly assess the current situation, take advantage of the many possibilities which this situation provides and fulfil the strategic objective that is socialism.[410]

The aims of the Alliance were the following:

- To attain national liberation
- To have the working class as the dominant force in the struggle so as to have its views and demands adopted as the overall guiding principles for the struggle to end poverty and exploitation[411]

Alliance partners adopted the RDP as a policy and means through which to ensure the delivery of basic needs. This has not been fully implemented[412].

The union further made pronouncements on what it called "objectives of our struggle"[413]:

> That our struggle is for total transfer of political and economic power to the working class; That our key objective is that of building an interventionist government geared towards efficient service delivery through engagement of the people.[414]

In this congress the union made assessments on the government and the Alliance in light of the objectives of the struggle and the history of the Alliance. Notice that the building of an

[410] *CWIU, Congress Resolutions*, 1997, page 2

[411] Ibid

[412] Ibid

[413] Ibid

[414] Ibid

interventionist state points to the idea (captured in the strategy of the RDP) that the way in which the union seeks to arrive at a socialist set-up is by gradual changes as opposed to revolutionary rupture.

While there is a renewed mention of the "total transfer" of "power to the working class", this has been directly linked to the social democratic project of radical reform, not a Workers Government, as suggested in the early 1990s. It is not surprising, then, that the formulation is full of tensions: between an appeal to all "citizens of our country" as "equals", and the call for the "total transfer" of "power to the working class", between the stated aim of a "total transfer" of "power" and the very modest and hardly radical objective of "efficient service delivery", and between the call for the "building of an interventionist state" and the "strategic objective" of socialism. An interventionist state is not a workers' government, and it is unclear why it should lead to socialism, especially if it serves "all citizens", drawn from all classes, as "equals".

The next sections try to overcome these problems. On the government, the union notes that "the CWIU supported" the tripartite Alliance, which "is subject to review from time to time"[415] as well as the largely Keynesian RDP. It noted that the objective of the Ministry of the RDP was constant evaluation of the programme's implementation. The union further argued that:

> The RDP is threatened by the legacy of an economy which is in a structural crisis, by the results of decades of systematic racist, capitalist and patriarchal under development and by the neo-liberal policies of globalisation; That the RDP is also threatened by class forces that are opposed to the strategic objective and who seek to purport it as a modernising and normalising project; That the RDP has to be under the working class hegemony; That the strategic programme for transformation, the RDP has not been fully implemented, which lead to the adoption of the following policies i.e. GEAR, LRA, 1995, BCEA, 1997 [Basic Conditions of Employment Act] etc.[416]

[415] Ibid, page 2

[416] Ibid

Why capitalist "class forces" should be opposed to the RDP is not explained; this formulation does help to let the ANC off the hook for abandoning the RDP, as blame can now be directed elsewhere, with the hard questions about the class character of the ANC thereby sidestepped.

That said; the union had to admit that the Alliance has blocked working class participation in important ways. It is argued that:

> No programme was formulated for engagement of the masses; as such masses remain largely spectators in the theatre of the struggle for transformation; That this is because of the objective and subjective weaknesses that confront the alliance and in particular the ANC; The alliance leadership is not accountable to the masses and operate without a mandate; There is a notion that we should break the Alliance with the ANC and the SACP and form a worker's Party; GEAR undermines all the principal features of the RDP – in its provisions around housing, health, social welfare, jobs, high real interest rates, etc.; Mass organisations are weak. There is little consultation with constituencies and decisions are made on top down basis; Campaigns have generally not been successful and they have not led to the strengthening of mass organisations.[417]

These pronouncements are so crucial that they warrant full quotation.

Yet the while the CWIU considered a break with the Alliance, possibly to form a new workers' party, it chose not to do so. The CWIU resolutions stress continuity with current policy. The resolutions went on to argue that "as COSATU" they "do not have the capacity to form a political party"[418], without indicating the basis of this assertion. This indicates that the proposal for a break of the Alliance and formation of a separate workers' political party did not receive popularity. The union stressed, instead, the critical disadvantages of breaking with the Alliance, chiefly the consciousness of the working class, also reflected in a survey conducted by Buhlungu[419]. Indeed, most of the workers' attitudes in COSATU unions at this time reflected

[417] Ibid, pages 2 - 3

[418] Ibid

[419] Buhlungu S, 2006

favour for the ANC;[420] the CWIU union also noted this reality, saying: "The political consciousness of the working class still reflects support of the ANC as reflected in the 1994 elections."[421]

The union's other reasons for not breaking the Alliance can be summed up as follows,

> The objectives of the Alliance have not yet been achieved; The resolution of the National Question – calls for an alliance with the ANC, COSATU and SACP; The struggle against apartheid and social transformation is not complete therefore the Alliance is still necessary; There is no alternative organisation with mass support; [Thus] we need to rescue the ANC from any anti-working class elements in and outside the ANC.[422]

It is mainly for these reasons that the CWIU sees the relevance of the Alliance, and it therefore plans to *save* it from "anti-working class elements", rather than leave it.[423] The union does not say how it will defeat the forces that push an "anti-working class" agenda in the Alliance; neither does it say how it will ensure the ANC returns to RDP, or even how it would deal with the obvious fact that "the Alliance" did not have shared "objectives", inasmuch as the ANC was for neo-liberalism, and COSATU was for social democracy. The union states critical disadvantages of breaking with the Alliance, chief amongst which is the consciousness of the working class, also reflected in a survey conducted by Buhlungu and reported in his work on *Trade Unions and Democracy*[424]. A major reason is the need to resolve the national question, which is the racial tension and divides that still characterise the South African society. The resolution of the race problem caused by the history of colonialism and apartheid is evidently hoped to be resolved by a strategic alliance with progressive nationalists. It is significant that the union does not refer to its own history of liberation struggle in South Africa throughout apartheid days: a history that

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[420] See Buhlungu S (ed.), 2006, *Trade Unions and Democracy: Workers' political attitudes in South Africa*, Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town

[421] *CWIU, Congress Resolutions*, 1997

[422] Ibid

[423] See Van der Walt L, 2009, *The South African Elections, Neo-liberalism and the working class strategy*, http://www.nope.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76:the-south-african-elections-neo-liberalism-and-working-class-strategy&catid=42:other-stuff&Itemid=49

[424] Buhlungu S, 2006

shows its strength, without much help from the ANC, to lead communities to defend themselves and workers to win shop floor struggles; a history of developing largely independently from political parties, a history of resolving the national question through class struggle and mass action[425].

Perhaps debating what type of a party is needed as an alternative would have been more helpful than dismissing it on the basis of assumptions about the consciousness of "the working class". The very notion of a "workers' party" itself could have been interrogated as well, by examining histories of socialist revolutions elsewhere in the world with the hope of picking up lessons and developing strategy[426]. It would have been useful, for instance, to consider the history of anarcho-syndicalist unions like the famed National Confederation of Labour (CNT), which made a revolution in Spain the 1930s. In so doing, the South African political situation and its dynamics would bee situated in a broader global history. In addition, the union should have asked questions about conditions for a socialist transition, examined socio-political pros and cons.

In essence, the conviction that runs underneath the assessments of the union is about the potential of the trade union movement in the context of South Africa to lead a revolution in and of itself as a union. Therefore, if the union asks whether other unions have managed to lead revolutions in other spaces in the world, a different outcome and reasoning would have emerged. For instance, the role of the CNT in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939, suggests that labour movements can be "parties" of their own and have the capacity to lead revolutions, without recourse to parliament or electoral or vanguard parties[427]. In addition, an assessment that considers international lessons would have also shown how radical reform in other parts of the world affected the unions[428].

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[425] See Baskin J, 1991, pages 212 – 223, Rosenthal T, 1994, pages 23 - 31

[426] Part of what Callinicos argues is an analysis that constantly takes international outlook at heart historically and presently. Indeed cases like the CNT in Spain discussed by Rocker (2004), as well as Schmidt M and van der Walt (2009) could deal a great help in this regard

[427] See Schmidt M and van der Walt L, 2009, *Black Flame: the Revolutionary class politics and anarchism and syndicalism*, Oakland; AK Press, pages 198 - 202

[428] Callinicos A, 1992, *The Agenda of the South African Left*, in A Callinicos, *Between Apartheid and Capitalism*, London: Bookmarks

Taking its assessments of the alliance, the government and the economy into consideration, the union comes out in favour of implementing radical reform more effectively:

> To deepen the understanding of Socialism in the National Democratic Revolution Project and the transformation of state institutions to ones that are responsive, answerable and accessible to the people; To maintain the Alliance by... keeping masses up to date with developments around policy changes and NEDLAC negotiations. Coming up with a programme of action to ensure the implementation of the RDP; To build the organisational authority of the ANC in all three tiers of government and ensure that ministers and other representatives are not absorbed by new elite's agenda (of modernisation) and they must remain answerable to the Alliance and the masses; We need to ensure the ANC wins the 1999 elections; In building community structures of CBO's, ANC, SACP and also provide leadership; Actively participate and hold leadership positions within the Alliance components as the case may apply in the Alliance structures and provide clear class perspective; Ensure working advancement, defence and deepening of working class interest; Where a leader is a union official and decides to stand, his/her job will remain open until the election results have been announced. The NEC shall make the final decision on participation that will be in the interests of the union[429]

The overall message that is represented by these pronouncements is a hope of redirecting the ANC from its neo-liberal route through *more* direct union participation in the state and in the economy, as opposed to leaving the development of the economy largely to market forces; in addition, the union will ensure that the problems of an Alliance without mandate and accountability to the "masses" will be resolved by "keeping masses up to date with developments around policy changes". The question is: should an alliance be continued with the ANC regardless of it maintaining GEAR, since the understanding is that it cannot implement the objectives of the RDP? If this be so, it positions the union in a context where it is no longer necessarily fighting one battle with the ANC, but fighting the bourgeois forces *in* the ANC. This

[429] *CWIU, Congress Resolutions*, 1997

results in two battles: one is within the ANC against elites with the agenda of bourgeois "modernisation"; the other is against capitalism.

The ideological underpinnings of this approach, which accepts the Alliance with an ANC that is overtly neo-liberal, yet seeks to achieve socialism, clearly need to be justified by the union. It is also not clear how, exactly, the ANC would be saved from "anti-working class forces" – or what the way forward would be if the ANC resisted a return to the RDP. By 1997, radical reform was evidently not working, yet the union drew no lessons from this, essentially recommitting itself to radical reform and a *stronger* Alliance. It seems that leaders of the movement would be sent into the ANC, ensuring that it undertook its supposed responsibility to represent the workers, as was the position in 1993 (see chapter 3). This obviously raises several questions: why should it be acceptable for the ANC to be an open space for anti-working class forces to emerge? Should the energies of the union be focused on convincing or fighting for the ANC, as a broad church, to defend the working class? Above all, how does it affect the achievement of socialism in the future?

5.2.2 Theme 2: Rejection of GEAR and to return to RDP

In discussion of its resolutions on economic issues in this congress, the union begins its pronouncements by recalling the past congress and notes that it decided:

> The state to prioritise the provision of jobs, housing, health care and free and compulsory education for the working class; Nationalisation and renationalisation of selective industries such as the building and pharmaceutical industries and privatised former state enterprises as a way of achieving these immediate priorities, and; The RDP to advance our struggle for socialism.[430]

These assertions point to the idea of socialism. The union thus sees the state as central in achieving its strategic objectives: for example, it calls for the state to provide "jobs, housing, health care, free and compulsory education; nationalisation and renationalisation of selective industries such as the building and pharmaceutical industries"[431]. Indeed, the RDP is understood as a critical tool for the achievement of socialism, albeit of a social democratic type, with social

[430] Ibid, page 34

[431] Ibid

welfare and other Keynesian aspects. This throws light on why the union pursues the ANC alliance: because the ANC serves as a best tool to win elections due to its mass base and support.

The congress goes on to make assessments of the international and South African economy, and argues:

> That the world economy continues to be in the hands of a few who own the entire wealth of the world; that a neo-liberal agenda of globalisation of capitalism stands to benefit transnational corporations and:
>
> - It campaigns against the active participation of the state in the economy
> - It campaigns for the deregulation, privatisation and cutting of public sector spending
> - It targets organised labour, arguing for flexibility in the labour market
> - It seeks to push our economies into export centred strategy, to an extend of having our economy dependent on the good will of the most powerful economic forces
>
> That implementation of neo-liberal agenda leads to increased impoverishment; That liberalisation has the most effects on women workers; That despite the 1994 elections and the adoption of the RDP; The capitalist class is still dominant over the working class therefore, the economy is in the hands of a few and the majority do not have access to wealth; The government has no say in political decisions.[432]

The union further notes that:

> The present government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) economic strategy is committed to: A bosses led economic growth; A withdrawal of the state from economy; Cuts in state expenditure, including health and education; Job loss in the civil service; Large-scale of privatisation; Deregulation of markets, including cutting of tariffs which will lead to further job loss; Labour flexibility and cheap wages; An overall approach of international competitiveness and export-led growth, unlike the RDP's commitment to meeting the basic needs of the people.

[432] Ibid

> International competitiveness and labour flexibility will lead to greater profits for bosses and greater misery for the workers, resulting in lower wages, longer working hours, job losses, casualisation and sub-contracting; GEAR is essentially an anti-working class economic programme and a setback in our struggle for socialism; The current government's economic policy deviates from the RDP and that it is a direct contrast of the RDP though cushioned in the same language as that in the RDP; That our comrades in government appear to be accepting the logic of those who drive the globalisation process.[433]

The union thus situated the South African economic dynamics within a global context, noting the economic liberalisation process that reached its height in the 1990s through structural adjustment programmes advocated by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Indeed the union was correct, as the South African economy did not produce the jobs GEAR envisaged[434], but most of all the union was experiencing at first hand the consequences of privatisation, sub-contracting and casualisation on the shop floor from many companies that had started restructuring way before the coming of GEAR,[435] as shown in chapter 4. Indeed, as previously indicated, neo-liberal policies had in fact been applied in the 1980s by the outgoing apartheid government. Thus, for the ANC government to take this route only consolidated the strife workers had already been experiencing.

The congress further resolved on GEAR:

> That our economy should aim at the following goals: Working class control of strategic companies as Banks; Ensuring state control over the economy; Ensuring that more land is available to the landless; Job creation; Promotion investment in new factories that will create and not on shares in the JSE; Promoting the development of local industries; That all the steps we take are part of the process leading to socialist society, democratically controlled by workers.

[433] Ibid

[434] See Heintz J, 2003, Nattrass N, 2001

[435] See the previous chapter on the discussion of Industrial Restructuring

> Reject GEAR as an economic strategy, on the basis that it is an anti-working class economic strategy; To call the Alliance partners to reject GEAR – with immediate effect; To campaign against all areas of GEAR: – privatisation, welfare grants, job cuts, jobless growth; To unite with civic, youth, student, women and other organisations to campaign against GEAR; Strengthen COSATU's role in the NEDLAC through greater accountability of NEDLAC representatives, regular report backs to workers and a programme of mass action to back up working class demands.[436]

The role of the state:

> The state should be both producer and regulator of economic activity; In order for the state to deliver on infrastructural development, it will be necessarily for the state to ensure nationalisation of;

- Water, land, educational institutions, forests, pharmaceutical companies, transport, telecommunications, building material industry, mineral wealth and mines, hospitals, electricity.[437]

The logical conclusion lies with the state at the centre of the economic practice that CWIU believes will lead to achievement of its objectives. The building blocks for socialism as an end goal are central to the capture of the state. But the state that the union is dealing with at this point is certain to be opposed to this goal due to its macroeconomic strategy; thus the union plans to campaign for the strategy to be altered.

Such appeals will be made; the union does not plan a radically militant strategy in dealing with GEAR, but calls for the *Alliance* to reject GEAR, joining and campaigning for the government of the ANC ("comrades in government") to have a change of heart. The problem is that it is not explained why, if the "world economy continues to be in the hands of a few who own the entire wealth of the world", with a "neo-liberal agenda of globalisation of capitalism" applied universally, the ANC itself being committed by the use of GEAR to a "bosses led economic growth", there was any prospect of the ANC rejecting this route.

[436] CWIU, Congress Resolutions, 1997, pages 39

[437] Ibid, page 43

Obviously a liberal-pluralist view of the state is assumed. It is assumed that the state is open to all social forces, and can readily be won over by the working class. It is neither a bourgeois instrument (as Marxism would have it), or an inherently elitist structure (as the anarchists argue), but somehow open enough that reforms in the Alliance and the other methods of radical reform will suffice to can shift its direction towards a "left version of social democracy". This is shown by the way in which the state is presented as a *victim* of neo-liberalism: "our comrades in government appear to be accepting the logic of *those who drive the globalisation process*" (emphasis added).

This is exactly in line with Websterian hopes that the state can be part of a "counter-movement" against the "social destruction wrought by the market" – a view that casts the state as saviour from, rather central perpetrator of, neo-liberalism. Somehow capitalism is seen to have an inherent logic that is so firmly embedded that only socialism can suffice, in the final analysis, as a solution, yet the state is viewed, despite the history of both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, as somehow free of any inherent structural imperatives. Hoping to present the state as open, Webster and Von Holdt even quote President Thabo Mbeki's 1998 speech, about "two nations" divided and living in two economies, as evidence of shifts by the ANC towards redistributive policies[438]. Yet Mbeki never wavered from GEAR, occasional left rhetoric aside.

It seems a bit naïve to recommend that labour remains in alliance with the ANC state on the bases of speeches, rather than demonstrable policies, or on the basis that the state provides some welfare, not withstanding its concrete overall and ongoing commitment to the very policies that cause growing demands for welfare – neo-liberal policies[439]. If the state does not turn back from the route of privatisation and outsourcing, which affects workers, and from market led growth, it is simply not on the side of the working class, no matter how much welfare it gives to the poor, this does not lead to any worker control of production, any self-sufficiency, let alone radical reforms. The underlying assumption here is that the state is an instrument, an entity with no interests of its own, thus it can be swayed to and fro.

If the state provides jobs through public works programmes that offer employment at low wages (sourcing cheap labour) and on temporary terms (months), this is not Keynesianism, but simply a

[438] Webster E and Von Holdt K, 2005, page 35

[439] See a discussion on welfare states in Callinicos A, 1992, Between Apartheid and Capitalism, Bookmarks: London

neo-liberal outsourcing of labour; it is very different to a situation where workers are permanent employees of a particular company in which organisation of resistance over a period of time could lead to control of production. Even as social spending on things like education, health and housing can indeed reduce the burden on the poor, employment is important for access to the means of production that are separated from the majority. All that has happened, as shown in chapter 4, is the threatening of workers through retrenchments, outsourcing and privatisation, which also results in the weakening of labour movements. As Callinicos puts it:

> The embryo of an authentically socialist form exists in the workplace – and delegate-based democracy that has evolved in the unions. It is through the preservation, strengthening and expansion of these forms that workers can develop their ability to take control of society and run it along radically different lines from those involved in any conceivable variety of capitalism.[440]

An obvious alternative to fighting the neo-liberals in the ANC, while blindly supporting its election efforts, would simply be abstaining from participation in the 1999 elections - the ANC does need the Alliance – or let us say, COSATU - to win elections. This bargaining tool is not even evoked by the CWIU in its deliberations.

Likewise, the congress wants the *strengthening* of participation of COSATU in NEDLAC structures, and seeks to ensure accountability of representatives to members and affiliates. This is despite the proof that the experience of the CWIU thus far has proven fruitless, as shown in the previous chapter on industrial restructuring. The union still seeks to use these structures with a hope that this will not reduce worker control of decisions in the union, even though its own reflections indicate that this is exactly what has happened, for it is hard for representatives to maintain the report-back system as agreed in the 1993 National Policy Workshop[441]. Indeed this challenge of accountability has been running as a concern since the establishment of NEF and NMC, and their successor, NEDLAC[442]: "How do we prevent the NMC, NEC from becoming a committee remote from membership?"[443]

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[440] Callinicos A, 1992, *The Agenda of the South African Left*, in A Callinicos, *Between Apartheid and Capitalism*, Bookmarks, London, page 152

[441] *CWIU, National Policy Workshop Report*, 1993, page 20

[442] Ibid

It is clear that participation in these structures stems from the need to use the state to score gains and building blocks for socialism, and it is not considered by the union as a strategic choice in pursuit of its objectives.

5. 2.3 Theme 3: Building the Organisation and Worker Control

Once more in this conference, the union dealt with the lack of participation of workers in union activities, as is clear from the discussion above on restructuring and tripartite structures. It noted "that lack of participation by workers in many unions, including the CWIU may lead to bureaucratisation"[444]. In addition, "within CWIU and COSATU and the mass movement, worker control and democratic accountability has been weakened in our structures"[445]. It further argued that worker control and working class leadership are cornerstones of the ways to achieve socialism. The union insisted:

> It is only under a democratic, socialist society where the working class, under the leadership of organised workers, is in control of the state and the economy that:
>
> - All forms of oppression and exploitation will be eradicated
> - All citizens will be guaranteed collective democracy
> - All people will be ensured decent housing, living wages and full education
>
> Therefore resolve:-
>
> To strengthen worker control in our union at all levels; To advance worker control/participation and working class leadership at all levels of society based on class struggle; Promote worker participation in all structures outside the union (community, COSATU, ANC, SACP and meetings with the State and Capital); To continue our struggle for socialism.[446]

Here the union admits the weakening of worker participation, without asking what causes it – and, particularly, its relationship to the radical reform strategy – and without explaining how it

[443] Ibid, also see *CWIU, National Policy Workshop,* 1993, page 60

[444] CWIU, Congress Resolutions, 1997, page 11

[445] Ibid

[446] Ibid, pages 11 – 12

can be averted in the future. Indeed, if the union has had worker control before, something must have caused its reduction; the recognition of this activity is crucial for sustainable solutions to be put in place. Moreover, extending worker control on the shop floor links to worker control in the union, yet this is lacking from the union's discussion. The organisation also insists on ensuring worker participation and leadership at all levels of society before achieving it and articulating how it will be achieved in the union structures first, such as IR Pillar activities, before achieving it in structures like NEDLAC and on the shop floor.

It is noteworthy that the union aims to "strengthen COSATU's role in the NEDLAC through greater accountability of NEDLAC representatives, regular report backs to workers and a programme of mass action to back up working class demands"[447], while on the same note it speaks about advancement of "worker control/participation and working class leadership at all levels of society based on class struggle"[448]. Strengthening the participation of COSATU in NEDLAC through "greater accountability" and "back up with mass action" seems to have a similar meaning with achieving "control/participation and working class leadership" through "class struggle" to the union. Whilst for scholars like Van der Walt[449] and Callinicos[450], the notion of "class struggle" implies militant *abstention* from all forms of class partnerships, including corporatism, refusing to co-manage capitalism. The union retained its faith in a combination of mass mobilisation and participation in the structures of power, a process Adler and Webster called "dual emphasis"[451].

Indeed, Van Meelis, CWIU's industrial strategies co-ordinator, who represented the union in various NEDLAC structures stresses that the idea was "not to get co-opted"[452] in these structures and keep workers involved and informed in what happens in at NEDLAC.

Nevertheless, the union continues to assert its dedication to socialism and democracy: that is, the democratic control of the state and economy by the "working class under the leadership of

[447] Ibid, page 39

[448] Ibid, page 12

[449] Van der Walt, 2009, *Saving jobs in South Africa in the crunch: 'engage' or revolt***?** **http://www.anarkismo.net/article/12781**

[450] Callinicos A, 1992, pages 151

[451] Adler G and Webster E (eds.), 2000, *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*, 1985 – 1997, Macmillan Press: Britain, page 18

[452] Tanya Van Meelis, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, September, 2010

organised workers", and not the ANC. Indeed, the current ANC, from the reading of this resolution, cannot be this organisation; thus the union will "promote worker participation", indeed a word used interchangeably with "worker control", and working class leadership in the ANC.

The idea is that the ANC must be turned into an organisation that is controlled by workers and serves the working class; it must create a democratic state controlled by the working class through an organisation under the leadership of organised workers, where it must control the economy and society for "all forms of oppression and exploitation [to] be eradicated; All citizens [to] be guaranteed collective democracy; All people [to] be ensured decent housing, living wages and full education"[453].

These assertions are confirmed by the COSATU congress that took place later in 1997. In a document entailed "*Building socialism now: preparing for the new millennium*",[454] which "is a result of a 1997 COSATU congress resolution on socialism"[455] intended "for use in COSATU, SACP and affiliated for education programmes",[456] the union movement outlines its radical reform approach explicitly: "the COSATU resolution on socialism calls for a programme of 'building socialism now' and details 'building blocks for socialism in the present'",[457] which are "building a robust anti-capitalism – which mean relentless criticism of capitalism, building working class hegemony in many areas"[458] of society; "rolling back the market" from providing basic services such as "water, education, shelter, health care"[459]; "transforming the state – a powerful public sector is crucial component of socialism... our vision is that it should be developmental and facilitate participation and consultation"[460]; "advancing and experimenting with other, non-capitalist forms of ownership such as cooperatives"[461]; "transforming how work

[453] CWIU, Congress Resolutions, 1997
[454] *COSATU/SACP, 1999, Building socialism now: preparing for the new millennium*, booklet published by COSATU and SACP: Johannesburg
[455] Ibid, preface
[456] Ibid
[457] Ibid, page 67
[458] Ibid, page 68
[459] Ibid
[460] Ibid
[461] Ibid

is organised and managed – towards worker control and worker self-management"[462]; "strengthen worker organisation"[463].

The way in which radical reform is articulated is that the process of building these blocks brings workers into a state of self-management and self- determination. Part of the belief is that in nationalisation, the control must be by worker structures and not the state[464]; indeed, activities such as "consultation, negotiations, and participation on company boards"[465] are preparatory stages for the ultimate control by workers; "if real industrial democracy is to be achieved, workers have to advance beyond" these. So, in essence, in radically reforming the state, economy and their institutions, workers are in preparatory stages for socialist democratic control.

The same document, however, expressly views these radical reforms as taking placing *through* the Alliance with the ANC and SACP, rather than against it, and thus, ends up reaffirming the view, seen earlier, that the task is to win the ANC away from "anti-working class" forces. Equally, however, all the proposed measures are assumed as measures that will be achieved peacefully, the assumption being one of endless advance; the question of what will be done if capital or the state refuses to engage in class compromises that gradually advance workers' control is not addressed, nor is the possibility of a basic contradiction between the strategy, class compromise and co-management of capitalism, and the goal, socialism.

5.3 Why pursue Radical Reform against all odds?

This report does not claim to entirely answer the question of why the labour movement sticks with the strategy of radical reform. However, it will provide some reasons that may explain the persistence of radical reform as a choice of the ways in which the unions seeks to advance, defend and realise the interest of the workers. This is largely because of the scope of this research, which focused on archives and in-depth interviews with strategic leaders, limiting the extent to which conclusive conclusions can be made in this report about why the union sticks with radical reform. A study to do this will have to examine the grass roots impact of all the choices the unions makes, look at NEDLAC and other state institutions, as well as the socio-

[462] Ibid

[463] Ibid

[464] Ibid, page 70

[465] Ibid

political dynamics of the chemical industry and the whole economy and how it affects the workers and the union. Here, only the view of the union, and, indeed, the interpretations of those interviewed will be engaged to develop an understanding of why this might be the case. Even in this pursuit it is important to keep in mind that respondents did not include stewards, and thus their intellectual interventions to this question would be of even greater importance.

In the 1987 historic congress of COSATU, which Baskin argues proved that COSATU could offer leadership at a time when all other progressive anti-apartheid movements were weak (they ultimately got banned in 1988), unionists resolved on the adoption of the Freedom Charter. This decision almost divided the movement, for all its complexities, but marked the consolidation of the ANC/ Congress influence in the union.

Indeed, the CWIU did not have an official position on the Freedom Charter, as it had divided the union so deeply: leaders thought a return on the issue after congress would be more practicable for unity to prevail. However, the CWIU did adopt the Freedom Charter eventually, although along the lines of a radical interpretation similar to NUMSA i.e. the Freedom Charter was merely a stepping stone towards socialism, a *minimum* programme[466]. The Freedom Charter would be the basis upon which both capital and the state would be reformed, laying a basis for the socialist transition. Indeed, part of the critique of the Freedom Charter was its limitations in putting necessary conditions for the ending of national oppression and exploitation. Blake Moseley captures the debate as follows:

> The debate around the Freedom Charter was generally; to what extent does the Freedom Charter actually provide a good basis for directing the struggle into a socialist direction. One particular criticism of it then was that it does not guarantee the right to strike to workers as an example. And so the other point made was that working class leadership has to be won in practice not just in theory.[467]

[466] Baskin J, 1992, pages 212 – 223

[467] Moseley B, in Rosenthal T, 1994, *Struggle for Workers' Rights: A History of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union*, CWIU, Durban, pages 50 – 51

In the post-apartheid state and economy, the union clearly regarded nationalisation, expanded workers' rights and ongoing worker leadership as steps towards ultimately realising socialism. This is indeed a radical reform agenda, which in essence seeks, in the short term, a compromise with capital and the state, prioritising the removal of national oppression; "a left version of social democracy", as the Websterian tradition would prefer to call it[468].

The union's deliberations in the 1997 congress reflect that this ANC/ Congress influence still remains very strong. Indeed, the union's return to an admittedly failing strategy of radical reform is linked to support of the ANC, to the Alliance. The support for the ANC, which had adopted a largely neo-liberal framework, necessitates support for the state. In justification of the support of the ANC, the congress noted the support workers still gave to the ANC, as demonstrated by the 1994 elections; thus, we can assume, a break with the ANC would be unpopular with a majority of the working class. This congress also cited the importance of the national question as justification of the Alliance. Indeed, the national question is the resolution of racial inequalities, which the ideology of National Democratic Revolution argues needs an alliance with nationalists for its resolution in a two-stage approach to socialism[469].

This is made even clearer by the COSATU congress in that very year[470]. This further suggests that if unions do not support the ANC, as a black government, it may make way for a white government, a factor perhaps not favourable with the not-so-far-off history of white rule in this country. Whatever we may think about the national question necessitating the Alliance, taking into cognisance the failures and the detriments neoliberalism has caused for the life of the black working class in this country and which the ANC has persisted in implementing, what is clear is that unionists see the national question as important, and then assume that the national question can only be resolved by means of staying in the Alliance.

Scepticism about splitting from the ANC was indeed noted in the early 1990s by the CWIU, as shown in chapter 3 of this report. Fears were specifically expressed around the ANC's insistence on attracting foreign investment. However, it is important to see that radical reform tries to

[468] See Adler G and Webster E, 1995

[469] See *COSATU/SACP, 1999, Building socialism now: preparing for the new millennium*, booklet published by COSATU and SACP: Johannesburg, pages 61 -65

[470] Ibid

resolve, or at least rhetorically promises that it can combine "legal means of struggle" with "a radical version of social democracy"; and we must note that this promise is critical for how the union understands the political situation in South Africa, for it allows the union not to be unpopular with the majority of the working class by leaving the Alliance, yet holding on to its vision of socialism. In addition, it is noteworthy that unionists had a great hope in that upon agreeing on a soft version of what they initially thought of the reconstruction strategy[471], they had come with a government that would make necessary interventions against capital, and for the working class, through the RDP. Finally, the union (without much justification) believed it does not have capacity to establish an alternative to the ANC.

These reasons present a predicament in the union's strategy, which is indeed demonstrated by adoption of radical reform in the first place: how do we pursue a radical vision of socialism without contradicting the support of the ANC, without being unpopular to the majority of the working class? This is the predicament the 1997 CWIU Congress found itself to be in.

In addition, the interviews reveal that among the reasons for resolutions to take the direction of the ANC is the influential Congress/populist tradition within the union movement. Indeed, from the late 1980s, as Chris Bonner, the CWIU's organiser in the 1980s and National Education Officer in the 1990s, argues, there were shifts to accommodate the Congress influence in relation to what was happening in the country. She says:

> The unions were not the answer but they were the key to change. They were operating legally and we had that space to operate. But I think the tensions started to come up in the 1980s, especially when we were moving towards starting to form to unified trade union movement. I think on the kind of FOSATU side there was a softening up and an opening up, to some extent – not massively – but definitely they also started to enter more populist ways of doing things. Beginning… like with the boycotts, and with stayaways, starting to move much more to try and accommodate what was happening… Where you got the other

[471] See Gotz G, 2000, pages 159 – 189

> groupings talking much more about working with the communities, that kind of thing[472]

Bonner insists: "Within Chemical you also had different tensions. You had those who were more aligned with the ANC, then you had the more workerist grouping and then you had the more far left groupings"[473]. This pattern is confirmed by Don Gumede, who was president in early 1990s. He believed that the union was dominated by 'workerists' from its formation, but in the 1980s, it tilted to Congress 'populists'[474]. Aligned to the ANC, they used democratic structures of the union, of which the 'independent worker bloc' was so proud, to influence members to agree to the Alliance with the ANC[475]. So in essence, there were three main tendencies in the CWIU; Congress supporters (also called), workerists/ the 'independent worker bloc' (who were thought to be pushing union independence; sometimes also incorrectly called 'syndicalists') and the independent left (also called independent Marxists)[476].

In the late 1980s and the 1990s the Congress tendency became more influential in the union; according to Gumede, the adoption of the Freedom Charter and the Harare Declaration (which included a set of principles to guide negotiations for the removal of apartheid), were indications of this influence. Martin Jansen, who identified himself with the independent Marxist or left tendency, states:

> Initially, we supported the idea of the Workers' Charter... but gradually we began to shift, more so because of the popularity, it was a bit opportunistic, of the Freedom Charter... We also felt that what was contained in the Freedom Charter was quite radical, and could be interpreted as socialist in character, so eventually as the debate raged on we then supported the congress elements within the CWIU cause; with the ANC's rising popularity more and more congress ANC type of people emerged from the ranks and were employed in the CWIU... so within the

[472] Chris Bonner, *Interview by Nathasha Vally*, September, 2009

[473] Ibid

[474] Don Gumede, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, September, 2009

[475] Ibid

[476] See Baskin for an elaborate discussion of these tendencies in COSATU, Baksin J, 1992, pages 91 – 108, 212 – 223

> CWIU ANC gained more popularity because of their popularity in the mass struggle.[477]

Furthermore, for Appolis this shift became necessary "because the syndicalists [he meant the 'workerists' – MQN] [478] accepted the hegemony of the Congress movement"[479]; he explains that this is:

> part of... shifts that sort of took place in the early 1990s, and that is why you find in post-1994..., many of them, of the syndicalists [sic.] are actually moving to various positions within the post-apartheid state, you find them being directors in the department of the Presidency... they occupied sort of different positions in the state because of that shift that sort of took place[480].

These tendencies are important considerations if we are to understand the choices or resolutions reached by the union. Appolis argues that the lines of workerists were blurring in the union with those of the Congress, they were changing and effectively reconfiguring their views in a pro-ANC, and pro-social democratic direction. So for him, in the post-1994 political spectrum in the CWIU, these two groups, 'workerists' and 'populists', were increasingly uniting and were often opposed to the independent leftists. That is, the issue was no simply the rise of the 'populists', but the shifting views of the 'workerists' as well. Thus, if sympathisers with the Congress movement are the majority and dominant tendency in the union, choices to stick with the Alliance relate exactly to this reality. When asked about radical reform and its working in the union, Jansen had this to say:

> There is nothing radical about... the notions of radical reform, that was just rhetoric... from the side of myself and others who were more Marxist oriented... we took reforms very seriously, or the need for reforms or workers' struggle for

[477] Martin Jansen, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, September 2009

[478] This label must not be confused to mean that there were anarchists in the federation: it was used without much actual consideration of the anarcho-syndicalist tradition in general, and was a convenient label for people who emphasised union independence from political parties, prioritised shop floor struggle or were critical of the ANC. See Baskin J, 1992 for a discussion of the usage of labels in COSATU

[479] John Appolis, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, August 2009

[480] Ibid

> reforms very seriously... We always tried to enradicalise them, and give it more revolutionary content to build workers consciousness and build the strength of workers' organisation... which is why personally I always jumped into getting involved in mass campaigns and organising.[481]

Indeed, it appears that the meaning of class struggle seems must be clarified; nevertheless for some, there were no radical gains out of radical reform politics, which instead led to participation in state institutions and reduced activity on the part of the workers. Indeed, the 1993 NEC workshop did ask about the "threat to worker control because of high levels of negotiation"[482] despite some officials denying the existence of this threat at this time[483].

The understanding is that part of the reason why the union chose to stick with radical reform is related to the ANC supporters or Congress tendency, which was predominant in the CWIU. Be that as it may, there is nothing new the CWIU hoped to do except intensifying control of those who negotiate through mandates and reports, fighting the liberals in the ANC, and strategic abstention from teams and factory forums on the shop floor. Noteworthy as well, is that the alternative tendency did not have concrete responses to the critical concerns that confronted the union at that time. This is so especially with very idea of the national question, which the congress types emphasised needed alliance with the ANC.

5.4 The power of interpretation: Websterian radical reform and the promise of socialism

The COSATU/SACP document on "building socialism now" uses the term "transformative unionism"[484] instead of "strategic unionism", and speaks of specific gains that must be achieved for socialism to be realised. However, it is basically the same "building blocks" approach towards gradually achieving socialism, entailing cooperation with the state and capital, and falling in the reformist tradition of socialism (evolutionary socialism/ parliamentary socialism, 'democratic socialism', social democracy) as opposed to the two revolutionary traditions of

[481] Martin Jansen, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, September 2009

[482] *CWIU Policy Workshop Report*, pages 16 Apolli 17

[483] Tanya Van Meelis, *Interview with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi*, September, 2010

[484] COSATU/SACP, 1999, page 69

socialism: political/authoritarian socialism (mainly classical Marxism) and libertarian/anti-state socialism (mainly anarchism/syndicalism)[485].

The Websterian tradition refers to "legal means of struggle", and we ought to see how this is in direct tension with ambitions of worker control of the union – let alone workers' control of production. "Legal means of struggle" justify the need for state and capital power structures on the basis that socialism is not possible yet, but even if this were true, it still does *not* follow that just because you cannot inaugurate socialism tomorrow, today you have to work/collaborate with the class enemy.

If you cannot say how you will install socialism tomorrow, you are not necessarily saying you also do not know how to defend gains against the enemy: defend employment, working conditions and high wages. These gains which the union movement has secured through class struggle can be defended, even extended, without necessarily cooperating with capital and the state; there is also nothing that makes such cooperation is an inevitable outcome of the transition. Indeed, if by "social movement forms of protest and struggle"[486] we are saying something that makes employers come to the table and give you what you want, and then in this case can you negotiate, make a gain, then the focus on "legal means of struggle" is misleading, Labour is not powerful because it registered under the LRA, or active in the NMC, NEF and then NEDLAC, but powerful because of its *mobilisation* of the masses through shop floor struggle *outside* the centres of power. Even the NMC/ NEF/ NEDLAC were born from struggles like the twenty-one–day strike that shook the Chamber of Mines in 1987 where "340 000 miners were involved, and almost five million working shifts were lost"[487]; the 2,5 million people who went on stayaway in 1987 May 6 and 7, the 10 000 workers of OK Bazaarswho went on strike[488], and approximately 800 000 participated in a Transvaal stayaway in 1985, 6 000 of whom belonged to SASOL, a factory organised by CWIU,[489] and so on.

These battles which took over a decade or two from the early 1970s and ranged from recognition battles to battles for the political struggle of black people, are what makes labour a power to be

[485] Schmidt M and van der Walt L, 2009, pages 6
[486] Adler and Webster E, 2000, page 18

[487] Baskin J, 1992, page 224

[488] Ibid, page 189

[489] Rosenthal T, 1997, page 81

reckoned with. If this be so, when labour no longer does this, what will make it a power? The state will always have the military ready any day to execute its instructions, capital will control the means of production; but indeed labour has only its unity, and its class struggle as the sources of its bargaining power. Any strategy that undermines these – and I have suggested radical reform is precisely such a strategy – poses a real danger to the very power of the unions.

Radical reform, discussed and advocated by the Websterian interpretation, is appealing because it promises to resolve the tensions between a radical version of social democracy, and "legal means of struggle", and "social movement forms of protest and struggle" and the new parliamentary democracy. However, it fails simply because it does not work, providing a left rhetoric for ongoing working class defeats. Thus, COSATU claims optimistically that "The transition may... be marked by contradictions, stagnations and major reverses. History is not a smooth process and does not have a guaranteed outcome."[490] But if "contradictions, stagnations and major reverses" are the *primary* outcome of the radical reform strategy, there is no reason to assume that there will be any outcome "guaranteed" besides defeat after defeat.

5.5 Radical Reform, worker control and socialism

The goal of the union has persistently been that of socialism and "workers' control". The Websterian school has tended to overstate the progress of radical reform in yielding results towards the achievement of a "radical vision of socialism". In looking at the transformation of "apartheid workplace" the Websterian school does not consider whether the strategy brings labour a step closer to control of production means or self-sufficiency, or makes a fundamental shift in capitalism. Rather we are left to assume that efforts are informed by this goal, and that, overall, enough progress is being made to justify the strategy being maintained.

Nevertheless, it is critical to notice the changing meaning of worker control in the discourse of radical reform, and how this is related to the difference of meaning espoused in 'class struggle'. Tendencies in the union against radical reform are not able to depart from radical reform even as they critique it, because they still think you can intensify mass mobilisation in parallel to radicalising negotiations: both the discussion document by Appolis and some of the interviews quoted above demonstrate this.

[490] *COSATU/SACP, 1999,* page 62

Websterians speak of "dual emphasis" as part of the process in the practice of radical reform. In essence, the Websterian tradition promises to balance worker control, a radical vision of socialism and 'legal means of struggle', but sacrifices 'class struggle' labelling it 'social movement type of protest'. In this dual emphasis, you have a changed role of workers in that they sacrifice actively determining union activities within the union itself, turning towards "high levels of negotiation"[491] that require technocracy. The role they therefore play is that of "a passive mass ready to be mobilised by union leadership to reinforce institutional positions and policy influences"[492].

The union's clear description of socialism has never wavered from seeing the use of the state as imperative: this is demonstrable in CWIU's congress resolutions from 1987, 1989, 1991 and 1997, as well as the 1993 Policy Workshop and the COSATU/SACP pronouncements about building socialism. The difference is that the view of the state is increasingly a social democratic, rather than a Soviet one, COSATU and the SACP state:

> Our vision of socialism is no longer saying that the state should own the economy. Experience has shown that the state can exploit just as easily as the private sector.[493]

What is this vision of socialism? The document states:

> Socialism is a transitional social system between capitalism (and other systems based on class oppression and exploitation) and a fully classless, communist society. The socialist transition may well be of long duration. The transition may also be marked by contradictions, stagnations and major reverse... Socialism requires working class hegemony, and it is characterised by four core features: democracy, equality, freedom and the socialisation of the predominant part of the economy.[494]

[491] *CWIU Policy Workshop Report*, pages 16 - 17

[492] Barchiesi F and Bramble T (eds.), *Introduction*, Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New, South Africa', Ashgate Publishing: USA, page 5

[493] COSATU/SACP, 1997, page 70

[494] Ibid, page 62

Socialisation of the economy includes worker-controlled production and distribution of social surplus, inclusive of control of pension and provident funds. However, in achieving this, the labour movement sees the usage of the state as key.

The reality is that in the assessments of the practice thus far, the state has not only refused to promise socialism, it has diverted from a more interventionist role in the market to one that emphasises private sector ownership and direction of major sectors of the economy, coupled with privatisation and outsourcing. Even Websterian radical reform requires a different state. Therefore, what do workers do when radical reform failed at least to provide a state that it needs? What indeed is to be done, if you are to defend the gains of workers (employment and its basic conditions), and draw closer to socialism? The first step is to interrogate the theory of the state that is being deployed. We have seen that radical reform assumes a liberal-pluralist model of the state, but given COSATU's manifest ability to have even so moderate a programme as the RDP implemented, perhaps it is worth revisiting Marxists and anarchist views of the state, as perhaps better guides to action.

It is also the contention of this report that a clear distinction must be drawn between mass mobilisation in "dual emphasis" and in "class struggle outside and against the state". This distinction has implications for the idea or practice of worker control against bureaucratic tendency in the union. If workers are to control their unions, as Ulrich notes in the case of the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC), the immediate predecessor of FOSATU, tension arises "between the creation of a democratic trade union culture and the workers' support of more autocratic political and traditional leaders and populist movements".[495] In the TUACC period, the contradiction was manifested in the support of a substantial section of unionists for the Kwa-Zulu homeland government. Today, the tension centres on participation in bodies such as NEDLAC, and in the Alliance – it is a tension that must be resolved.

5.6 Militant class struggle and radical reform

The maintenance of a democratic culture embedded in the union structures such as the shop stewards, branches and executive committees requires mandates, report-backs and the option of

[495] Ulrich N, 2007, Abstract

recalling leaders[496]. However, in interaction with bodies such as the state and its structures, a theorisation of the state will be helpful for how that relationship will better function. Indeed, the CWIU's idea of withdrawing participation from teams and forums because they discuss retrenchments, issues that affect workers negatively, is a starting point in that the agenda of the structure is considered before participation.

Indeed, the agenda of the state is also neo-liberal and seeks privatisation, and should be subjected to such withdrawal. However, in addition, we need to ask how participation in the state as an institution that is able to shift from a worker-friendly (RDP) agenda at one point to one that is overtly and unmistakeably hostile (GEAR), will affect the workers' movement. Rocker argues that participation in the politics of the state "destroys the belief in the necessity of constructive socialist activity and, worst of all, the impulse to self help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above"[497]. This constructive socialist activity in which the 'impulse of self help' by workers or "self confidence of workers' organisations" is built[498] concretely speaks to a type of political activity where solutions and victories are worked out from popular direct involvement of workers.

The strategy of radical reform, in its insistence on participation in state institutions, has eroded the activity of workers' organisation from the shop floor to negotiating forums like the LFTF. This involvement, beyond its requirement of technocracy, focuses workers' attention on solutions to their struggles from above, building confidence to expert negotiation, technocracy and research, which, in the period under study, failed to yield results. However, a different political activity that gives workers direct involvement in planning, building from the shop floor through worker leaders by mandates and report-backs, results in confidence in their own efforts to create a better life for themselves. The "self-help impulse", which is important for self-confidence in one's own organisational capacity, cannot be realised through "legal means of struggle", as these have isolated workers and divided the unions.

The tools of militant class struggle outside and against the state, indeed driven through worker control principles that the unions in South Africa built as their legendary achievement, gives

[496] See Ulrich N, 2007, Buhlungu S, 2001

[497] Rocker R, 2004, page 54

[498] Callinicos A, 1992, page 66

workers the direct schooling in organisation, planning and fighting that is required to lead and control production in a socialist society. The struggle fought this way makes more possible the schooling of workers for control than the practices of "dual emphasis" that use mass mobilisation to merely support a process largely beginning and ending in negotiations remote from workers direct planning, organisation and fighting.

The intensification of militant class struggle outside and against the state – which consists of "militant abstention" from managing neoliberalism and capitalism, and of struggle waged through shop floor mobilisation, including occupations, strikes and boycotts – if it does not yield victories in terms of short-term demands, nonetheless promotes a self-help impulse involving popular democratic participation of workers. Indeed, the promise of radical reform not only failed in implementation, but was simply an illogical pursuit that sacrificed worker control traditions and has resulted in retrenchments, privatisation, outsourcing and casualisation, which got managed in collaboration with the enemies of the working class.

As Callinicos argued in 1992 against Godongwana, South Africa will provide another example of failed social democratic politics and unionism. He insisted to South African socialists that "if [they] do not learn from mistakes elsewhere in the world, they run the risk of repeating them"[499]. Godongwana dismissed this as mere "rhetoric and dogmatism"[500] at the time. Yet today, Callinicos' prognosis can be confirmed by the South African historical record of more than a decade of "strategic cooperation with capital and the state". It is the refusal to learn from "mistakes elsewhere in the world" that is truly "dogmatism", the road to a blunder that went against historical lessons, and that ended with compromises that left the workers vulnerable but weakened their militant self-built organisations. The results of privatisation, outsourcing and retrenchments are proof of gains lost, asphyxiation of socialist dreams and activity as worker control of organisations was undermined.

This history of union strategy proves that 'having tea and biscuits with the masters'[501] yields no results, while militant class struggle outside and against the state and capital certainly does.

[499] Ibid, page 65

[500] Godongwana E, 1992, page 21

[501] This is adapted from Steve Biko, referring to whites as masters who often invited blacks for tea to discuss their struggle in apartheid South Africa. Although Biko never emphasised unions and factory as sites of struggle, this phrase is useful for what

Restructuring could have not taken place in the 1980s in the same way as it did in the 1990s, for the epoch of the 1980s was one of emphasis on worker control and militancy, not of "legal means of struggle". The words of Rudolf Rocker are also true in the South African case:

> Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity and, worst of all the impulse of self help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above... Socialism steadily lost its character of a cultural society, and, therefore, could not let itself be halted by the artificial frontiers of the nation states... So inevitably the labour movement was gradually incorporated in the equipment of the national state and restored to this the equilibrium which it had actually lost before.[502]

In essence, this report, above all it does, contributes two significant points to labour studies in South Africa; firstly is that radical reform has, as a strategy, not benefited the workers. Secondly, the herein argumentation is such that even if it did defend worker's gains or benefit them, it still would have weakened the labour movement. It has affected it like an "insidious poison" specifically realised in the existent failure to bridge the gap between the leaders, researchers and technicians above, and the rank and file – leading to the annihilation of the "necessity of constructive Socialist activity and, worst of all the impulse of self help" that manifested in the 1980s through the idea of worker control. These are the years of worker control, strategic partnerships and solidarity with social movements and other organisations of the oppressed, indeed, the years of no having tea and biscuits with the bosses.

The history carried by these years must speak concretely to worker's present realities, and inform the strategy to advance their interests in a world of continuous precariousness of social security manifested in forms of casualisation, outsourcing, privatisation and other social ills. This nostalgia must be used to resist "inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above", and seek to release the movement of the workers from the

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radical reform as union strategy boils down to. See Biko S, 1996, *Black Souls in White Skins* in *I write what I like*, Raven Press: South Africa

[502] Rocker R, 1938, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, AK Press: Scotland, pages 54 – 55

asphyxiation caused by radical reform. It must help realise self sufficiency and socialist activity that labour is capable of; a revolutionary potential of the working class labour movement.

This report is a conversation about and with trade union strategy from the union's point of view. The idea of socialism, what it means, and how, taking conditions of the working class at this point, can it be achieved, remains central. A clear vision, concretely extrapolated will assist to set an achievable program. Nevertheless, the report dealt with what was present in union strategy, and how this affected the union overtime, that is to say how its conceptualisation of strategy and the practice thereof interacted and shaped the life of the union. Thus, it is an evaluation of set objectives, ideas and aspirations of the trade union movement.

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