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**DEMOCRACY AND MODERNISATION IN THE MAKING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN
TRADE UNION MOVEMENT: THE DILEMMA OF LEADERSHIP, 1973 - 2000**

Maxwell Sakhela Buhlungu

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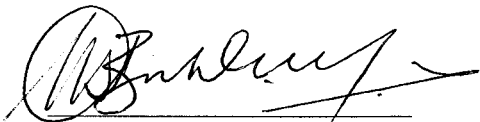
M. S. BUHLUNGU

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology).

Johannesburg, September 2001

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



Maxwell Sakhela Buhlungu

12TH day of SEPTEMBER, 2001

Dedication

To my family, nuclear and extended!

Abstract

Through an examination of the tradition of 'worker control' and the changing role of full-time officials in the post-1973 unions, this thesis examines a theme which has preoccupied the minds of sociologists since the pioneering work of Sidney and Beatrice Webb at the turn of the twentieth century, namely, the contradictory relationship between the imperatives of democracy and administrative efficiency in trade union organisation. The post-1973 unions affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) epitomise the worker control tradition, hence the choice of this federation and its affiliates to illustrate this contradiction.

The findings of this thesis show that membership growth coupled with the attainment of economic and political citizenship by black workers in an era characterised by the insertion of South Africa into a changing global political economy has eroded the tradition of worker control. Accompanying these changes is organisational modernisation, that is, processes of *change and reconstitution* in an organisation which result from a quest to achieve its goals and ensure its durability and adaptability to changing internal and external circumstances. One of the implications of organisational modernisation is that union officials now play a more active and influential role in union decision-making, thus intensifying the tension between the imperatives of democracy on the one hand and administrative efficiency on the other.

However, the findings also suggest that these tensions are subject to a contestation which takes the form of different approaches to organisational modernisation or what we call modernisation projects. An examination of the changing role of full-time union officials shows that the 'activist organiser' of the era of the liberation struggle has been transformed into three types - the ideological unionist, the 'entrepreneur' and the career unionist - all of whom pursue different and competing modernisation projects.

The thesis argues that organisational modernisation intensifies these contradictions, leading to the dilemma of leadership, rather than the 'iron law of oligarchy' as propounded Robert Michels. This dilemma highlights a tension between two competing imperatives in a trade union, namely, the need to be democratic on the one hand, and the desire to achieve administrative efficiency on the other. The thesis suggests that the iron law of oligarchy is not the sole and final trajectory of an organisation such as a trade union.

Instead we propose a novel resolution of the classic democracy/oligarchy dichotomy, namely, the maintenance and intensification of the dilemma of leadership. This approach denotes a state of affairs where the union is in transition but the final outcome is indeterminate because of contestation and the ever-changing balance of power. It implies that democracy and administrative efficiency are equally important imperatives in an organisation, imperatives which should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory.

Key words: organisational modernisation, worker control, post-1973 unions, COSATU, union officials, dilemma of leadership.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANC	African National Congress
BEC	Branch Executive Committee
BMWU	Black Municipal Workers' Union
CCAWUSA	Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
CEPPWAWU	Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union
CAWU	Construction and Allied Workers' Union
CCOBTU	Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions
CC	Central Committee
CEC	Central Executive Committee
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTMWA	Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association
CWIU	Chemical Workers' Industrial Union
CWU	Communication Workers' Union
DIMES	Durban Integrated Municipal Employees Society
DITSELA	Development Institute for Training, Support and Education of Labour
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers' Union
FEDUSA	Federation of Unions of South African
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GAWU	Glass and Allied Workers' Union
GAWU	General and Allied Workers' Union
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GFWBF	General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund
GS	General Secretary
GWU	General Workers' Union
IAS	Industrial Aid Society
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions
IIE	Institute for Industrial Education
IPS	Institute of Public Servants
LRA	Labour Relations Act
LSO	Labour-supporting organisation
MACWUSA	Motor Assembly and Components Workers' Union of South Africa
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers' Union
MGWUSA	Municipal and General Workers' Union of South Africa
MICWU	Motor Industries Combined Workers' Union
MWUSA	Municipal Workers' Union of South Africa
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NALEDI	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

NIA	National Intelligence Agency
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUPAWO	National Union Printing and Allied Workers' Union
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
OCGAUW	Oil, Chemical, General and Allied Workers' Union
PAWU	Plastics and Allied Workers' Union
POPCRU	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union
POTWA	Post and Telecommunications Workers' Association
PPWAUW	Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union
PWAUW	Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAAPAUW	South African Agriculture and Plantation and Allied Workers' Union
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers' Union
SACCAUW	South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SACTWU	Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers' Union
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SARHWU	South African Railway and Harbours Workers' Union
SASBO	South African Society of Bank Officials
SATAWU	South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union
SSC	Shop Stewards Council
SWOP	Sociology of Work Unit
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUACC	Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council
TUCSA	Trades Union Council of South Africa
UAW	United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers' Union
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UJMW	Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers
UMMAWOSA	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
UTP	Urban Training Project
VW/VWSA	Volkswagen/Volkswagen South Africa
WPMWU	Western Province Motor Assembly Workers' Union
YCW	Young Christian Workers

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PREFACE

Research material for this study was gathered at intervals over a period of four years. However, before and during this time I was directly and indirectly involved as a participant in, and observer of, the South African trade union movement. I first became interested in labour while I was at university in Cape Town in the mid-1980s. A course on trade unions in developing societies stimulated my interest in trade union mobilisation and organisation and prompted me to explore ways of switching my activism from student politics to labour. It was during this period that I spent time as a union research trainee in a labour-supporting organisation in Cape Town. Thus, from the onset my involvement in the union movement was an intellectual one. My first union job as a national education officer of the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) placed me within the ranks of professionally-trained intellectuals who were under the direct discipline of the union movement. When I left the union in 1992 my role changed to that of a 'freelance intellectual', that is, one who is based outside the movement but who still plays a supportive role towards building a strong union movement. I performed this role in my capacity as a writer for a union magazine, a university-based researcher, a board member of two labour supporting organisations, a regular contributor to a labour journal and a facilitator in several union education and training workshops and seminars.

The timing of my joining the unions placed me in-between the old generation and the new generation as identified in this thesis. A few years after I had joined the unions the changes which I identify and examine in this thesis began to occur. Thus, although there is a specific time-frame within which the research was conducted, I drew on and benefited immensely from this range of other experiences and involvement in the labour movement. Indeed, the choice of the research topic was inspired and informed by these experiences. This thesis is, in a sense, autobiographical.

The shifts and processes of organisational reconstitution which are the subject of this study

became apparent to me before I left full-time employment in the unions at the beginning of 1992. At that time I was assistant general secretary of the union. From this 'managerial' vantage point I became aware of the strengths of the union and its structures and the role it was playing as part of a larger movement fighting for economic emancipation and national liberation. However, at the same time I became increasingly aware of two types of subtle changes in the character of PPWAWU and the union movement as a whole. The first type of changes was one which threatened to change the balance of power in favour of employers. The apparent inability of the union to respond to new issues which arose as a result of managerial restructuring of workplace relations was alarming. The late 1980s and the early 1990s marked a period when many South African companies were repositioning themselves to face international competition. I was puzzled by the fact that a powerful union movement which occupied the moral high ground could be out-manoeuvred so easily by employers who had a legitimacy crisis with their own employees. In particular, employers seemed to be succeeding in driving a wedge between union members and their shopfloor leadership, on the one hand, and branch and national structures and leaders of the union, on the other.

The second category of changes was related to the changing needs and demands of union officials on the union. Part of my job was bringing these demands and issues to the attention of the national office bearers of the union and trying to resolve them. This made the early 1990s the most frustrating time of my stay in the union. I spent my last year and a half in the union helping to design procedures and systems related to staffing such as leave conditions, disciplinary and grievance procedures, financial and transport procedures and procedures for recruitment, interviewing and the appraisal of union officials. These procedures and systems were developed to ensure consistency and fairness in the management of the union's affairs. The need for written procedures and policies also arose because many new and unusual demands were being made by officials. In the course of responding to these demands unprepared office bearers at various levels of the union were setting many precedents, with far-reaching political and financial implications for the cash-strapped union. Thus, some of the early processes of modernisation were to safeguard the resources and political integrity of

the union and to ensure that everyone was treated fairly.

However, there were other pressures the union was facing which implied a shift away from the collective, altruistic and egalitarian culture of the early years. These included demands for differentials in remuneration to compensate officials with skills, demands for air travel (as opposed to bus, train or minibus travel), a shift away from community and church meeting venues towards using hotels, and demands for employment benefits such as medical aid, provident or pension fund, car and housing allowances. This led to many conflicts between worker office bearers who felt duty-bound to uphold the tradition of worker control, and many of the new generation officials who viewed attempts to control or monitor their activities as a sign of 'creeping bureaucracy' by national and branch office bearers.

After leaving the union my bewilderment and frustration turned into intellectual curiosity as I tried to understand the nature and implications of these changes. The first set of changes became the subject of my MA dissertation which I completed in 1996. The research examined shifts in management strategies and how unions were responding to them. Its findings highlighted the pressures unions were facing in a changing national and international context as well as a 'capacity deficit' which had arisen as unions were responding to these new pressures.

The choice to investigate the role of union officials and the processes of organisational modernisation was a fortuitous one. In 1996 the September Commission, an investigative team appointed by COSATU, wanted to undertake a census of full-time officials in the federation as part of a wider study on the future of unions. I reached an agreement with the Commission whereby I would do the research and submit a report to them and thereafter be free to use the data for my own research purposes. The survey of full-time officials in COSATU thus became the first leg of my research.

It was only after the completion of the survey that I began to comprehend the processes

which had been the source of my frustration and puzzlement as a union official in the early 1990s. It became apparent to me that what I had been witnessing and experiencing was a process of generational change and new pressures on the union to 'modernise' the way it operated. Even though the term 'bureaucracy' was used by some in the union to describe the style of the office bearers, what was in fact happening was that pressure was being brought to bear on an administratively and financially weak union with a non-hierarchical organisational culture to modernise in a way which would enhance the standing and power of full-time officials.

However, it was an invitation in late 1997 to give expert evidence in defence of union officials in the case of *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs SAMWU* which resulted in the clarification of the precise nature of the dilemma facing union officials.¹ The origins of the case can be traced back to 1993 when 800 SAMWU members employed by the Springs Town Council in Gauteng province went on strike demanding that the case of four dismissed SAMWU shop stewards should be referred to voluntary arbitration. On the fourth day (a Friday) of the strike, which was illegal in terms of the old Labour Relations Act of 1956, the Council agreed to the workers' demand and told the workers to be back at work at 07h00 the following Monday (7 June 1993) or face dismissal. The rest of the case revolves around what actually happened on that Monday morning as well as the role played by the union official, Silas Letsimo. According to the union, as Mr Letsimo began to address the workers telling them to go back to work as management had agreed to their demand, a Council official arrived and handed out dismissal notices to the workers for failing to heed the Council ultimatum.²

The workers were only re-employed in 1994 after a political intervention by the newly-elected ANC-led provincial government. Some two years later, after a council official told union members that they should claim the wages they had lost as a result of the strike from the union, about 600 of the re-employed workers, all of them members of SAMWU, hired a lawyer on the understanding that the lawyer could get their lost wages back from the Council.

In reality, the legal action was against SAMWU, and the workers, who were SAMWU members, were suing the union for R5 million in lost wages from the time they were dismissed to the time they were re-employed.

The basis of the claim was that the union official, Mr Letsimo, had a 'legal duty' or a 'duty of care' as a leader of the union to instruct union members to go back to work because their strike was illegal and their jobs were in jeopardy. In the case of those who disobeyed the union, Mr Letsimo should have taken disciplinary steps against them, including expelling them from the union. This was best captured in the testimony of the plaintiffs' expert witness, Professor Pieter Schalk Nel of the University of Pretoria.³

In our expert evidence for the defence (see Appendix 3) we argued that this notion of leadership was an elitist one which assumed that leadership in a union should operate in the same way as in other social institutions in a capitalist society. We said that it ignored the particular history, traditions and organisational culture of worker control which operates in the post-1973 unions, of which SAMWU is a part. The concept of a dilemma of leadership emerged as part of a critique of the plaintiffs' argument. Although the concept then lacked theoretical elaboration, it nevertheless became the anchor of the expert testimony presented in court, particularly in our assertion that,

In the circumstances of industrial action trade union officials face a dilemma: on the one hand, they are expected to advise and lead the membership; on the other hand, they are constrained in this role by the expectation that they act upon a mandate from the members themselves.

The final judgement was handed down in Springs early in 2000. The magistrate ruled against SAMWU and ordered it to pay the amount demanded by the workers as well as bear the costs of the legal action. The judgement invoked the (male) 'union boss' thesis and put the full-time union official at the centre of the dispute by finding that "Mr Letsimo's or the union's omission to take any steps to prevent the dismissal was indeed contra the actions of a

reasonable man". The magistrate concluded that,

(T)here was a duty of care on the Defendant via Mr Letsimo, whether he instigated the strike making his omission more serious, or from his mere omission to act in the interests of the Plaintiffs by not timeously stopping the strike, or by not ensuring that he was present at the City Council on Monday morning at 07h00 in order to request the workers to return to work.⁴

On reflection, we concluded that the court did not understand SAMWU's dilemma because it did not understand the history of the post-1973 unions. We argued that South African unions such as SAMWU, unlike most unions elsewhere in the world, do not possess the power to discipline their members in the manner proposed by the plaintiffs' legal team and their expert witness. Indeed, this remains the least recognised but one of the crucial dimensions of the tradition of worker control and democratic unionism.

It seemed as if the arguments by the plaintiffs' legal team and their expert witness amounted to an attempt to ignore the tradition of democracy and worker control in the history of the post-1973 unions and to replace it with a notion of 'business unionism' which is predicated on the legal doctrine of a duty of care which is alien to the experience of the new unions in South Africa. Indeed, grassroots or democratic unionism emerged as a reaction against such a type of business unionism which was widespread among the established unions at the time. Mr Helberg, the plaintiffs' advocate, disputed the notion of worker control and instead argued that SAMWU members regarded their full-time union official as "their father, their leader and their boss".

It was the identification of these two versions of the role of full-time officials that clarified the nature of the dilemma facing union officials. This research, therefore, set out to investigate the changing role of the full-time union official *in relation to* the tradition of worker control which was the norm in the post-1973 unions. How do unions respond to demands to professionalise and modernise while still maintaining rank-and-file participation?

The concept of a 'dilemma of leadership' originated from my attempt to comprehend the full implications of the SAMWU case. The case inspired me to explore further the implications of the issues raised by the workers' lawyers and expert witnesses for the tradition of worker control. This concept is central to the main argument of this thesis.

The notion of 'organisational modernisation', on the other hand, originates from my trade union experiences as an observer and a participant, as well as from my MA and other research. However, I was only able to conceptualise these processes in this way after I had conducted the union officials' survey and gained an understanding of a wide range of related processes. I was able to understand that, apart from bureaucracy, there are other changes which occur in any organisation and that those who champion them never set out to make a trade union oligarchic. Indeed, some modernisation processes can help enhance democracy, not oligarchy. As a result the term oligarchy is not an accurate description of the changes which I write about in this thesis. Here I have used the term 'modernisation' in the same sense that sociologists use it to refer to change in society which is the "overall societal process by which previously agrarian historical and contemporary societies become developed".⁵ Applied to a union or an organisation, modernisation therefore refers to the overall process of change from 'primitive' or 'traditional' and weakly organised associational forms towards more structured forms which have the capacity to cope in a modern economic, social and political setting.

Indeed, we could argue that many trade unions are adopting conventional management techniques to cope with new challenges on the shopfloor and in the new national and global political economy. In Britain one of the champions of organisational modernisation in the unions is the Centre for Strategic Trade Union Management in the School of Management at the University of Cranfield which conducts research, runs courses and provides consultancy services to the Trades Union Council (TUC) and many of its affiliates. In the words of the Director of the School, "unions are substantial organisations for which strategy, human

resource management, financial management, marketing strategies, and other modern management techniques are vital in enabling the organisations to meet their objectives and fulfil their potential”.⁶

However, we must point out that organisational modernisation processes are often grafted onto existing forms of social organisation rather than them conforming unproblematically to a universal trajectory of modernisation which is discontinuous with ‘traditional’ forms. There is now a growing recognition by scholars that there are different routes into modernity. Indeed, some have made a distinction between ‘western modernity’ and modernisation processes in non-western societies such as those in Africa.⁷ With reference to organisational modernisation in trade unions, we make a similar point by suggesting that notions of democracy were often modified to make them compatible with workers’ ‘lived experiences’. The same can be said about the processes of organisational modernisation we discuss here.

The context within which social research is conducted is always characterised by fluidity and change, thus introducing an additional complexity for the researcher. This fluidity and change is due to the fact that as time lapses, old issues and social actors are replaced by new ones. Even in the most stable societies where social life appears humdrum and seamless, generations of people come and go, new debates and discourses replace old ones, new fault lines of social cleavage emerge, new struggles are fought and new configurations of power emerge. Although many scholars have conducted their research during times of extreme social fluidity, it is very rare for scholars to draw attention to this fluidity as the changes seldom seem to impinge upon the research process.

However, in this study processes of rapid social change did impinge on the research process in a number of important ways. The processes which are indicative of this social fluidity are political democratisation, deracialisation of society, social recognition of trade unions and the growing insertion of South Africa into the global political economy. This has had several implications for this research and has made the process of data gathering as hard as ‘hitting a

moving target'. Firstly, the research was conducted at a time when there was a change in generations of union leadership and it is this generational change that created immense problems for me. Thousands of full-time officials and worker leaders have been leaving the unions since the early 1990s to take advantage of career opportunities elsewhere. Many of these leaders were part of the intellectual layer of unionists who participated in the formation of union traditions, including the discourse of democracy. In many cases they have been replaced by younger leaders and officials who are part of a different generation. Thus, doing the research for this study was like hitting a moving target because the issues, meanings, people and the larger economic and political context were changing constantly and quickly. For example, a large number of the union officials who were part of the survey in 1996/97 have since left the unions and could not be traced for in-depth interviews.

Secondly, upward social mobility exacerbated the problem as officials continued leaving the unions throughout the 1990s. In a number of the cases where they left the unions, unionists were eager to distance themselves from the movement. This often coloured their testimonies about the unions in a negative way as they wanted to project a new image of themselves.

Thirdly, the issues and the politics within the union movement changed considerably in the last decade. With the shift from 'militant abstentionism' to 'social partnership', unions found that they had to reorient themselves from resistance to reconstruction. The difficulty for me was that, depending on the union and the region of the country, the consensus on what reconstruction and social partnership meant for unions was either fragile or non-existent, thus it was hard to make out what the official voice was.

Fourthly, what made the research both frustrating and exciting is the fact that in recent years the discourse of union democracy and the social world within which the union movement exists have been undergoing rapid and fundamental changes. The transition to a liberal democratic dispensation has created a new context where old meanings have had to be revised and new ones constituted. This made the task of conducting this research more

difficult as there was little consensus among unionists themselves about the issues which were being investigated. In addition, there has been a change of discourse from one which emphasised participatory democracy to one which emphasises administrative efficiency. Indeed, many of the newer worker leaders and officials were not familiar with the old discourse and thus tended to be too hasty to dismiss it in favour of 'professionalism' and administrative efficiency.

Finally, trade unions are now recognised by the state and employers, but they have become more marginal as social actors. At many levels this has made many union leaders defensive and this often introduced complexities into the interview situation. Many unionists find it tempting to reproduce the official union line to researchers and journalists and it takes tremendous perseverance and coaxing to get them to engage in a meaningful dialogue during an interview.

Nevertheless, these problems were compensated for by several other factors, chief among which is the fact that I have been a participant and observer in these processes and I had discovered different ways of gaining access to vital information or issues.

The thesis is divided into three parts made up of eight chapters which present the framework and the findings and outline the central arguments which underpin the study. *Part I*, which is made up of Chapters 1 and 2, identifies the dilemma of leadership and traces the emergence of the democratic tradition in the post-1973 unions. In Chapter 1 I introduce the research problem and situate it within the literature. I also present a theoretical and conceptual framework. Chapter 2 explores the ways in which the worker control tradition of unionism was built in the post-1973 unions. In addition to various intellectual contributions, I discuss the significance of the workers' 'lived experiences' as well as the economic and political context which prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Part II, which includes Chapters 3, 4 and 5, examines the dilemma of leadership through

three union case studies. In these Chapters I use the case studies to illustrate the general trends which apply to most COSATU unions. This includes a discussion of modernisation processes within these unions.

Part III is the last section of the thesis incorporating Chapters 6 to 8. In Chapter 6 I present a contemporary profile of union officials in COSATU and identify issues which cut across the individual affiliates of the federation. Chapter 7 explores new cleavages among union officials, discusses changes in the national and international contexts and identifies different modernisation projects which correspond to new cleavages among officials. The discussion in Chapter 8 offers a resolution to the age-old dilemma between democracy and efficiency.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify the use of certain terms and concepts which could lend themselves to different meanings and interpretations. I do not intend to provide a glossary of terms here but I want to highlight differences in the meanings of key terms and concepts which, in a different setting, would acquire different meanings.

In most of the literature the term *union official* is used to refer to a small category of union employees, often elected ones who occupy senior positions in the union hierarchy. Other terms used are 'full-time official' and 'union officer'. In this literature the term is seldom used to refer to lowly officials and clerical functionaries of the union. The reader will notice that I have used the term in a different sense, which is inclusive of all union employees regardless of rank or position. There are three main reasons for adopting this inclusive and non-hierarchical meaning of union official. Historically, the post-1973 unions have used the term in this sense to distinguish all employees from union members and elected worker leaders. In addition, the use of a common term for all employees of the union is historically significant in that it reminds us of the days when union employment in these unions was not characterised by occupational distinctions. In those days, which in some cases go back only some 15 years ago, remuneration and other conditions of employment were uniform for all regardless of position or designation.

This specific use of the term is also a legacy of the era of the 'activist organiser' which is discussed in the thesis. During that era, which was also the time of the liberation struggle, rank or status did not carry much prestige or material benefits. It was thus common to talk of all union employees as officials. I should emphasise that even union administrators who performed clerical functions were also regarded as officials and, indeed, their work then had a strong activist dimension which it has lost in recent years.

Worker control is another term which may confuse the reader as it is also specific to the South African union context. Of course the literature, especially that on British trade unionism, has studied 'workers' control' for close on a century now. The cardinal difference is that while the latter term emphasised the involvement of the organised working class in controlling and running production and enterprises, the former emphasises (but is not limited to) the right of workers to take leadership positions in running their own unions and ensuring that leadership is accountable to them. This internal focus by the post-1973 unions is understandable given the fact that these workers were denied union rights, and the trend of 'sweetheart unionism' which was strong at the time.

In some of the literature the notion of *servicing workers* has negative connotations as it is part of the conservative model of unionism known as business unionism. However, in the post-1973 unions 'servicing' has a different meaning altogether. It means assisting workers to run their structures better and to solve their own problems at the workplace level. This includes calling workplace general meetings to organise, unite, mobilise and politicise workers; training shop stewards to handle workplace problems themselves; providing back-up in handling disciplinary and grievance hearings and in negotiations with employers; and providing workers and shop stewards with information to help them develop politically. In a nutshell, servicing is a set of activities undertaken by the union official to mobilise and empower workers and their shopfloor leaders.

The term *office bearer* may present some with difficulties as it acquires different meanings in different union settings. In the post-1973 unions, an office bearer is one who is elected onto a committee to hold office for a fixed term. These committees exist at various levels of the union, from the shopfloor right up to the national level. At the workplace there is a committee of shop stewards which elects from within its ranks three senior shop stewards (chair, vice-chair and secretary). In a branch structure the office bearers' committee is made up of four or five people (chair, vice-chair, treasurer and secretary). In terms of the tradition of worker control, all these people have to be workers who are union members in good standing, except the secretary who is elected from among full-time officials in that branch. The same arrangement applied to regional and national structures. Thus there is a distinction between officials and office bearers and only a small number of full-time officials are office-bearers.

Finally, I have made reference to racial categories as they are commonly used and understood in the South African context. The main categories are 'African', 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'white'. However, the term 'Black' is often used in an inclusive sense to refer to people who belong to the first three racial categories.

In this thesis I have attempted to capture an important, albeit fluid, moment in the making of the post-1973 union movement. I hope that the discussion that follows has succeeded in putting the changing social character of these unions in perspective.

Notes:

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1. Eddie Webster and myself were invited by SAMWU to present expert testimony in support of their argument in court. The expert opinion was presented in court in late 1998.
 2. The union's version of events is contained in the following sources: The verbatim transcript of the court record of *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs SAMWU* (unreported case 4478/96, Springs Magistrate Court); notes taken by the author during a SAMWU case consultation by E. Webster and S. Buhlungu with Silas Letsimo (then branch secretary of the union in the East Rand, based in Springs), 18 September 1998; author interview with Silas Letsimo, provincial secretary of SAMWU, Johannesburg, 14 September 1999; and Roskam, A. and Fourie, N. 2000. "Union Liability: Assessing the SAMWU case", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 24, 1.
 3. Verbatim transcript of the court record of *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs SAMWU* (unreported case 4478/96, Springs Magistrate Court), 02 February 1998, p. C12.1389.
 4. *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs SAMWU* (unreported case 4478/96, Springs Magistrate Court), "Judgement" (English translation by Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom), p. 32.
 5. Jary, D. And Jary, J. 1991. *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*. Glasgow: Harper-Collins, p. 404.
 6. Cranfield University, School of Management. 2000. *The Centre for Strategic Trade Union Management* (brochure).
 - 7 For a discussion of this point see Chabal, P. and Daloz, J. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as political instrument*. Oxford and Bloomington: International African Institute, James Currey and Indiana Univerisity Press.

PART I

THE EMERGENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION: THE DILEMMA IDENTIFIED

In this section we examine the classic contradiction between democracy and administrative efficiency and how the post-1973 unions in South Africa adopted worker control in an attempt to overcome it. Thus, in Chapter 1 we identify the *contradiction of organisational imperatives* (democracy versus administrative efficiency) which creates the *dilemma of leadership* (the tension between being accountable to the short-term interests of the rank-and-file on the one hand, and the desire to consider the long-term interests of the union which requires skills and competence on the other). We then identify a process of organisational change, which we term organisational modernisation, and explore how it sharpens the contradiction of organisational imperatives and, in a democratic union, creates the dilemma of leadership.

Chapter 2 traces the origins of the tradition of worker control and rejects the notion that this tradition was 'invented' solely by one group of intellectuals in the early 1970s. Instead, it is argued that the worker control tradition was a composite of many influences and contributions. The discussion in this Chapter demonstrates that in the post-1973 unions the democratic tradition is deeply entrenched and that organisational modernisation in these unions is subject to a fierce contestation by a generation of workers and officials who were socialised into the tradition.

The identification of the dilemma of leadership is of considerable importance in this thesis as it lays the basis for exploring a novel approach to resolving the contradiction of organisational imperatives in trade unions. Thus, if worker control ensures that the processes of organisational modernisation are contested, then the outcome is not necessarily oligarchic or democratic. In this

way, the notion of a dilemma of leadership helps us to challenge conventional zero-sum notions of power and introduces a new approach to the understanding of organisations such as trade unions.

CHAPTER 1: DEMOCRACY *VERSUS* ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY: THE DILEMMA OF LEADERSHIP¹

Introduction

This thesis explores the dynamics of democracy and organisational change within trade unions. Through an examination of the relationship between rank-and-file union members and shop stewards on the one hand, and full-time officials on the other, this study problematises and evaluates the relationship between the imperatives of union democracy and those of administrative efficiency.

Central to these concerns is the role of full-time officials, particularly the extent of their power in union governance and their role in promoting or deterring democracy within these organisations. The South African unions which emerged in the aftermath of the 1973 strikes sought to prevent a concentration of power in the hands of officials by building a tradition of worker control and accountability of leadership to their members. They de-emphasised the role of the union official and instead encouraged a tradition of unionism in which workers and worker leaders played a more prominent role in decision-making. The rationale for this was to build a culture of democratic participation by the rank-and-file and to discourage the emergence of oligarchic tendencies in the new union movement. In this thesis we evaluate the success or failure of these strategies by addressing three distinct, but related, themes. Firstly, we seek to establish the extent of the power of full-time officials as leaders within trade unions. The significance of this question becomes all the more evident when we consider the ambiguity of the role of full-time union officials as both employees and leaders.

Secondly, we examine whether or not the tradition of worker control succeeded in achieving the objective of constraining the power of full-time officials. Finally, we pose the question, if worker

control constrained the power of union officials, what are the implications of this for the ability of trade unions to function efficiently? As the discussion in this chapter shows, the search for answers to these questions helped us identify the dilemma of leadership which we discuss below.

Full-time union officials constitute a distinct stratum of union leadership whose job is to ensure proper co-ordination and efficient administration. They are the public face of modern trade unionism and, as such, they lead the union side in negotiations with management and the state and represent their members in a myriad of other institutions and forums. Their full-time availability to do union work allows them access to knowledge, skills and information which shopfloor workers and shop stewards do not have. By contrast, union members and shop stewards spend most of their time on the shopfloor with the result that they are left with very little time to devote their attention to union business. In addition, most of them have neither the skills and knowledge of the full-time union official nor the social profile to match the union official.

Democracy, Modernisation and the Dilemma of Leadership

The tradition of worker control sought to curtail the power of full-time officials so as to make them accountable to rank-and-file members, particularly through a system of mandated decision-making. However, during the last decade, the post-1973 unions have been under pressure to 'modernise' their operations so that they could maintain their effectiveness as representative bodies of workers. In view of the fact that these unions still espouse worker control, modernisation has intensified the contradiction between the imperatives of democracy on the one hand, and administrative efficiency on the other. This *contradiction of organisational imperatives* highlights the tension between two competing requirements in a trade union. It is the common thread that runs through the entire thesis and leads to the *dilemma of leadership*. The dilemma of leadership highlights the tension between the need to have a democratically elected leadership which is accountable to the rank-and-file on the one hand, and the desire to have a

skilled, competent and efficient leadership on the other. One of the consequences of organisational modernisation is that union officials begin to play an increasingly active and influential role in decision-making, thus encroaching upon the right of elected worker leaders and democratic structures to make decisions. In a nutshell, this dilemma is deeply located in the study of trade unionism.

In a seminal study of British trade unionism first published more than a hundred years ago, Sidney and Beatrice Webb observed that once unions developed from local into national organisations they left behind the ideal of ‘primitive democracy’. This process was accompanied by the emergence of a governing ‘class’ made up of full-time officials who had acquired a “professional expertness quite out of reach of their fellow-members at the bench or the forge”.² Published under the title, *Industrial Democracy*, the study remains an authoritative sociological examination of trade unionism at the turn of the twentieth century. This and another classic by the same authors,³ has inspired the proliferation in the twentieth century of a large body of literature on what has become known as the sociology of trade unionism.

The sociological study of trade unions drew insights from the sociological study of organisations, particularly the work of Weber and Michels. Their crucial concern was “the tendency for organizations to develop a life of their own, apart from the membership which created them”.⁴ In other words, although an organisation is created by individual members, it tends to become more than the sum total of those members’ wishes and becomes a social entity or institution in its own right, with its own patterns of power and control.

By joining a union for the purpose of collective power, solidarity and the protection of interests against employers and the state, individual union members ‘trade off’ some of their individual interests and autonomy and subordinate themselves to the discipline of the collective body. The problem then becomes whether or not unions can “simultaneously maintain both discipline and democracy”, that is, whether they can ensure that “the balance between power exercised *for* the members and power exercised *over* them” remains equitable.⁵

The Webbs observed that early trade unions did not face this contradiction because they practised primitive democracy where union business was transacted by all members in a general meeting. This rudimentary form of union democracy was premised on the view that “all men are equal” and that “what concerns all should be decided by all”.⁶ For the Webbs the contradiction of organisational imperatives arose with the growth in size and complexity of trade unions which brought about the need to co-ordinate and ensure efficiency of the growing national union, a development which led to the employment of full-time officials. The officials became “a class apart”, a “civil service of the Trade Union world” which became increasingly alienated from the rank and file membership.⁷ The growing power and influence of full-time officials presented the unions with the difficulty of combining union democracy with administrative efficiency.

The Webbs concluded their study by presenting the conundrum which subsequent studies sought to unravel. Union development results in one of two scenarios, none of which augurs well for democracy within these organisations. Unions can either practise democracy of the sort which prevailed under primitive democracy and face the consequences of inefficiency and disintegration, or they can accept the imperatives of administrative efficiency whose consequence is the dominance of a ‘personal dictator’ or an expert bureaucracy.⁸

The implication of the Webbs’ work is that democracy in unions corresponds to a particular phase in their history and development, namely, when they are small in size and when it is feasible for their members to transact all their business without outside assistance. In his study of American unionism Richard Lester arrived at a similar conclusion, namely, that these unions had experienced certain internal changes since the 1930s. The main trend which he noted was that many of them had been “shedding their youthful characteristics in the process of settling down or ‘maturing’”.⁹ This, for Lester, suggested that unions tend to go through a “natural evolution of organizational life” characterised by stages of development which began with a radical and democratic stage. But once organisations gain recognition by employers and the society as a whole, a transformation occurs in terms of organisational goals, the nature of leadership, internal

operations and the distribution of power and functions among its different structural levels. These changes are invariably accompanied by the emergence of a hierarchy and an oligarchy, the shifting of some functions and decisions from local to higher levels and the development of impersonal relations between top officials and the rank and file membership.¹⁰ But Lester pointed out that there was no inevitability about a pattern of this maturation as each union is shaped by its own peculiar circumstances.

Prospects for Union Democracy: Assessing Four Approaches

Over the last 165 years or so four approaches emerged regarding the prospects for union democracy, namely, the optimistic approach, the pessimistic approach, polyarchy and contemporary theories of union democracy and oligarchy.¹¹ The optimistic approach is often associated with the early work of Marx and Engels and their treatment of trade union struggles. Although they were mindful of the limitations of trade unions in the face of a powerful bourgeois class, they saw the importance of trade unions in building a political consciousness. As Engels wrote in the 1840s,

That these Unions contribute to nourish the bitter hatred of the workers against the property-holding class need hardly be said.... Strikes...are the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided; they are the *pronunciamentos* of single branches of industry that these too have joined the labour movement.... And as schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled.¹²

Thus, for Marx and Engels trade unions were the first step in the emergence of a revolutionary class consciousness which would later result in a direct challenge to the capitalist system. However, in later years their enthusiastic embrace of trade unionism was tempered by a lack of revolutionary activity in trade union ranks. Their explanation for this was based on three arguments, namely, that a minority of privileged workers were able to get concessions from the bosses; corruption of union leaders, made possible by the apathy of the rank-and-file; and the

embourgeoisement of the British working class.¹³ According to John Kelly this ambivalence in Marx and Engels' work on trade unions was related to swings between periods of high militancy and mobilisation and those of quiescence by the working class. Thus, it was during periods of quiescence due to economic growth (such as the 1850s and the early 1860s) and economic stagnation (such as the late 1870s and early 1880s) that the two "gave vent to their deepest reservations and their most hostile judgements on the emerging trade unions with their fondness for 'bourgeois respectability'".¹⁴

The pessimistic approach comprises theorists from diverse political and intellectual backgrounds. It is shared by theorists who subscribe to three schools of thought, namely, the integration thesis (Lenin), the oligarchy thesis (Michels) and the incorporation thesis (Trotsky).¹⁵ Lenin argued that, at best, trade unions could develop a 'trade union consciousness' and that the fact that they saw their objectives being achieved under capitalism contained a tendency for unions to be integrated into the system. Michels' notion of an iron law of oligarchy derived from a detailed examination of the internal functioning of political parties and trade unions which led him to conclude that it was inevitable for these organisations to be controlled by a few leaders. Trotsky saw the danger of incorporation of trade unions arising out of the crisis of capitalism, the actions of government and business leaders to emasculate unions and the conservatism of top union officials who acted as agents of capital.

This literature, which for a long time constituted the conventional wisdom on the subject, takes a pessimistic view of the prospects of democracy in modern trade unionism. However, it should be pointed out that the pessimistic tradition is intellectually diverse and that different theorists tend to emphasise different aspects of these developments. It is thus fair to present this pessimistic tradition in the form of a continuum. Michels occupies the extreme pole while others tend to qualify their positions by noting that there is no inevitability about it. In addition, the pessimism of the Marxists stems less from perceived shortcomings in the internal governance of trade unions and more from what they considered to be the revolutionary limitation of trade union struggles.

The third approach, the polyarchic model, is critical of all zero-sum notions of democracy and power in unions and sees union democracy as a matter of “degree rather than kind”.¹⁶ This literature adopts a pluralist approach to power and influence in organisations. For example, James took a dim view of both extremes of the spectrum in this debate, namely, those who take positions which sit on the extremes of the optimistic and pessimistic approaches. He argued that a union is neither democratic nor oligarchic. Rather, power is distributed through the union such that “different levels or groups have some scope over certain limited issues”.¹⁷ Banks contended that the union leadership are regularly challenged by members at these levels. The only value of oligarchic theories is that they have “sufficient force to raise the possibility that what has occurred in the departure from primitive democracy has been the creation of what has been called ‘polyarchy’, a balance of power between the leaders and a minority of active participants”.¹⁸

Since the end of the second world war a number of studies have been undertaken to test the proposition of bureaucracy and oligarchy in trade unions and many of them have emphasised the existence of countervailing factors which militate against oligarchic tendencies.¹⁹ Although these contemporary studies acknowledge the value of contributions by the pessimists, particularly Michels, they challenge the conventional wisdom of the pessimists and question the existence of an ‘iron law’. For example, Hyman and Fryer begin by acknowledging the “immense theoretical importance” of Michels’ work and then go on to assert that the factors which formed the stimulus for the emergence of unions “inevitably set limits to the process of goal displacement”. Thus oligarchic tendencies can be counterbalanced by such factors as a union constitution which promotes rank-and-file participation, a tradition of democracy and the existence of rival factions which have the ability to mobilise opposition to autocratic tendencies.²⁰

Hemingway argued that it is not helpful to assume an immutable tendency towards oligarchy in the same way that it is not safe to assume a participatory model of democracy.²¹ Like Hyman and Fryer, he suggested that there is always a struggle for control within unions. For him what determines the predominance of one trend over another is what he termed the ‘balance of

control', a settlement which is the outcome of a battle for control. This balance is determined by the amount of resources each side can deploy to secure the compliance of the opposition.²² This view is premised on the assumption that trade unions contain factions or groups which have different interests.

The major shortcoming of all the approaches summarised above is that they provide incomplete answers to the contradiction of organisational imperatives as discussed above. The ambivalence of scholars within the optimistic tradition has already been alluded to, and it points to a weakness within the Marxist tradition of scholarship, namely, its failure to understand the way formal organisations operate.²³ It points to a general tendency within the broad Marxist tradition, namely, a tendency to romanticise working class organisations when the prospects of victory seem possible, and to find scapegoats for any failure to achieve such victory. The weakness of the pessimistic traditions is the 'inevitability thesis', that is, the notion that there are immanent tendencies or an iron law which inevitably propels unions towards oligarchic rule. This notion oversimplifies what is, in reality, a very complex issue of power, its distribution and exercise in an organisation. However, the contribution of this approach is that it alerts us to a tendency which is a universal problem of leadership in social institutions and organisations. The polyarchy approach also offers useful insights in that it seeks to avoid the polarity in the debate between the optimists and the pessimists. Its limitation, however, is its suggestion that there can be a permanent equilibrium of power between the various interest groups in society or in an organisation. The countervailing tendencies identified by contemporary theorists do not amount to a rejection of the tendency towards oligarchy. Rather, they represent an attempt to move away from the democracy-oligarchy dichotomy. Despite their immense contributions to the debate, the problem with these theorists is their tendency to be defensive and thus their failure to develop a coherent theory outside of the framework set by the pessimists.

All the above perspectives are useful insofar as they illuminate different aspects of the problem first identified by the Webbs. However, the conundrum presented by the Webbs remains unresolved. Since the 1980s many theorists who have contributed to the debate seem, in one way

or another, to be recycling the same arguments by reproducing the same polarity.²⁴ Most of them seem to take for granted that oligarchy in trade unions is inevitable, and use their empirical material to support this view. Many of these studies place emphasis on the formal structures of power (constitutional provisions, regular elections, methods of recruitment, etc) and characteristics of full-time officials which predispose them to oligarchic control in the unions. But they fail to go beyond these formal aspects of power and to examine the distribution of power and contestation at lower levels of the organisation.

However, the value of recent studies, including the ones referred to above, is that they provide new empirical material which sheds more light on the contradiction between democracy and efficiency within unions. For example, a number of these studies have provided invaluable analyses on gender relations within the stratum of full-time officials.²⁵ Kelly and Heery's study, which uses the notion of generational change to examine the relationship between the formation of the politics and attitudes of union officials on the one hand, and the economic and political climate at a particular time in history on the other, also provides new analytical insights.

A recent study which makes an important contribution to the debate is that by Voss and Sherman. These scholars challenge the notion that oligarchy is the sole and final trajectory of organisations such as trade unions and argue that a revitalisation and radicalisation of goals and tactics can occur within highly oligarchic and conservative organisations. Their study of American unions shows that this radicalisation occurred under 'a special set of conditions'. Firstly, local unions experienced an internal political crisis which resulted in a change of leadership, either through election or after the intervention of the international union. Secondly, the new leaders had previous activist backgrounds in other movements from which they had gained skills and a vision to implement new organising strategies. Finally, the leadership of the international union was committed to revitalisation through the organising model and thus facilitated the entry of the new local leadership and provided them with resources and legitimacy.²⁶ This leads them to observe that in some ways "the labor movement has come to resemble more closely its predecessor of the 1930s".²⁷

This analysis is extremely useful for understanding a similar trend of revitalisation and renewal within the formerly oligarchic and corrupt 'coloured' unions in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Three of these unions, one in the municipal sector and two in the auto/metal sectors, are discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively. Indeed, these revitalised unions came to play a pivotal role in the building of democratic traditions in the 1970s and 1980s and became the backbone of democratic unionism in their sectors.

We now turn to a consideration of the experience of the post-1973 unions in South Africa and the light it sheds on this old contradiction.

The South African Experience

The literature on South African trade unions which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s was inspired to a large degree by the re-emergence of black trade unions in the wake of the 1973 strikes and other factors nationally and globally, particularly the waves of militancy among workers and students. The late 1960s and the early 1970s mark a period of political ferment and optimism about the prospects of an advance towards democracy and radical forms of social transformation. In this context new approaches to union organisation were not simply intended to avoid mistakes of earlier generations of unionists, though this was an important consideration. They sought to put into practice some of the ideas born of the idealism and optimism of the time. Thus, according to Friedman the activists and intellectuals who participated in the formation of the new unions were committed to "democratic grassroots unionism" and therefore deliberately sought to establish "structures which would ensure that workers took part in decisions".²⁸ Although this form of unionism did not take root immediately, the groundwork was laid in this early period.²⁹

Many observers of the South African trade union movement have noted that by the 1980s these unions had succeeded in entrenching a democratic culture which revolved around the notion of

worker control. According to one commentator and activist at the time, the principle of worker control “challenges the thesis that an institutional logic leading to oligarchy is inherent within trade unionism”.³⁰ Among some observers of the union movement this became a self-evident truth and thus democracy and worker control were seen as unproblematic propositions.

Therefore, the problem with most of the studies on these unions is that they assert the democratic character of the unions without actually examining the internal dynamics of decision-making within them. Our view in this thesis is that such an examination is important and that it must, of necessity, include a study of the role and power of full-time officials.

The significance of this thesis and its findings is that it is the first systematic study which focuses specifically on full-time union officials in South Africa. Maree’s research on democracy and oligarchy in the emerging black unions in the 1970s is probably the first set of studies which addressed the issues related to democracy in these unions. The first piece of research was an evaluation of the independent unions in the Transvaal and the Western Cape in the 1970s with a view to establishing whether or not these unions conformed to Michels’ iron law of oligarchy or to Gouldner’s notion of an ‘iron law of democracy’. Maree’s findings refuted both theories and suggested that instead of democratic organisations becoming oligarchic, “there was a contrary trend of oligarchic organisations becoming democratic”.³¹

Although Maree’s work is extremely useful, particularly in relation to the issues covered in this thesis, it has a limitation in that it covers only the early period of unionisation and his notion of union democracy assumes that the distribution and exercise of power always conform to formal or constitutional provisions and procedures. Therefore, he does not examine the impact of worker control on the role of full-time union officials.

One of the earliest references to the employment conditions of full-time officials was made by MacShane, Plaut and Ward in a book published in 1984. Although their reference to the employment conditions of officials was incidental and therefore sketchy, their study makes for interesting comparison today. Their study revealed that in 1984 the Metal and Allied Workers’

Union (MAWU) employed 23 organisers while the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had 17 organisers.³² Although officials in most unions received a uniform salary, there were variations of salary from union to union. For example, National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU) officials were paid relatively high salaries at R800 per month, compared to MAWU (R500), the NUM (R320 - 450) and the General Workers' Union (GWU) (R400).³³

MacShane *et al.* also observed that organisers started off as union shop stewards who were then recruited into full-time positions by their unions. Their study also noted that most organisers were under 40 years old. Finally, they made reference to the difference between the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) unions over the role of white full-time officials.³⁴ What emerges from their investigation is that even within FOSATU the role of white officials was not completely free from controversy. They cited Andrew Zulu, then vice-president of FOSATU, who asserted that, "The whites are there as advisers. That's where they should stay. We have to provide the leadership. Sometimes the white intellectuals go too far in offering leadership and then there is a possibility of a clash".³⁵

Other studies which attempted to analyse the role and position of full-time officials in the unions were done in the 1990s, with a particular focus on the so-called leadership drain from COSATU and its affiliates.³⁶ Baskin *et al.* estimated that COSATU and its affiliates employed a total of 1 450 full-time officials of whom 80 had left the unions.³⁷

While these studies provide a glimpse of the situation of full-time union officials, they are limited in their objectives and usefulness. The study of MacShane *et al.* was an overview of the union situation in South Africa for non-South African readers and the reference to union officials was incidental to that broader objective. It also did not examine union officials as part of the leadership and the issues they faced in all the unions at the time. The more recent studies have been preoccupied with questions of union capacity and the so-called brain drain from the union movement and therefore yield little information about the overall characteristics of full-time union officials.

Up until the early 1990s the post-1973 union movement had a reputation for its militancy and adherence to democratic principles in its mode of governance. For a while it appeared that the movement was able to subordinate the imperatives of administrative efficiency to those of democracy and worker control. However, over the last decade changes have occurred internally and externally thus forcing the unions to reprioritise questions of efficiency and organisational modernisation. In this thesis we are concerned with this reprioritisation and its implications for the democratic tradition of these unions. We focus on the role of full-time officials because such a focus provides a useful lens for examining these contradiction of organisational imperatives, processes of change and the dilemma of leadership to which they give rise.

The value of the South African experience is that it shows that the reprioritisation of organisational efficiency which takes the form of organisational modernisation does not necessarily result in oligarchy. Instead, this change of priorities results in what we have termed the dilemma of leadership, a tension which is manifested through contestation among different groups of union activists and members. As we shall show later in this thesis, this contestation is also present among full-time union officials.

In South Africa the dilemma of leadership is made sharper by the fact that the society has been in transition from authoritarianism. It is now generally acknowledged that union struggles in the specific contexts of developing societies have given rise to a different brand of unionism, namely, social movement unionism, which is peculiar to the conditions of 'late industrialising societies' such as Brazil and South Africa.³⁸ In addition to its broad movement character, social movement unionism is characterised by militancy and a participatory approach to internal governance. However, as one author has argued, the shift towards social democracy in these societies results in disputes within the union movement which express themselves as 'dilemmas of institutionalisation' and 'dilemmas of leadership'. These dilemmas arise as a result of attempts by union leadership to govern the union and pursue workers' long-term goals on the one hand, and the memberships' militancy and assertion of its short-term goals on the other.³⁹ In South Africa the dilemma of leadership has become more pronounced because of union members'

militancy and the tradition of worker control on the one hand, and the leadership's efforts to modernise the internal operations of the trade union movement on the other.

The above points to the specificity of societies in transition from authoritarian rule where social movement unionism emerged and suggests that the conditions and role of full-time officials in these societies will be different from those of their counterparts in the metropolitan countries where the bulk of the literature originates. The birth of the tradition of worker control in South African trade unionism coincided with the period of intensified struggles against apartheid and authoritarian workplace regimes. This specificity applies to the period of these struggles from the 1970s right up to the achievement of democracy in the mid-1990s. The decline of social movement unionism and the erosion of worker control may result in the emergence of trends which have been observed in established unions in developed societies. However, once again, the form that these trends take will be shaped by the specific history and context of South Africa. The dilemma of leadership discussed in this thesis is an example of the way in which change inside a union movement is shaped by the specific economic, political and historical context in which it operates.

The importance of this discussion is that virtually all the literature on full-time officials originates in the union movements of developed and western societies and, too often, concepts from union movements in these societies are applied uncritically to developing societies without regard to specificity or context. Thus, many who have studied unions in developing societies have applied analyses and concepts developed in the context of developed societies and have, in the process, failed to identify the theoretical and conceptual opportunities presented by certain developments in developing societies. The dilemma of leadership is an example of a theoretical construct that draws on conventional sociological debates and the specificity of a union movement in a society in transition.

In addition to the above, most of the existing literature on full-time union officials is trapped in the sterile polarity of democracy *versus* oligarchy and thus fails to account for abiding processes

of change which we have called organisational modernisation. While in developed societies these processes occurred over a long period of time and may have been difficult to observe, in developing societies these processes were condensed into shorter periods of time. It is thus relatively easy to observe how organisational culture and traditions are invented, modified and changed in the course of an organisation's life. The foregoing serves to caution against a mechanical application of concepts from metropolitan union environments as this may conceal or obscure realities which warrant rigorous examination and analysis.

Before outlining the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis, we present a brief discussion on the location of the full-time official in the union. The need to problematise the location of the full-time official arises for two reasons. Firstly, the full-time official is central to our discussion of the contradiction of organisational imperatives, organisational modernisation and the dilemma of leadership. Secondly, the location and role of the union official is, to a large extent, shaped by the specific historical, economic and social context in which a union movement operates.

Full-time Union Officials, Leadership and Power

The role of the full-time union official has been the subject of many sociological studies since the pioneering accounts of the Webbs at the turn of the twentieth century. It is a role which emerged with numerical growth and increasing geographical expansion of trade unions and the ultimate creation of national organisations which could no longer operate on the basis of direct democratic control by its members. In addition, the establishment of a collective bargaining system which required the attention of full-time functionaries of the union made the position of the full-time official more secure. It was this permanence of the full-time official together with the need for efficient administration that produced "a progressive differentiation of an official governing class, more and more marked off by character, training and duties from the bulk of the members".⁴⁰ This points to the contradictory location of the full-time union official in the social structure.

He belongs neither to the middle class nor to the working class. The interests which he represents are exclusively those of the manual working class from which he has sprung, and his duties bring him into constant antagonism with the brain-working, property-owning class. On the other hand, his daily occupation is that of a brain worker, and he is accordingly sharply marked off from the typical proletarian, dependent for his livelihood on physical toil.⁴¹

This contradictory location of the full-time union official has been the subject of many studies on trade union leadership. Writing about union leaders in America, C. Wright Mills made the famous observation that “(E)ven as the labor leader rebels, he holds back rebellion. He organizes discontent and then he sits on it, exploiting it in order to maintain a continuous organisation; the labor leader is a manager of discontent”.⁴² Tony Lane argued that trade union leadership contains an inherent contradiction which meant that “the leader who hoped for the dissolution of capitalism nevertheless had to come to terms with a capitalist reality in his daily round”.⁴³ This led Lane to the pessimistic conclusion that although trade unions reflected a contradiction between labour and capital, they were not the means for resolving such a contradiction.⁴⁴ This pessimism, which is shared by many other scholars, centred on the view that the union leader is subject to many other pressures, including those from management, government and other social institutions, thus making him or her amenable to non-working class perspectives. Lane has argued that the disappearance of the intimacy of contact between the union official and the membership is not “an act of choice” on the former’s part because “regardless of individuals, everything conspired to set the leader apart”.⁴⁵

There is another tradition of scholarship which, though it acknowledges tendencies towards oligarchy, argues that there are ‘countervailing tendencies’ which operate to minimise or reduce such tendencies. As one writer noted, no union can “escape the profound influence of its democratic rationale”, and thus accounts of union bureaucratisation and oligarchy need to be balanced with a recognition that assumptions that unions ought to be democratic play a key role in shaping the relationship between union officials and members.⁴⁶ There is now a vast body of literature which demonstrates beyond doubt that rank-and-file union members are capable of mounting successful struggles to democratise their own unions and eject undemocratic officials.

Above we have made reference to some of this literature. Samuel Friedman's account of a successful revolt by Teamster Local 208 in the United States is another example of this literature. He argues that bureaucracy in a union acts as a "shock absorber for capitalism" but it does not eliminate class struggle because when union members come under attack by employers who seek competitive advantage by attacking their conditions, these workers fight back. They often do this by democratising and transforming their unions so that they can use them to defend their interests.⁴⁷

Above we have also made reference to the contradictory location of the full-time official in the broader social structure. This contradiction also manifests itself within union structures. Many analysts neglect to examine the fact that on the one hand, full-time officials are employees and servants of the union and its members and on the other, they are leaders of these unions and members. This "two-way system of control" means that union members have a right to exert control over the officials, but it also means that officials have "specific powers of leadership and discipline" which they can exercise over union members.⁴⁸ This tension has always been present in the South African unions examined in this thesis and the tradition of worker control was an attempt to regulate this tension in favour of union members by divesting officials of the power to discipline workers and subordinating them to democratic union structures.

We take heed of the warning against treating unions as self-contained units of analysis which are isolated from the "enviroming institutions of power with which trade unions constantly interact".⁴⁹ This observation is particularly germane to a discussion of the role and position of full-time union officials because their work is an example of this interaction. But even more broadly, trade unions are shaped by influences arising out of a change in the structure of the economy or a particular sector of the economy, relations with employers and government institutions, a change in the social and political environment in a country and changes in the global political economy. In their discussion of the changing character of British full-time union officials, Kelly and Heery have noted what they term a "generational change", which they argue results from changing social values. They further assert that changing attitudes and values of

officials are formed by the political and economic climate which prevails at a particular time in history. For example, in Britain officials who served in the 1950s and 1960s had their formative years in the 1920s when there was a general distrust of shop stewards among union officials. As a result, they tended to take a more bureaucratic approach to trade unionism, with little attention paid to building strong shopfloor organisation. However, the economic boom of the 1960s was accompanied by waves of worker militancy and the emergence of a new breed of officials in the 1980s who brought with them new values which sought to encourage strong workplace organisation in the unions.⁵⁰

As noted above, full-time officials are crucial to our discussion of the contradiction of organisational imperatives, organisational modernisation and the dilemma of leadership. Not only are they employed to ensure efficient administration in unions but many also become champions of modernisation processes within their unions. Thus, in this and subsequent chapters the changes which we discuss pivot around the changing role of full-time officials in the post-1973 union movement. In our discussion we are mindful of the specific historical, economic and social context in which a union movement operates. Whereas the early union official was an activist engaged in a struggle to improve the conditions of workers on the shopfloor as well as to defeat the apartheid system, today this layer of union leadership is characterised by new cleavages shaped by new struggles in the unions and in the broader society. Once again this alerts us to the need to contextualise any comparison which we wish to make between unions in developing countries such as South Africa and those in developed societies.⁵¹

This discussion now turns to providing the theoretical framework which underpins the discussion in the rest of the thesis.

Theoretical Framework

Earlier in this chapter we identified the contradiction of organisational imperatives (democracy and administrative efficiency) in a trade union which is also about the relationship between rank-and-file union members and full-time union officials. A focus on the relationship between union members and full-time officials helps us problematise the concept of democracy in trade unions. Democracy is the stated goal of modern trade union movements. It can either take a rudimentary form ('primitive democracy') or a representative one where the bulk of union members is represented by elected leaders. In either of these cases, the key principle is that union members should participate directly or indirectly in decision-making and other affairs of the union. It also suggests that leadership should be accountable to the rank-and-file membership.⁵² However, Joseph Schumpeter has argued that despite an 'arbitrary convention' which defines democracy as 'government by the people', the people never actually govern except in cases where there is direct democracy.⁵³

The approach taken in this thesis goes beyond the simple formula of democracy as government by the people, of the people and for the people. Both democracy and oligarchy are analytical categories or ideal-types and their analytical relevance and usefulness is limited unless they are discussed in relation to power and its distribution and exercise in a real-life organisational setting. In other words, democracy and oligarchy are not simply about formal procedures and constitutional provisions. They are, in the first instance, about the power of groups and classes in society or groups within organisations and how that power is exercised by each group or class to pursue its own interests. Procedures and constitutions are mechanisms to formalise existing power relations between groups and classes.

What this suggests is that in complex organisations democracy and oligarchy are never found in their ideal-typical forms. They operate simply as tendencies, latent or manifest. Thus the question which the social researcher needs to ask in relation to organisations such as unions is not whether they are democratic or oligarchic, but which of the tendencies is latent and which is manifest.

Methodologically, this means that the first task is to establish what the balance of power is between union members and leaders and to then determine whether the level of contestation is high or low. A low level of contestation suggests the predominance of the one tendency at the expense of the other, while a high level of contestation may suggest a dilemma.

This thesis examines the changing role of full-time officials in the context of rapid organisational changes resulting from the growth of membership, changes in the constituencies which unions organise and represent, and a changing national and global political and economic environment.⁵⁴

Organisational modernisation is the concept that best captures the processes of change in emerging or transforming organisations or institutions such as the ones examined in this thesis. Unlike terms such as democracy, oligarchy, bureaucracy and institutionalisation which refer to a supposed *state of being* of an organisation, organisational modernisation refers to those processes of *change and reconstitution* of a movement or an organisation which do not necessarily make it less democratic or more bureaucratic. Organisational modernisation cuts across all types of organisations, old and new, and refers to the enduring processes of change which result from the quest to achieve the goals of an organisation and to ensure its durability, efforts which one scholar argued were intended to “convert temporary movement into permanent organisation”⁵⁵, and endeavours to make unions adaptable to changing internal and external circumstances. These include operational and strategic decisions and actions as well as changes in organisational structures and political orientation. They range from mundane and routine organisational adjustments to politically and strategically significant decisions, actions and changes.⁵⁶ Although the Webbs did not use the term ‘modernisation’, their Preface to the 1920 edition of *Industrial Democracy* alluded to the same process when it referred to trade unions as “working class democracies” which were “perpetually recasting their constitutions to meet new and varying conditions”.⁵⁷ This process begins with the transition from a movement to a formal organisation and continues throughout the life of a formal organisation because, in the words of one analyst, organisations are “not the embodiment of the members’ wishes”. They are social institutions which develop their own “internal patterns of power, goal-seeking and conflict”.⁵⁸

In a nutshell, the relationship between administrative efficiency and modernisation is that between the means and the end. Thus, if administrative efficiency is the end goal of modern organisations, then organisational modernisation is a means towards that end. A good example of this is the corporate world, where there is a strong emphasis on ‘organisational design’ or ‘organisational development’. According to scholars of work organisations these concepts imply that structures, tasks and cultures are “manipulable by management, design being central to the achievement of corporate goals”. The changes implied by organisational design and development are regarded as “the key to ‘good’ or ‘effective’ organisation”.⁵⁹

Organisational modernisation is inextricably linked to Max Weber’s notion of rationality and bureaucracy in modern capitalist society. However, organisational modernisation is a broader concept which incorporates, but is not limited to, the features of bureaucracy described by Weber. In other words, while bureaucracy describes the way “modern officialdom functions”⁶⁰ organisational modernisation encompasses all the processes of change implied by the shift from traditional forms of authority and direct democracy in small organisations and communities to modern and large organisations and communities governed in terms of what Weber termed ‘legal authority’. In this regard, the following features and principles normally associated with bureaucracy are crucial elements of organisational modernisation.

- ❑ the principle of official jurisdictional areas,
- ❑ the principle of office hierarchy,
- ❑ the principle that office management is based on written documents (files),
- ❑ the principle that office management presupposes specialised training,
- ❑ the principle that official activity demands the full working capacity of the official, and
- ❑ the principle that office management follows general rules.⁶¹

In addition to the above, organisational modernisation also implies moving away from those practices associated with small, ‘traditional’ organisations and institutions which have not achieved a status of permanence. In the case of the trade unions, it is usually driven by a desire to

achieve efficiency in a context of fierce contestation with opponents, principally employers, the state and rival unions, within the national and international contexts. Thus organisational modernisation is an inexorable process of change and innovation while bureaucracy is a state of being which is one of the outcomes of such a process. What this implies is that modernisation may, and does, give rise to different outcomes depending on the nature of contestation within an organisation or institution. In every organisation or institutions there will be competing projects of modernisation driven by various factors such as class interests, generation, political ideology and gender, and the final outcome is often a reflection of the existing balance of power between the contending tendencies or groups. The interests of some of the groups or tendencies may diverge or converge depending on the issues at stake.

In this thesis we argue that organisational modernisation is spawned by a process associated with attempts to co-ordinate the activities of a formal organisation, namely organisational management. Organisational management as a process or a set of related organisational co-ordination activities is, on one hand, a response to an internal and external environment in which the organisation operates and, on the other hand, the trigger of processes of organisational modernisation. Analytically, this concept is the link between the internal and external pressures which an organisation is exposed to, and the actual changes which manifest themselves as organisational modernisation. However, organisational management, just like the modernisation it gives rise to, is not a benign process which promotes the interests of all sections of the organisation equally. Although modernisation in its various guises, such as 'organisational development,' is often presented as being neutral, it always carries an ideological, class, race, gender or culture bias.

The processes of organisational change or modernisation we discuss in this thesis do not affect members of an organisation in a similar way nor do they occur in a linear, uninterrupted manner. They are mediated by different forms of social cleavage. Generation is one of these forms of social differentiation which is particularly germane for this discussion. As one analyst has observed, despite the apparent continuous and seamless nature of humanity's reproduction, "the

collective experience of a defined age-group can be a lasting motivating force upon human action".⁶² Karl Mannheim's seminal essay on generations continues to shape modern sociological thought on the subject. He asserted that the concept has two dimensions, both of which are important. 'Generation location' refers to the people who share the same year of birth and thus have a "common location in the historical dimension of the social process".⁶³ 'Generation as actuality', on the other hand, is based on the above but entails more than merely being born into the same social and historical region. It also entails "participation in the common destiny" of the historical and social unit into which people were born.⁶⁴

The notion of generation is pertinent to our discussion of processes of organisational modernisation in that these processes have an important generational dimension. Mannheim has argued that generations play a pivotal role in cultural transmission, that is, the passing on to new generations of "traditional ways of life, feelings and attitudes".⁶⁵ From this we can infer that a high turnover in union leadership may have a highly destabilising effect on this process of cultural transmission, thereby fuelling processes of organisational modernisation. In other words, a rapid generational change may precipitate or accelerate organisational modernisation as the incoming generation seek to entrench new traditions and an organisational culture that corresponds to their social and historical experience. In these circumstances, the result would be a rapid shedding of old organisational traditions, norms and values. Thus, the general proposition we make in this thesis is that different generations tend to pursue different organisational modernisation projects and that their choices are often a function of their social and historical experiences. Of course we should qualify this proposition by pointing out that there is considerable intellectual and cultural intercourse between generations in a union environment and each tends to learn from the other and modify its views accordingly. This intellectual crossover ensures continuity and, on most issues, it helps trade unions avert political conflicts between generations.

Three different generations of full-time union officials were (and still are) active in the unions in the period covered by this thesis. These are the 1960s union and political activists who survived

the wave of repression and arrest or who had served their terms in prison and came back to work underground to revive the unions. These activists were shaped by the robust political activism of the 1950s and 1960s which had used the defiance campaign as a weapon to push back the frontiers of apartheid repression. Their main contribution to the new union movement was their understanding of mass politics. However, their experiences were limited given the fact that their unions were never really able to gain recognition and conclude binding agreements with employers.

The second generation were what we could call the “children of ’76”, that is, those who came into adulthood just before or in the aftermath of the 1976 and 1980 student uprisings and the 1980s struggles to make the country “ungovernable”. Up until the mid-1990s this group constituted the bulk of full-time officials in the post-1973 unions. They brought into the movement a militancy which had not been seen before in the South African struggle and are the ones who took the union struggles of the 1980s beyond the shopfloor by engaging in community struggles and forming alliances with other civil society movements.⁶⁶

The final generation of union officials is the one which achieved adulthood just before or after 1990 as the apartheid system was in an advanced stage of disintegration. This was a time when ‘fighting the system’ was no longer a risk and when activists were beginning to compete with one another for positions and influence within the broad liberation movement.

In this discussion we have condensed the generations into two by combining the first two because the first group was very small in number and there was a great deal that the two had in common, including sharing the same political outlook. In addition, the 1960s generation had played a role in tutoring some of the officials from the 1976 generation. Therefore, we have referred to the pre-1990 unionists as the old generation and those from 1990 onwards as the new generation because we wanted to capture the change of outlook that coincided with the demise of apartheid. This change represented a sociologically interesting phenomenon. The old generation’s existence and political outlook were defined and shaped by the resistance against the

apartheid state and managerial authoritarianism. The new generation on the other hand, was defined and their outlook shaped by the liberalisation of politics from the end of the 1980s and the advent of democracy in the mid-1990s.

The concept of generation is used in this thesis to understand the way in which processes of organisational modernisation and, by implication the dilemma of leadership unfold. Every organisation or movement has its own traditions and organisational culture. In an organisation such as a trade union traditions and culture are built, modified and unmade all the time. In addition, each new generation adopts existing traditions, modifies some of them, jettisons others and invents new ones. Thus, the process of organisational modernisation which we have argued underpins change within organisations such as trade unions is about the making and unmaking of traditions and organisational cultures. During times of relative stability in organisations these changes are subtle and do not appear to threaten stability. However, changes such as generational change which coincides with dramatic and fundamental shifts in the social structure and institutions of power in the national and global contexts tend to result in more radical projects of organisational modernisation and far-reaching modification of a union's culture and traditions.

South Africa is an example of the latter case where there were dramatic shifts in the social structure. Under these conditions organisational modernisation is accompanied by generational change which results in the dissolution of old notions of activism and generates three types of union officials, namely, the ideological unionist, the career unionist and the 'entrepreneur'. These types of officials, which overlap with the two generations discussed above, pursue different projects of modernisation. We discuss them in detail in the chapters that follow.

Assessing Organisational Modernisation in COSATU: A Thematic Approach

Organisational modernisation is a concept which encompasses all those processes and practices in an organisation which are oriented towards enhancing that organisation's efficiency. But it is

not always easy to pinpoint these processes and to assess or measure the changes. In this section we highlight the main themes which we have adopted throughout the thesis as indicators of change within the unions. As will become apparent in the brief summary of issues below, modernisation, unlike oligarchy which is only one of the possible outcomes of this process, is not necessarily negative or anti-democratic. Rather, it is a process that permeates the everyday existence of every organisation which is accelerated by numerical growth, increased interaction with those in authority and the complexity of the issues that the organisation deals with.

Organisational management

The phenomenal growth in union membership which has been accompanied by rapid expansion of full-time official employment, makes organisational management an area of particular interest for analysis in the sociology of trade unionism. The increase in union employment has a number of implications for the functioning of the trade unions. Firstly, most unions spend at least half of their annual income on employment costs. Secondly, large numbers of staff necessitate greater attention by unions to staff supervision, performance appraisal and administrative efficiency, thereby requiring that staff management and development be designated as functions in their own right rather than being part-time tasks of the general secretary. It also means that unions have to develop clear procedures on a variety of issues such as recruitment, performance appraisal and grievance and disciplinary matters. In short, unions have come under pressure to 'professionalise' their staff management policies and practices.

Thirdly, unions have moved away from flat salary structures by introducing hierarchical grades and other forms of recognising skill, service, workload, responsibility and seniority. This is partly a response to the 'brain drain', the need to build and retain capacity and the fact for some officials union work is a career rather than a commitment to a struggle. Finally, over the last decade unions have invested substantial amounts of money into building an administrative infrastructure and providing support to full-time officials.

Organisational management, then, refers to the 'managerial' dimension of running an organisation such as a trade union. In particular, this applies to the managerial functions and procedures related to the recruitment, supervision, remuneration, training, support and retention of personnel. All the above point to far-reaching changes in the way unions are managed, and these changes highlight one area in which unions have been modernising in the period covered by this thesis.

Organisational governance

In contrast to organisational management as discussed above, organisational governance has to do with processes and structures of decision-making within an organisation. The circuits through which power is exercised in an organisation are subject to modification and reconfiguration, particularly at times of rapid social and political change in the society within which the organisation operates. In highlighting organisational governance as one of the indicators of organisational modernisation, we are particularly interested in whether the processes of decision-making are centralised or decentralised. In an organisation such as a trade union, modernisation tends to result in increased centralisation of decision-making and the emergence of a representation gap.

The demobilisation of union membership and the weakening of union structures have been accompanied by a trend towards centralisation and an increasing power of officials. The process of centralisation taking place inside these unions, particularly as a result of the recognition of unions and the establishment of industry and national forums such as bargaining councils and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), has resulted in relations of dependency between union members and some shop stewards on one hand, and union officials on the other. Bureaucratisation is often understood to refer solely to the changing role and power of full-time officials *vis-a-vis* the membership. However, Hyman has suggested that it is also possible to have a 'bureaucratisation of the rank-and-file'⁶⁷ in the sense that full-time shop stewards and some worker leaders could begin to perform similar functions and wield the same

power as full-time officials. Indeed, it would appear that the expansion of the layer of worker leaders who are full-time shop stewards is resulting in a similar phenomenon in several of COSATU's affiliates.

In the chapters that follow we interrogate changes in the way in which unions are governed and decisions taken to demonstrate the extent of modernisation that is taking place.

Organisational culture

The area of organisational culture is crucial for understanding the extent of modernisation processes with movements and organisations which are undergoing change. This theme is about changes in the culture, traditions, values and norms of an organisation and ideological outlook and orientation of its members, activists and leaders. For example, one of the questions we answer in the chapters which follow is whether or not the collective, comradely and self-sacrificing culture of the post-1973 unions is being superseded by one based on individualism.

The culture of an organisation is a product of the experiences and actions of people who are members and participants of the organisation who, in turn, are embedded within a broader social and cultural milieu. These members draw on a variety of meaning systems and knowledge bases and then use such learning to shape and influence the culture of the organisation. Thus the process of generational change bears on this theme as it could affect and be affected by these other changes. We also examine the role of intellectuals in the creation of organisational cultures.

Gender relations

The labour market for trade union officials is segmented along gender lines and this segmentation translates into an inequality of power relations between male and female full-time officials. We examine whether or not organisational modernisation exacerbates the occupational differentiation which places men at the top of the occupational hierarchy and relegates most

women to clerical and junior administrative forms of work.

The social and political environment

Today unionists operate in an environment where opportunities for upward social mobility have increased considerably for certain sections of the population. This, to a large extent, explains the brain drain and the 'waiting room phenomenon' where young people join the unions and remain there for a few years to accumulate work experience and then leave for greener pastures. The desire for upward mobility introduces other processes of change for trade unions and their officials. Unions often find that they have to introduce differential pay systems to retain skilled officials who are likely to get better job offers elsewhere. But this has the effect of introducing various kinds of segmentation in the labour market for trade union officials, particularly along the lines of income, occupational position, education, skill and gender. Certain categories of union officials are in a very strong bargaining position to force certain kinds of changes and processes of modernisation.

The global economic and political environment

The emergence of a global environment characterised by a preponderance of free-market ideas has a tremendous impact on the projects of modernisation which are articulated by different groups within the union movement. What is clear, however, is that the phenomenon of 'vanishing utopias' has affected unions in the same way as other organisations in South Africa and elsewhere. This phenomenon indicates the absence of progressive economic and political alternatives to capitalism which confronts left-wing activists, movements and organisations as a crisis.

We have used the above themes to frame our assessment of modernisation processes within the post-1973 unions. As the discussion in the chapters which follow will show, these unions have experienced unprecedented changes in all these areas. However, our discussion also shows that

not only are these changes contested but there are important continuities with the past in all these areas, something which calls for an innovative approach to analysing these changes. Thus, instead of adopting the conventional characterisation of these unions as bureaucratic or maturing, we have adopted the concept of a dilemma of leadership to capture the contested nature of the changes as well as the continuities with old union traditions.

Conclusion

The issue which is at the core of our discussion in this chapter is the contradiction of organisational imperatives, that is, the tension between democracy and administrative efficiency. In our discussion we argued that in a trade union which is committed to democracy, organisational modernisation which seeks to enhance efficiency gives rise to an additional tension which we call the dilemma of leadership. This dilemma arises because worker control seeks to curtail the power of full-time officials while modernisation seeks to give full-time officials more latitude to make decisions without first referring these to union structures. In other words, the dilemma of leadership is a tension between the need to have a democratically elected leadership which is accountable to the rank-and-file on the one hand, and the desire to have a skilled, competent and efficient full-time officials on the other. In a society in transition from authoritarian rule, such as South Africa during the period covered by this thesis, the militancy of the rank-and-file intensifies the dilemma. The concepts of 'generation' and 'generational change' are used in this thesis to fathom the complex processes whereby the dilemma of leadership intersects with organisational management and modernisation. Does this dilemma represent a creative opportunity or a threat to the post-1973 unions? We shall return to this question in our concluding chapter.

We now move on to Chapter 2 where we discuss the tradition of democratic unionism which in the post-1973 is better known as worker control. In addition to identifying the forces that shaped the 1973 generation of unionists, we also examine how these unionists built worker control.

Notes:

1. In this thesis we use the terms democracy and worker control interchangeably. However, for purposes of consistency we have used democracy or democratic tradition, and the terms worker control or worker control tradition are used only when it is specifically relevant to use them. On the other hand, organisational modernisation is used to denote organisational processes and changes oriented towards the achievement of administrative efficiency. In other words, modernisation refers to the means while efficiency refers to the end. The processes we discuss in this thesis refer to organisational modernisation and thus the term administrative efficiency is only used to refer to the end goal.

In an organisational setting the contradiction of organisational imperatives manifests itself as a tension between democracy and organisational modernisation. In other words, it manifests itself as a contradiction between rank-and-file participation on the one hand, and organisational changes intended to achieve the goal of administrative efficiency, on the other. Thus, although we make a distinction between the terms administrative efficiency and organisational modernisation, we have used the couplet 'democracy *versus* administrative efficiency' interchangeably with 'democracy *versus* modernisation' to capture the relationship between the organisational goal of efficiency and the modernisation processes intended to achieve it.

2. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1920 (first published in 1897). *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, Green, p. 15.
3. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1926. *The History of Trade Unionism*, revised edition, London: Longmans, Green.
4. Crouch, C. 1982. *Trade Unions: The logic of collective action*, London: Fontana, p. 162.
5. Hemingway, J. 1978. *Conflict and Democracy: Studies in trade union government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 4.
6. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1920. *op. cit.*, p. 8.
7. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1926. *op. cit.*, p. 466.
8. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1920. *op. cit.*, p. 36.
9. Lester, R. A. 1958. *As Unions Mature*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, p. 21.
10. *ibid.*, pp. 21 - 22.
11. The terms 'pessimistic' and 'optimistic' are used by Hyman, R. 1971. *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*. London: Pluto Press. Hyman's study presents an intellectual history of the debates and examines at length the different traditions in the study of trade

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- unionism. Another comprehensive review of this literature which is extremely useful is that of Kelly, J. 1988. *Trade unions and Socialist Politics*. London/New York: Verso.
12. Engels, F. 1973. *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. pp. 226 - 31.
 13. Hyman, R. 1971. *op. cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.
 14. Kelly, J. 1988. *op. cit.*, pp. 11 - 12.
 15. For a full discussion of these three theories see Hyman, *op. cit.*, pp. 11 - 20.
 16. Two of the most useful sources on polyarchy in trade unions are: Banks, J. A. (1974) *Trade Unionism*, London: Collier-Macmillan; and James, L. (1984) *Power in a Trade Union: The role of the District Committee in the AUEW*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 17. James, L. 1984. *op. cit.*, pp. 5 - 6.
 18. Banks, J. A. 1974. *op. cit.*, p. 92.
 19. For example, Lipset, S. M., Trow, M. and Coleman, J. 1956. *Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union*. New York: Anchor Books. Hyman, R. 1971. *op. cit.*; Hyman, R. 1975. *Industrial Relations: A Marxist introduction*. Houndmills: Macmillan; Hyman, R. and Fryer, R. H. 1977. "Trade Unions: Sociology and Political Economy", in Clarke, T. and Clements, L. (eds) *Trade Unions Under Capitalism*. Glasgow: Fontana; and Hemingway, J. 1978. *op. cit.*
 20. Hyman, R. and Fryer, R. H. 1977. *ibid.*, p. 166.
 21. Hemingway, J. 1978. *op. cit.*, p. 176.
 22. *ibid.*, p. 11.
 23. Weber's work presents the most coherent theorisation of formal organisation. For an elaboration of his ideas on organisations see Weber, M. 1968. *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Volume 3, New York: Bedminster Press.
 24. An example here is Bramble, T. 1995. "Deterring Democracy? Australia's New Generation of Trade Union Officials", *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37 (3). In this article the author argues, on the basis of indicators such as constitutional provisions, social origins, educational qualifications and method of appointment, that Australia's new generation of full-time officials are deterring union democracy.
 25. For example, Heery, E. and Kelly, J. 1988. "Do Female Representative Make a Difference: Women Full-time Officials and Trade Union Work", *Work, Employment and Society*, 2, 4; Kelly, J. and Heery, E. (1994) *Working for the Trade Union: British trade union officers*, Cambridge:

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- Cambridge University Press; Lawrence, E. 1994. *Gender and Trade Unions*. London: Taylor & Francis; and Pocock, B. (ed.) 1997. *Strife: Sex and politics in labour unions*. St Leonards (Australia): Allen & Unwin.
26. Voss, K. and Sherman R. 2000. "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union revitalization in the American labor movement", *American Journal of Sociology*, 106 (2), p. 309.
 27. *ibid.*, p. 313.
 28. Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today: African workers in trade unions, 1970 - 1984*. Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 59 - 60.
 29. For a detailed discussion of the strategies adopted in the early years the work of Friedman (*ibid.*) and Maree, J. 1992. *Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy: The Rebirth of African Trade Unions in South Africa in the 1970s*, unpublished manuscript, is particularly useful.
 30. Webster, E. 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 253.
 31. Maree, J. 1982. "Democracy and Oligarchy in Trade Unions", *Social Dynamics*, 8, p. 52.
 32. It is not clear whether these figures included other full-time functionaries in the union, such as administrators and education officials. The authors only made reference to 'organisers'.
 33. MacShane, D., Plaut, M. and Ward, D. 1984. *Power!: Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*. Nottingham: Spokesman, p. 68.
 34. *ibid.*, pp. 68 -70.
 35. *ibid.*, p. 70.
 36. See for Buhlungu, S. 1994b. "The Big Brain Drain: Union Officials in the 1990s", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 3; Collins, D. 1994a. "Stopping the Gravy Train", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 3; and Baskin, J. (ed.) 1994. *Unions and Transition: COSATU at the dawn of democracy*, Johannesburg: NALEDI.
 37. Baskin, J. (ed.) 1994. *op. cit.*, p. 34.
 38. For a discussion of social movement unionism and the conditions which gave rise to it see for example, Webster, E. 1988. "The Rise of Social-movement Unionism: The two faces of the black trade union movement in South Africa", in Frenkel, S. and Pines, N. (eds) *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*. London: Croom Helm. and Seidman, G. W. 1994. *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
 39. W. Mangabeira cited in Webster, E. 1999. "Defusion of the Molotov Cocktail in South African

Industrial Relations: The burden of the past and the challenge of the future”, in Kurivilla, S. and Mundel, B. (eds) *Colonialism, Nationalism and the Institutionalization of Industrial Relations in the Third World*. Stamford, Connecticut: Jai Press, p. 51.

40. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1920. *op. cit.*, p. 16.
41. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1926. *op. cit.*, p. 467.
42. Mills, C. Wright. 1948. *The New Men of Power: America's labor leaders*. New York: Harcourt, Brace. pp. 8 - 9.
43. Lane, T. 1974. *The Union Makes Us Strong*. London: Arrow, p. 228.
44. *ibid.*, p. 230.
45. *ibid.*, p. 233.
46. Hyman, R. 1975. *op. cit.*, p. 74.
47. Friedman, S. R. 1982. *Teamster Rank and File: Power, bureaucracy and rebellion at work and in a union*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 33.
48. Hyman, R. 1975., *op. cit.*, p. 73.
49. *ibid.*, p. 69.
50. Kelly, J. And Heery, E. 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 200 - 201.
51. For a discussion of the importance of context in comparative analysis see Locke, R. M. and Thelen, K. 1995. "Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized comparisons and the study of comparative labor politics", *Politics & Society*, 23, 3, 1995. These authors have suggested a different approach called 'contextualized comparisons' which is premised on the view that "various international trends are not in fact translated into common pressures in all national economies but rather are mediated by national institutional arrangements and refracted into divergent struggles over particular national practices" (p. 338). This, they argue, is intended to complement, rather than displace conventional 'matched comparisons' which seek to identify common trends across different national contexts.
52. For a discussion of this point see Moodie, T.D. 1994. *Going for Gold: Men, mines and migration*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, pp. 256 - 63.
53. Schumpeter, J. 1987. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Sixth edition, London: Unwin, p. 247.
54. Some of the national and global pressures on trade unions are discussed in Hyman, R. 1999. *An Emerging Agenda for Trade Unions?* (Discussion Paper No. 98), Geneva: International Institute

for Labour Studies. One of the conclusions of the paper is that global changes in the world of work and in labour markets mean that "a traditional, standardized trade union agenda can neither be practically effective nor ideologically resonant" (p. 11). Although the issues discussed by Hyman relate to the "crisis of traditional trade unionism" at the macro level, they are nevertheless extremely useful in illuminating our argument that external forces contribute to trigger internal changes within unions.

55. Flanders, A. 1970. *Management and Unions*. London: Faber, p. 43.
56. In COSATU and its affiliates organisational modernisation is encompassed under the rubric of changes and adjustments known as 'organisational renewal' or 'organisational development'. For examples of current debates and thinking within the federation see September Commission. 1997. *September Commission Report*. Johannesburg: COSATU (especially Chapter 9 entitled "Transforming Ourselves to Transform Society: Building effective organisation"), and Dicks, C. and Thobejane, C. 2000. "OD in Unions: A case study of NEHAWU", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 24, 3.
57. Webb, S. and Webb, B. 1920. *op. cit.*, p. xx.
58. Crouch, C. 1982. *op. cit.*, p. 161.
59. Thompson, P. and McHugh, D. 1990. *Work Organizations: A critical introduction*. Basingstoke and London: MacMillan, p. 171.
60. Weber, M. 1968. *op. cit.*, p. 956.
61. These principles are discussed in detail in Weber, M. 1968., *op. cit.*, pp. 956 - 58.
62. White, Dan S. 1992. *Lost Comrades: Socialists of the front generation, 1918 - 1945*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 3.
63. Mannheim, K. 1952. *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 290.
64. *ibid.*, p. 303. In a fascinating study on the generation of students who participated in the 1968 student uprisings in Western Europe and North America, one analyst has made the following observations: "In some ways, then, 1968's impact was as tangible and yet as important as a change of the airwaves; a generation of students learned that it was possible to confront the established order not just in the streets but socially, politically, culturally, and in its most intimate manifestations in the human personality. It anchored large sectors of that generation on the left ... Significantly, one of the moments that remains most vividly engraved in many student's memories is the sense of personal engagement and freedom they felt when they took their lives into their hands, occupying their small spaces of liberated territory, democratically managing and deciding their own affairs" (Fraser, R. 1988. *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*. London: Chatto & Windus, pp. 317 - 18).

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65. *ibid.*, p. 299.
66. These played a similar role to the “new leaders with activist experience in other social movements” as discussed by Voss, K. and Sherman, R. 2000., *op. cit.*
67. For a discussion of this concept see Hyman, R. 1979. “The Politics of Trade Unionism: Recent tendencies and some problems for theory”, *Capital & Class*, Summer 1979.

CHAPTER 2: THE INVENTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION IN THE POST-1973 UNIONS¹

Introduction

In the last chapter we identified and discussed the notion of a dilemma of leadership which results from a tension between democracy on the one hand, and administrative efficiency and organisational modernisation on the other. This dilemma arises when rank-and-file union members assert worker control while some full-time officials seek to modernise the way a union operates. However, before we consider how this dilemma manifests itself in an organisational setting, we begin by examining how a generation of union activists emerged and a democratic tradition was invented.

In South Africa democracy in general is a tradition which was built by the liberation movement as a whole, including political movements, trade unions and civic organisations. The emergence of this tradition in the trade union movement is often attributed solely to the generation of young activists who were involved in the re-emergence of unions after 1973. Some analysts have gone so far as to suggest that the white student activists and university-trained intellectuals were the main source of democratic ideas which were alien to the black workers who constituted the membership of these unions.² However, a closer examination of the evidence suggests that the democratic tradition of unionism owes its origins to a very wide range of influences and sources, among which were cultural, traditional, political and intellectual influences. Thus any attempt which seeks to examine and understand how the democratic culture and tradition of unionism was built needs to go beyond the simplistic notion that only a select group of activists and intellectuals brought the democratic culture into the unions.

An examination of how this tradition was 'invented' is simultaneously an attempt to understand the social character of trade unions and how they bear the imprint of the historical and cultural heritage and social experiences of their members and leading activists. Hobsbawm has argued that the building of new institutions, ideas, theories and tactics is seldom a result of deliberate social engineering because "men live surrounded by a vast accumulation of past devices, and it is natural to pick the most suitable of these, and to adapt them for their own (novel) purposes".³ In a similar way, the democratic tradition of the post-1973 unions was a complex composite of the lived experiences of egalitarianism and grassroots participation shared by black workers and the intellectual contributions of activists from different social and political backgrounds. This chapter is an attempt to identify some of these contributions and experiences and to discuss the economic and political context in which the robust tradition of democratic unionism emerged.

Below we discuss some of the 'materials' or 'lived experiences' which contributed towards the building of democratic unionism in South Africa.

The Lived Experiences of Black Workers and the Emergence of Democratic Unionism

The making of a mass movement and the associational forms that it gives rise to involves a series of social processes of mobilisation and construction of new forms of solidarity and identities. It is in the construction of these forms of solidarity and new identities that the lived social experiences of the different groupings that come together become crucial. In other words, a social group does not enter into new associational forms as a *tabula rasa*. In his seminal study of the making of the English working class, E. P. Thompson refers to the formation in 1832 of a society of weavers in Ripponden, a weaving village in the Pennines, and the remarkably radical tone of its founding rules which were based on notions of communal co-operation and egalitarianism. This was during the time when Robert Owen's intellectual influence among the working class was at its height. Thompson's comments on the significance of the society's rules have relevance for our argument here.

This is not just a translation of Owen's doctrines to the context of a weaving village. The ideas have been shaped, laboriously, in terms of the weavers' experience; the emphases have shifted; in place of the messianic stridency, there is the simple question: Why not? One of the small co-operative journals was aptly entitled *Common Sense*: its emphasis was on the 'Trading Associations'.⁴

Thompson's account underlines the argument we make in this discussion that new organisational forms and intellectual influences seldom take root in a vacuum. More often than not, they are received in a social and cultural milieu which has produced its own traditions, norms and values which shape the lives of people in particular ways. Thus, the adoption of new doctrines should rather be conceived of as a dialectical blending of intellectual influences and the social idioms and experiences of working class people. In the case of the new unions in South Africa, the different groups of workers which were part of the new processes of mobilisation brought with them a number of lived social and cultural experiences which coalesced into what became the democratic tradition of worker control in these unions. Some of these experiences were not necessarily democratic in themselves but they promoted the search by workers for more egalitarian alternatives. The discussion below identifies and discusses some of these lived experiences.

Religious influences

Many of the workers who joined unions during and after 1973 had deep religious backgrounds while many others had distant affiliations with different religious formations in their communities. The dominant religion was the Christian faith which was practised through different denominations. Religion had a profound influence on the new unions in the 1970s, and in many cases this influence was still visible in the 1980s. A prominent historian of the British working class has noted a similar influence on the British (and French) trade union movements and has observed that although religion has historically served to "drug the pain of intolerable social strain, and provide an alternative to revolt", it can also serve to promote revolutionary objectives. Thus in poor and pre-industrial Britain where religion was "the language and

framework of general action" it inspired all ideologies of revolt.⁵ But more importantly for our argument here is the contribution of religion towards organisation-building.

In the main, however, the labour tradition of dissent derives from the Methodist revival; more especially, from the series of breakaways after 1810 of which the Primitive Methodist is the best-known. It was in this school that the new factory proletarians, rural labourers, miners and others of the sort learned how to run a trade union, modelling themselves on chapel and circuit. One has merely to read the district report of an East-Anglia farm-labourer's union to see how much they owed to it.⁶

In the literature on South African trade unionism, the religious contribution has, until recently, gone unacknowledged. Although still limited in its analysis because of its narrow focus on institutional contributions of religious organisations, the recently published history of the Urban Training Project (UTP) goes some way towards making up for this omission. The book gives a detailed and extremely useful account of the role played by the Catholic church, its youth wing, the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and, to a lesser extent, other Christian denominations.⁷ Many of the UTP's officials and trainers had strong religious backgrounds while scores of YCW and UTP graduates later occupied influential positions in the post-1973 unions. Apart from this institutional contribution religion influenced union traditions in several other ways in South Africa. Firstly, it imbued many with a sense of justice and provided them with a rationale for challenging oppressive and exploitative relations in society. Thus, Salie Manie, then Western Cape leader of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU), could find no contradiction between his Islamic faith and his activism.

My mother was a religious instructor at the mosque. Religion has always played a central role in my life. The concept of justice has been ingrained in our family. My mother brought us up not to compromise on what was right. I believe in God. I also believe in social justice. I see myself as a Muslim, but I also see myself as a socialist.⁸

The new 'black theology' which emerged during the early years of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) made an explicit link between the teachings of the Christian faith and the struggle for democracy in the country. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s many church organisations

and centres began to make a statement about whose side they were on by making church centres available as venues for union meetings. This was at a time when many hotels and other venues in white towns were hostile to black unions and other liberation organisations. Emma Mashinini, the first general secretary of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) recalls that when the union was established in 1975 she could not rent an office in its name because of the Group Areas Act and had to resort to asking the white National Union of Distributive Workers to use its name to rent the premises. Later the landlord evicted the union because he did not like the regular stream of black workers visiting the offices. At this point Mashinini was offered offices at Khotso House, the building housing the national office of the South African Council of Churches.⁹

Secondly, there were cases where religion or religious rituals acted as a unifying force in the new unions. One of these rituals was the prayer at the start of union meetings which acted not only to unite those in prayer but also to lend legitimacy and respectability to the struggle. The use of prayers at the start of union meetings was associated with the older generation of workers and it remained an important ritual until a younger and more militant generation of workers took the lead in the 1980s.

Thirdly, one example of the influence of religion on the new unions is the way in which religious hymns were adapted to the struggle context and how the unions learnt to use the power of singing to mobilise workers into action. The power of singing was not only in the lyrics but also in the rhythm. In the same way that song and dance play an important part in African cultural life, it came to play the same role in the unions, only now with greater religious derivations.

Finally, many of those activists who came to occupy leading positions in the new unions had prior experience of leadership in religious organisations of various kinds. One example of these leaders is Sipho Kubheka, who rose to become the general secretary of PPWAWU. He was a lay preacher in one of the independent African churches before he joined the unions in the early 1970s where he had gained experience in public speaking, negotiation and organizing skills.¹⁰

Philemon Bokaba, an ex-shop steward of NUMSA at African Telephone Cables (ATC) who served as a national vice-president for many years in the 1980s and 1990s was an active official of his church for ten years before joining the union. He says that the skills that he gained as a church official were very useful in enabling him to perform his union duties.¹¹

In a nutshell then, although the church is a hierarchical organisation, it had a very influential role in the construction of the democratic traditions of the union movement. Indeed, in the context of apartheid South Africa, many church bodies had a relatively developed system of self-government and rank-and-file participation. Church bodies also had an extensive national network of people, facilities and resource bases which assisted the new unions in several other ways.

African traditional influences

The new unions also owed aspects of their character to what remained of traditional African political culture, in particular the tradition of debate and consensual decision-making by members of the community gathering at an *imbizo* or *lekgotla*. Experiences gained in these traditional structures in rural settings were part of the mosaic of lived experiences that gave birth to the democratic tradition of unionism in the 1970s.¹² There are many examples which show that this could be adapted and transferred into proletarian and other non-traditional settings. These gatherings were used by many migrant workers to debate issues and to resolve disputes among 'home-boy' groups in South Africa's urban areas and mining compounds. Indeed, part of the reason why many unions took root relatively rapidly among migrant workers in urban and mining hostels or compounds is that these structures were used as mobilising forums for union activities.¹³

However, we must add that, as with religious institutions, traditional structures tended to be hierarchical and were biased in favour of older men because maleness and age were associated with experience and wisdom. The implications of these negative aspects of the workers' lived

experiences are discussed later in this chapter. Suffice it to say that these experiences influenced the emergence of a more democratic culture of conducting union affairs, particularly the culture of debating issues until consensus emerges. In his book, *Command or Consensus*, Hammond-Tooke describes the operation of local administrative councils (an *imbizo* and an *inkundla*) in a traditional setting in South Africa's rural villages.

The 'chairman' of the council is of course the headman. In theory he guides the discussion, and the decisions are made in his name; in practice much depends on his personality and on the forces ranged for or against him in committee. We have seen how, in the traditional decision-making process, great emphasis was laid on consensus, so that decision-making was the product of an essentially 'political' interaction between council members who were equal to one another. The official position of the headman in the bureaucratic structure has tended to skew this extreme democratic system, for he is now backed by the Administration.¹⁴

Hammond-Tooke refers to these structures as 'tribal democracies' where there was "relatively little 'authority' attached to indigenous political officers. Political officers could command, but only after the order had been formulated by a process that involved consensus".¹⁵ In many ways, the union workplace general meeting and the local shop stewards' council are similar to the *imbizo*, especially in the way in which debate is conducted and consensus achieved.

Experience in cultural and sports organisations

The suppression of political and union activity in the 1960s was not accompanied by an obliteration of other social and cultural forms of organisation among black South Africans. Indeed, in many areas the absence of political activity led many to find solace in other 'non-political' activities such as sports and in cultural bodies such as dance clubs and choirs. Many of these bodies were run on strictly formal and relatively democratic lines, thus providing opportunities for those involved to gain basic organisational skills such as chairing meetings, operating bank accounts, keeping minutes, participating in open debates and the election of

leadership. Tim Couzens' fascinating study of the history of soccer in South Africa shows that soccer for black people became "an organised affair" early in the twentieth century. It would appear that during their early stages – 'spontaneous organisation', 'organised amateurism' and 'small professionalism' – there was active involvement by club members in the running of the affairs of these clubs.¹⁶ Glenn Adler has also examined how rugby, a sport with contradictory "traditional authority and democracy" contributed towards the building of solidarity between African and coloured workers in the Eastern Cape. He argues that non-racial rugby had a "profoundly radical potential" and provided players and political activists with a platform to discuss ideas and to form "autonomous organizations" which they were not allowed to form in the political arena.¹⁷

The contribution of these experiences, particularly the skills gained therein, towards the building of the democratic trade union movement should not be underestimated as many of the workers who joined unions in the 1970s and 1980s were members of these sports and cultural associations and clubs.

Mutual-help clubs or societies

Equally important in the building of the democratic union movement is the experience gained by working class black South Africans in a variety of voluntary mutual-help clubs and associations. These take various forms depending on the function they are supposed to serve. The *masingwabane* or burial society is a voluntary association established by people who pool money collected on a monthly basis to be used in the event of a death of a member or his or her relatives. It was, and remains, a very common form of social organisation among black working class people in environments which were perceived to be unfamiliar, hostile and which were physically distant from their close relatives and communities. In later years it also became a means of solidarity and mutual help in conditions of uncertainty and poverty in South Africa's segregated black townships. What is relevant about this form of association is the way it manages its affairs. A well-developed *masingwabane* will have a bank account, elected officials –

chairperson, secretary, treasurer - and will keep a record of its meetings which are held at regular intervals. In addition, it will have a democratic way of accounting for money spent. In the townships, the *stokvel* and its many variants such as the *moholisano* and the 'society', are formed as savings clubs where members take turns to receive all the funds collected every month. In all these clubs, there are regular meetings and there is democratic debate about how much the contributions should be, who to admit to the club, etc. Although they emerge as adaptive and defensive forms of social interaction and reciprocity, or "instrumental collectivism" as some have referred to them,¹⁸ they also point to an ability to blend traditional African and western institutional and social practices. One writer has observed that the process of 'syncretisation' which results in these social institutions and practices is a manifestation of an embryonic race and class consciousness and the "continuing value and power of indigenous world views among colonised people".¹⁹

School struggles

Many of the workers who participated in the formation of the new unions in the 1970s had come through a period of turbulence in the education system where they had been thrust into positions of leadership in struggles against the authoritarian education authorities. Although many of these experiences did not necessarily result in the formation of democratic structures, the experiences remain important nevertheless because it was in fighting these struggles that these activists came to embrace democracy as an ideal. African education, particularly at the secondary level, has a long history of instability characterised by student 'strikes', many of which were provoked by authoritarian administrators and poor living conditions in boarding schools.²⁰ Nelson Ndinisa, a former shop steward and past president of the then South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU) recalls a protracted struggle at his high school, Osborne High in Mount Frere, which led to his eventual expulsion before he could write his matriculation examinations. At a certain stage of that struggle he played a leading role because he could understand that things were not right. He attributes his political awareness to a history teacher at the school.

While he was doing history he would give us more ideas of what is happening. So he was actually the one, so that when these things happened in Soweto we had a better understanding of them. Now when the [Transkei] independence came he was able to articulate what it means. Generally in the rural areas people didn't understand. But we tried to form a student grouping that side and we said that people must really understand that what we are getting is not really independence. So, that was the background as we started to know that something is wrong. I have always believed that that teacher actually played a critical role because he was able to explain and analyse the situation. Naturally, I was a good reader in black history and all those things, where we came from, why and all those things.²¹

Bobby Marie, a former national organiser of NUMSA, was also a student activist before he joined the unions. It was during this time that his political awareness developed and his student idealism propelled him towards involvement in democratic organisations in the community.²² But the largest group of student activists who joined the unions and made a tremendous impact on the unions were those who had lived through the heady events of 1976 and 1980 when thousands of students went into open conflict with the apartheid state. Many of these students brought notions of democracy, however fuzzy, into the budding union movement which made them amenable to the emerging tradition of democratic unionism.

Previous union experience

Many of the workers who joined unions in the 1970s had previous union experience, many of them having joined unions affiliated to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Lambert has shown that many of these unions were run democratically and had elected shopfloor committees.²³ Thus, many of these older workers would have had some experience of belonging to a democratic organisation. Bonnin's research has also established a continuity between unionisation in the 1950s and 1960s and the re-emergence of unions in the 1970s. Workers still remembered the unions of the 1960s and the setbacks they suffered when Sarmcol management went on a counter-offensive to crush the union and reassert their control by restructuring the labour process.

The stories of Gwala's union were not forgotten - new workers learnt about those times from their fathers and brothers, but also from the *imbongi* of Sarmcol, Lawrence Zondi. Gwala left behind one important message to the workers he had organised - the importance of unity. Only by uniting and standing together could workers achieve their demands - this is the message that the new workers learnt.²⁴

The other experience which contributed towards the building of the democratic unionism in the 1970s and 1980s came from the coloured unions which had democratised and revitalised in the 1960s and subsequently joined forces with the emerging African unions in the 1970s. In Chapters 3 and 5 we discuss this contribution further.

Political and civic movements

Many of the members of the post-1973 unions had previous experience as members of political or liberation movements which had embraced democracy as their goal. Many of these members would have participated in liberation movement activities in the 1950s and 1960s, and some of their experiences were brought into the new unions after 1973. A number of them became front-line activists in the struggle to establish these unions.

In later years activists from the civics, the United Democratic Front (UDF), Africanist and Black Consciousness Movement organisations joined the unions and brought with them substantial experience and skills in mass mobilisation and organisation. But it is equally true to say that many union leaders took their experience into these liberation movements.

Liaison and works committees

After the passing of the Black Labour Relations Regulation Act in 1973 many employers orchestrated the formation of liaison committees as a strategy to bypass or avoid trade unions. Many workers who were to become union leaders in later years participated in these committees.

These structures were not democratic but they alerted those involved in them about the problems of working in 'toy-telephone' structures. However, to dismiss the entire experience as a negative one would be mistaken. Indeed, some unions had a deliberate strategy of taking these bodies over from inside and turning them into democratic shopfloor structures. Johann Maree was among a group of Cape Town activists in the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau who adopted a strategy of using works committees to get their 'foot inside the door' and then gradually transform these bodies into worker controlled shop floor committees.²⁵ At first activists in other centres were sceptical about the effectiveness of this strategy, but when it produced the desired results in Cape Town, unionists in other unions and other parts of the country also adopted it. NUMSA organiser, Petrus Tom's experience as a member of a liaison committee in the 1970s is also illuminating.²⁶ In these structures some workers learnt some organisational skills which are essential for running a democratic organisation, for example, chairing meetings, taking minutes, giving reports and basic negotiation.

Negative experiences of apartheid authoritarianism

Petrus Mashishi, the president of SAMWU, says that most black workers did not join trade unions because they liked them. "We joined the trade unions because of the way we were treated".²⁷ Millions of black workers experienced, in one form or another, the authoritarian nature of apartheid rule and these negative experiences predisposed them to some form of democracy both as practice within their unions and as an ideal form of government for the entire society. Indeed, for those in the liberation struggle broadly, belonging to a democratic organisation and being involved in the fight for democracy placed them on some kind of moral high ground *vis-a-vis* their apartheid oppressors. In the workplace, this oppressive and racially defined power structure took the form of an 'apartheid workplace regime' which constituted the workplace as "a place of white power and black powerlessness".²⁸

Fear of repression

Many activists who participated in the early years of union organisation and mobilisation argue that unions had no choice but to be democratic. One former unionist argues that the post-1973 unions “made a virtue out of necessity”. Democracy, he says, was made necessary by the hostile environment of employer resistance and state repression and to avoid victimisation of a few individuals. It also ensured that when leaders were victimised, the organisation would continue to function as the members would take responsibility for the survival of the union.²⁹

The contribution of lived experiences as discussed above has been neglected by scholars of the South African trade union movement. Part of the reason for this omission could be that some of the experiences do not originate in organisational milieus that are known for being democratic. Indeed, many of the experiences originated in undemocratic environments. However, all these experiences highlight the importance of workers’ lived experiences and the fact that transformative associational forms, modes of collective solidarity and identities are never constructed out of pure antecedents but emerge out of life as it is lived by those who participate in the construction of those new associational forms, solidarity and identities. This approach helps us move away from elitist approaches which always ascribe new ideas to an ‘intelligent outsider’.

Having said the above, we should also note that many of the organisations and arenas where these experiences were gained were often conservative and backward-looking. The negative or conservative lived experiences were also capable of being mobilised for different reasons. For example, the traditional experiences could be mobilised by ethnic groupings whose purpose was to collaborate with the apartheid government. In a similar way, religious sentiments could be exploited by conservative groups to discourage political involvement or to encourage collaboration with the apartheid state. Thus, ‘lived experiences’ are a weapon that cuts both ways in that some of these can be mobilised in a transformative way while others can be mobilised in a retrogressive direction. It is here that the role of leadership and intellectuals

becomes important, for they play a role in packaging and mobilising these lived experiences to fit in with the transformative project. This discussion now turns to the contribution of intellectuals in the emergence of the tradition of democratic unionism. Here 'intellectual' is used in its broadest possible sense to include organic intellectuals and others who perform a general leadership role in organisations.

The Intellectual Contribution Towards the Emergence of Democratic Unionism

The contribution of intellectuals to the emergence of the democratic tradition of unionism in South African is not in dispute. What is at issue is the form that this contribution took as well as the composition of the intellectual group involved in union organising and mobilisation. With reference to the South African trade union movement, the term 'intellectual' has been associated with only a particular group of activists who were white and university-educated. Many of these activists were employed by the unions but there were others who were based at universities as researchers and lecturers and in labour-supporting organisations (LSOs). The fact that most of the university-educated or traditional intellectuals were white is a function of inequalities in the provision of education and processes of social closure under apartheid which made it difficult for a black intellectual class to emerge.³⁰

Among some black officials and leaders in the unions, the term 'intellectual' was used as a pejorative reference to white officials who had administrative skills and possessed analytical skills which enabled them to 'theorise' about the suffering of black workers. Many of these black leaders and officials resented the power of these intellectuals which derived from their privileged background in the middle class of white society. Thus the term intellectual had the connotation of 'privileged fellow-traveller' for whom the struggle was not a life-and-death issue.³¹

In this discussion the term is used in a much wider sense, which could be construed to include Gramsci's two categories of traditional and organic intellectuals.³² In South Africa the concept

has also been used in this way with reference to the unions, but there are those who have taken it further by disaggregating the category of organic intellectuals further into sub-categories.³³

According to Gramsci, the social function of intellectuals is to advance or undermine various world views, a function which is performed in the course of the on-going political struggle for hegemony.³⁴ Hence for Gramsci, the intellectual function is not about eloquence and demagoguery but it is about “active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’.”³⁵ This function is also about the creation and diffusion of ideas. The latter function involves the ‘socialisation’ of existing and new ideas and even making them “the basis of vital action”.³⁶ This is the crucial function that the different groups of intellectuals discussed in this thesis played within the post-1973 unions in South Africa. Their role entailed, to a very large extent, the ‘packaging’ of a set of ideas into an ideology and a coherent political programme.

Intellectuals do not necessarily invent ideas and strategies but they perform the crucial functions of processing, refining, packaging and articulating often common-sense approaches and taken-for-granted ideas into powerful strategies and principles which then become the building blocks of enduring organisational traditions, principles and practices. Workers and their workplace representatives may have a desire to control their union and to ultimately take control of their workplaces, but they need intellectuals to help them organise these ideas conceptually, give them respectability and legitimacy, and to be able to defend or justify them intellectually and politically.

These intellectuals may be traditional, formally educated intellectuals, or they may be organic intellectuals who have been produced by union struggles and union processes of education and training. For the intellectuals to perform this role, they need to possess analytical and administrative skills and an understanding of the lived experiences of the workers they were organising. Few of the groups of intellectuals identified here possessed both strengths. Indeed, the strength of the intellectual contribution to the development of the post-1973 unions was the combination of different groups possessing different strengths. For example, the strength of a worker leader and full-time official such as Moses Ndlovu in Pietermaritzburg was that he understood the lived experiences of the workers he organised and he could translate abstract

terms into the language and idiom that the workers understood.³⁷ By contrast, some of the white officials that he worked with could read books on theories of trade unionism but they needed to combine this strength with his knowledge to ensure that new strategies were effective.

In short, the intellectual contribution towards the new unions did not come from a single group, but was a complex amalgamation of inputs by different layers of the movement's intellectual leadership, professional and organic. Below we examine briefly each of these layers.

Professionally-trained intellectuals

In this category we include university-trained intellectuals who joined the unions in a full-time capacity. Although there were a few black professionally-trained intellectuals such as Cyril Ramaphosa who had trained as a lawyer and subsequently founded the National Union of Mineworkers, and the author who had a B.A. Honours degree, the majority of these intellectuals were white. For this reason, within the emerging union movement the term intellectual came to be associated with white activists. Although a few of these officials became involved as organisers, most of them occupied specialist or strategic positions as media, research, education and legal officers or were appointed or elected as negotiators and branch and general secretaries.

It was in these capacities that they played the role of strategising and packaging ideas into coherent programmes of action. However, at the time of joining the movement most of these intellectuals were often naive and sometimes arrogant young people who had very little insight into the world of black workers in a racially-divided society. Their advantage, though, was that they controlled the instruments through which the strategising and the packaging was done. The packaging was done in their language, English, rather than the vernacular languages spoken by the workers they served. In addition, they alone had access to newspapers and journals where their contributions were evaluated, criticised or commended.

The role of white intellectuals within the unions has always been central but contested. The cleavage between black and white officials corresponded with class given that white officials

were invariably drawn from non-working class backgrounds while almost all black officials came from working class backgrounds. This resulted in an inequality of power relations and a division of labour whereby white officials, almost all university-educated, performed strategic and intellectual functions which carried more political clout while black officials performed more mundane functions such as organising and clerical work which during the early years did not carry political weight.

Even though most black worker leaders and officials acknowledge the contribution to the struggle by white intellectuals, they are critical of some of them for being manipulative and inconsistent when it came to respecting the democratic traditions of the union movement. Some of this is due to the fact that, compared to black union officials, most white union officials tended to be highly competitive and always wanted to take personal credit for their contributions. Part of this competitive spirit was a result of the individualism associated with their education, class background and access to intellectual resources and networks outside of the union movement. This accounts, in part, for the fact that the contributions of white officials tended to get more coverage internally and externally.

White officials occupied a curious and contradictory position in the South African social structure. On the one hand they had rejected white society as envisaged by the architects of apartheid and associated themselves with the struggle to emancipate the working class. In the context of apartheid, this meant that they were outcasts who were seen as traitors by their own communities. Many of them paid dearly for taking this stand through bannings, detentions and even death. On the other hand, though, white officials were never fully inserted into the class with which they had pledged solidarity. Ironically, the social distance which existed between white people and black people in general continued to exist between these officials and workers and black officials. None of the white officials could speak any of the African languages spoken by the workers they organised. White officials continued to maintain social contact within their white enclaves and activist networks. Their relationship with the workers was always mediated by the black full-time official who acted as a translator and interpreter in these interactions.

Otherwise, all workers and shop stewards, regardless of whether they could speak English or not, had to 'compromise' so as to make things easy for the white official.

Johann Maree, an activist in the early years of union re-emergence in Cape Town, remembers that this gap existed in the Western Cape. Zora Mehlomakhulu, a black activist, worked with the white activists who were involved in building the new unions. She was also linked to another network of black workers and activists in the townships who were more directly involved in organising workers in the factories.

We were all white and we were planning structures and strategies. But she would also be linked to another network in the township. We would only see the people when they came through the office. She always was there and participating, but she wasn't one of the leading intellectuals. She was *au fait* with what was going on, but she wasn't a strategising person. But she was there in some of the organising and asked and made very good comments. She used to sit a bit on the fringe of the intellectuals and had contacts in different directions, and it was actually interesting to know what she thinks. There could well have been some white intellectuals who went to workers and visited them at factories. But I would imagine it didn't happen very much. My sense is that there was a language, culture and political barrier at that time.³⁸

Thus, black officials played a very important role in helping white officials break through these barriers. None in the union movement at the time raised this publicly as a problem as their skills were seen to outweigh any shortcoming white officials may have had with regard to language and their inability to understand the world of black workers. The division of labour between strategic and planning functions on the one hand, and clerical and organising functions on the other, was also about the inequality of power relations between black and white full-time officials. What prevented this state of affairs and the resentments that it generated among black union activists from exploding into an open conflict was the inter-dependence of the two categories of union officials. Black officials depended on the administrative and strategic skills of white officials and stood to learn a lot by working closely with them. Similarly, white officials depended on the co-operation and assistance of black officials regarding communicating with black workers and understanding the cultural codes of the black workers' world in a racially

divided society. However, this relationship remained fragile as it depended on the continued monopoly of organisational skills by the white officials. When a significant layer of black organic intellectuals emerged in the 1980s the position of white officials became more tenuous and the interdependence began to fracture and disintegrate.

The power of white intellectuals within the union movement has always been attributed, correctly, to their class background, their financial resources and networks and their intellectual and administrative skills. However, there is another neglected source of power for white full-time officials, namely, their contradictory location within the social structure of a racialised society. For many black workers, the colour of these officials conferred respectability to their struggle and brought knowledge and skills which colonial domination and apartheid had taught them only a white person could possess. As one senior MAWU shop steward put it, “workers still ask the whites to come and do the negotiating”.³⁹ Jeremy Baskin, a white official who served PPWAWU in different capacities over many years, and later became a COSATU official, argues that the fact that white officials had knowledge of how the system worked was a resource for the unions.

Under apartheid whites had access to the system and had an understanding of the system in a way very few black people could have. I think white organisers knew how to negotiate with the white bosses, under apartheid they had insight into the working of the enemy, they had the benefit beyond the skills.⁴⁰

Baskin illustrates this by citing an incident back in the 1980s when he was driving a union *bakkie* [van] from Piet Retief to Richards Bay with several shop stewards as passengers in the back. They were stopped at a police roadblock and to avoid being searched and harassed Baskin decided to act as a white boss ferrying his workers to his farm. The police relaxed and let them through. In a similar incident when he was driving with senior unionists near Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape, he used the same trick by telling the police, “I’m taking these boys home. They have been working overtime”. “Because I was white, they said I could pass”, he says.

But the contradictory position of white officials was also a source of their vulnerability. They

were unable to penetrate the world of black workers beyond the formal interactions defined by the requirements of their jobs within the unions. Also, a lot of these interactions were characterised by inter-racial etiquette on both sides which meant that problems, tensions and misunderstandings were often shelved in favour of maintaining the facade of inter-racial harmony. The upshot of this was that although they could communicate with some workers and got others to translate for them in meetings, this did not compensate for the failure to penetrate the social and cultural interstices of the black workers' world. One of the activists who was part of the early efforts to establish unions in the Western Cape recalls being puzzled when watching black workers discuss issues in Xhosa because they seemed to discuss endlessly. He later realised that this "talking and talking" was part of African traditional practice of consensus-building. "You had to have a lot of patience also when you worked in the union", he said.⁴¹

This was a critical handicap as it meant they could not reach the level where formal union education and political discourse is digested, interrogated and reinterpreted to fit in with the existing knowledge forms and discourses. It was also at this level that organic intellectuals and discourses emerged and shaped the politics of ordinary members of movements and organisations.

What the above implies is that although some white intellectuals sought to groom a worker leadership which would not oppose their own politics, what occurred in the early 1980s was that a layer of worker leaders and organic intellectuals emerged independently of white officials. The processes through which these leaders and organic intellectuals were produced is discussed in other sources.⁴² Suffice it to say that as they gained confidence and political maturity, these leaders and intellectuals became more assertive and began to express their resentment of the power and 'democratic centralism'⁴³ of white officials. Jane Barret, former general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), cites the example of Chris Dlamini, a Sweet Food and Allied Workers' Union senior shop steward at Kelloggs in Springs who became president of FOSATU and vice-president of COSATU, to make the point about black worker leaders' resentment of white officials. She argues that in the 1980s Dlamini went through "a very

angry period in relation to [white] intellectuals”.

Basically, I think he and other leadership were finding their own political feet and they looked back and felt in some way that their own intellectual development had somehow been curtailed. And in asserting their own political identity, and I think it was most strongly expressed by Chris. He would periodically sort of lash out at those that he felt persuaded him of things that he was now disagreeing with, you know. And, generally speaking that tended to be that previous generation [of leaders]. And, of course that generation, they did have a very clear, I'm not saying it was right, but they did have a clear political objective as expressed in the Joe Foster speech and the early debates in FOSATU. They were the strongest proponents of a particular form of trade unionism and they were very guarded about protecting the trade union movement, very resistant to linking up with other political organisations and very suspicious of the nationalism of the ANC.⁴⁴

According to Barret, this assertiveness by black unionists coincided with and was partly shaped by the resurgence of mass mobilisation outside of the trade union movement in the early 1980s. She argues that in a context where white officials had skills which translated into control, this resentment and anger was understandable.

Because of the greater access to education and with English being the first language and greater writing skills and all that, on average, of the whites who were working in the trade union movement, it would have been impossible to prevent a situation where, from time to time, emerging black leadership didn't feel somehow resentful because all of those skills easily translate themselves into control.⁴⁵

From about 1984 this assertiveness by black organic intellectuals and worker leaders, in conjunction with a range of other factors, resulted in the decline of the power of white officials in the post-1973 unions.⁴⁶ According to one observer, this period was characterised by “a surge of popular resistance and stayaways” when workers started to assert their own agenda which was not confined to the workplace. This agenda was about issues such as rents, education, police harassment and, most importantly, political power. It was at this time when the United Democratic Front was formed and the ANC re-emerged as a leading force in the struggle for national liberation, resulting in a new political dynamic which “none of the intellectual stratum

were comfortable with".⁴⁷ In addition, a generation of young student activists who had been in the vanguard of school and youth struggles in 1976 and 1980 had joined the workforce and the union movement. The assertiveness of this generation which, in many instances, was inspired by the black consciousness movement, radical politics and an uncompromising approach to the struggle catapulted them to the forefront of the burgeoning worker's movement. Incidentally, it was from within this group that the bulk of black organic union intellectuals were drawn. While in most cases they co-operated with white intellectuals for the good of the union movement, there were several instances when they challenged the power of these intellectuals.

The second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s saw a retreat by white officials from the union movement into specific policy-oriented areas. By this time the post-apartheid South Africa was in sight and these intellectuals carved a niche for themselves in the policy arena because that was where their skills were "significantly more valuable because this is the terrain of university-based intellectuals".⁴⁸ It was this new-found niche which drew most of the old generation of white union officials out of the unions and into state institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), union investment companies and consultancy work. As the discussion in Chapter 6 shows, there are very few white officials left in the union movement today, and those who remain do not enjoy the same status, power and influence because unions have managed to develop, retain and attract a critical mass of black intellectuals. The other reason why there are fewer white organisers in the unions is, according to one white ex-unionist, because social institutions such as universities which used to produce "committed whites" have stopped producing them. "Maybe Sociology is not producing those people anymore".⁴⁹

Over the last 15 years, all the intellectual and leadership roles which white officials used to perform within individual unions and inside the union movement have been assumed by black leaders and intellectuals. According to a former unionist the significance of this change extends well beyond the union movement itself.

If there is one place where black people are running their own show, it's the unions. Nowhere else in society is that the case. Basically there is a couple of whites. And, black people, that's who the unions belong to, all the disadvantaged groups. That movement, anyway, belongs to them.⁵⁰

We need to qualify the above discussion by noting that white intellectuals or officials were never a homogenous group in the union movement. There were cleavages within the group which arose as a result of gender, class backgrounds and political affiliation of the officials. Thus, instead of them being part of a single network of power, we should understand them as individuals who belonged to several networks of white activists. Although these networks operated in collaboration with networks of black union activists, they remained separate and operated in competition with one another and with those of black unionists. Furthermore, apart from the rare cases when 'approved' black unionists were invited to a *braai* in the white suburbs or to some clandestine evening caucus at a union congress, activists from white and black political and social networks never met outside their normal working hours to debate politics.

'Freelance' intellectuals

In addition to intellectuals who were active inside the union movement, there were those who played an active role in support of the movement but were based outside it.⁵¹ Some of these were students, but most were professional intellectuals at universities and in labour-supporting organisations such as the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE). Richard Turner, an intellectual who received his university education in South Africa and France and taught at the University of Natal, epitomises the freelance intellectual which we discuss here. In addition to inspiring generations of his students to become active in the field of labour, Turner played an active role as a freelance researcher, writer, and educator in support of the emerging union movement. Most of these freelance intellectuals were white and, as Appendix 4 shows, they constituted a very powerful back-up for the emerging unions. Together with those inside the unions, they constituted a network of intellectuals whose contacts extended far beyond the national boundaries of South Africa because of their ability to access international literature, to write for

international publications, to travel overseas and to study in foreign, principally western, institutions.

An important distinction between freelance intellectuals and the professionally-trained intellectuals discussed above is that while the former sought to influence union traditions by playing a supportive role in the form of research, education and advocacy, the latter sought power inside these unions. This stems from the fact that professionally-trained intellectuals inside the unions wanted to exercise control because they “believed in the value of their contribution”.⁵² Although the desire to see their ideas put into practice is common to both categories of intellectuals, the professionally-trained intellectuals working within the unions epitomised what one scholar termed “a disguised set of claims advancing their own candidacy as a new elite”.⁵³ Another study of the relationship of intellectuals and power argues that in every age the intellectuals’ ascendancy to “class power” is achieved by defining as universal, eternal and supreme “whatever knowledge best serves the particular interests connected with their social role” in order to maintain their monopoly of this role. In other words, intellectuals have a tendency to elevate their own “immanent interests” to the status of “transcendent values”.⁵⁴

A point of cardinal importance regarding both categories of intellectuals is that they packaged the democratic traditions of the emergent union movement in the image of Marxism which they had learnt during their training at local and foreign universities. Thus, the Marxist orientation of the democratic traditions of the new unions is attributable to the professionally-trained intellectuals, freelance intellectuals and, of course, party intellectuals who were active during the formative years of these unions.

The *South African Labour Bulletin*, a labour journal established by freelance intellectuals in Durban in 1974 has, during its nearly three decades of existence, served as a platform for aspiring and established white intellectuals to present their ideas for evaluation and criticism. Even in those rare cases where black intellectuals participated in its debates, the parameters of such debates were set by white intellectuals who continue to constitute the majority of its

editorial board to the present day.

The other group of freelance intellectuals were from church bodies. Apart from the religious influences we discussed above, specific church bodies and activists contributed intellectually towards the building of democratic unions. We have already discussed the role of the Catholic Church in building the UTP as an important trade union education and training centre. The Catholic Church also contributed through the YCW, an international organisation which catered specifically for young working class people in the age group 14 to 25 years. One of the chief aims of the YCW was to “address worker demoralisation under industrial capitalism”.⁵⁵ The methodology it adopted to achieve this is very important for our discussion here.

YCW concern to build from the bottom up influenced the character of the UTP through the methodology it had developed. YCW was concerned with worker education, but was not top-down, clergy to laity, white to black, lecturer to student, leader to follower, kind of movement. Cardijn [Belgian founder of the movement] had said workers own nothing: not the factories they work in, nor houses they live in; let them at least own their own movement. This required that a worker-centred methodology be developed to promote leadership. ... YCW's ‘see, judge, act’ method involved members in reflection of their experience.⁵⁶

This participatory methodology engendered a democratic and empowering ethos among those who had been through YCW and, later, UTP training sessions. According to one writer this meant that “It was ordinary workers who were thus empowered to question union officials and structures, in ways that secretaries and organisers found painful and undermining”.⁵⁷ This contribution to the democratic tradition of unionism has, until recently, been ignored. Yet it represents a profoundly progressive and innovative methodology which was easy for workers to assimilate and relate to their lived experiences under capitalism and apartheid.

Party intellectuals

The contribution of party intellectuals or 'organisationally-based intellectuals' towards the building of the trade unions movement can be traced back to the early years of the twentieth century when activists of the Communist Part of South Africa (CPSA) initiated worker education projects such as night schools.⁵⁸ The role of activists in the CPSA (later the South African Communist Party [SACP]) and other liberation movements in building trade unions and worker leadership continued throughout most of the twentieth century. These activists had a considerable influence on the shaping of the democratic traditions of the post-1973 unions.

Their contribution towards the building of this tradition is best illustrated by the experience of one of the early union recruits. He was introduced to unionism in the early 1970s and he attributes his political growth and the egalitarian values that were inculcated in him at this time to Elias (Robert) Manci, a SACTU and ANC activist who had just served a ten year sentence on Robben Island. In addition to giving the young unionists an oral history of the liberation struggle, he also introduced those he had identified for political education to a new, non-hierarchical way of relating to one another as workers. Manci's first recruits were all clerical workers whose positions were seen by other workers to carry "some kind of prestige". He asked them to make their own tea, wash their cups and go and assist other workers to off-load goods from trucks. Manci then referred these early recruits to the Industrial Aid Society (IAS), an organisation he had helped establish, for further training in democratic unionism.⁵⁹

Many of these activists were from the ANC, the SACP and SACTU. Some of them were also veteran unionists in their own right and they were acutely aware of the importance of building sustainable union structures which would survive a counter-offensive by employers and the state. Some of these activists made their intellectual contributions from outside the movement while others joined the unions and participated as full-time officials.

Union-made intellectuals

The role of clerical workers in those industries and workplaces organised by the new unions has received scant attention in the literature on South African unionism. While it is without doubt that many of these workers aspired to the same material and class status as the ‘corporate guerillas’ discussed by Nzimande in his important study of African personnel practitioners (APPs) in corporate South Africa,⁶⁰ many other clerical workers realised that their future lay in solidarity with the rest of the working class. Many of these workers were in the frontline of endeavours to establish the new unions and ended up in leadership positions as shop stewards, local, branch and national office-bearers and full-time officials. Within the black workforce, they constituted the privileged few who could read, write, translate, argue and negotiate. Most importantly, many of these workers had access to management information by virtue of their own positions and their regular contact with managerial operatives in the corporate environment.

The role that these workers played in the invention of democratic union traditions was crucial. In the early days of these unions, they were among the key contacts with white intellectuals as well as being the intermediaries between these intellectuals and black workers. More importantly, many of them played the role of interpreters and social and political brokers. On the one hand, they translated the abstract theoretical constructs of the traditional intellectuals into simple, understandable organisational strategies and tactics for their blue-collar colleagues and on the other, they enlightened the intellectuals on the ways of the black workers’ world. In this way, many clerical workers were thrust into leadership positions as shop stewards, full-time union officials and organic intellectuals of the incipient movement. Because of the unusual distance between white intellectuals and the working class, clerical workers played a critical role in the invention of the tradition of worker control and democratic unionism in South Africa.

In a similar way as the clerical workforce, semi-skilled and skilled workers played a pivotal role in the invention of the movement’s democratic traditions. E. P. Thompson has referred to artisans

in early nineteenth century England as the “intellectual elite of the class” because of their ability to read and write.⁶¹ In South Africa, this phrase applies equally to the black clerical workers and the semi-skilled and skilled workers who joined the union movement in the early years. Their education ensured that they got elected into leadership positions by the workers and, as such, many of them constituted the organic intellectual force in the new unions. Indeed, the bulk of the organic intellectual layer of the post-1973 unions was drawn from the ranks of semi-skilled and skilled workers. This layer was crucial to the organisational breakthrough of these unions, that is, their ability to gain employer recognition and to establish permanent organisation. The bulk of old generation full-time officials in the 1970s and 1980s came from the ranks of these workers.

All the post-1973 unions ensured that the shop steward was an integral part of their constitutional structures. Thus, as elected representatives of organised shopfloor workers, shop stewards are products of the democratic tradition of unionism. However, from the beginning shop stewards have played an important role in the invention of the tradition of democratic unionism.

Hobsbawm has argued that the invention of traditions is “a process of formalization and ritualization” of practices from the past through repetition.⁶² Many shop stewards perform an intellectual function not only by interpreting issues to their constituencies on the shopfloor, but also by being active agents in the process of formalisation and ritualisation of union democratic traditions.⁶³ Their role as organic intellectuals makes them suited to perform both functions and, their understanding of the social world of their members puts them in an extremely important strategic position as brokers who determine the content of union traditions.

Full-time officials perform an intellectual function in the union movement and their contribution towards the invention of the democratic tradition of unionism is beyond doubt. What is not clear is why they would help entrench a tradition that curtailed their own power in the interests of worker control. Briefly, there are four reasons why they did so. Firstly, the context of the liberation struggle was favourable to experiments in democratic governance because such experiments were important for lending legitimacy to that struggle. Practices which could be interpreted as being undemocratic would cause untold damage to the trade union struggle and the

democratic struggle as a whole. Secondly, there was a widely-held assumption among workers, and all those who fought for democracy, that unions should operate democratically. This also meant that full-time officials were expected to promote union democracy, failing which they would face the danger of being rejected by their constituencies and communities. Thirdly, many full-time officials were political activists in their own right and were thus committed to ensuring the development of a strong democratic tradition of unionism. Finally, worker control and union democracy were not seen as ends in themselves but were means to an end, namely, an egalitarian society where inequalities of power relations between groups in society would no longer exist.

For these reasons, union officials worked hard to build union democracy at the level of ideas, strategies and tactics and to translate complex theories and abstract formulae into simple ideas which workers could act upon. They also took an active part in building worker leadership as part of their organising responsibilities. Thus the processes of formalisation and ritualisation they engaged in resulted in notions such as worker control, mandates and democracy becoming part of the popular lexicon among unionised workers.

Grassroots intellectuals

Bonnin has used the term ‘grassroots intellectual’ to refer to someone who is “a broker of the past and a controller of symbolic capital” whose role is to unify members of a community. The example she provides is that of an *imbongi* (praise-poet) who performs this role by giving meaning to the experiences of members of his or her community.⁶⁴ However, the category of grassroots intellectuals extends beyond *izimbongi* and includes other oral, written and physical cultural forms such as resistance or struggle songs, theatre, worker autobiography and dance. These forms of cultural and political expression have always been present in black communities and in the working class movement in general.

The intellectual dimension of resistance songs is one of the neglected aspects of resistance by the workers’ movement and the liberation movement as a whole. Part of this has to do with the

group form of these songs and the fact that they often appear as a form of spontaneous improvisation by a group of protesters. Thus, the composers of these songs remain anonymous and invisible. In reality, though, the task of composing songs which serve to criticise the *status quo*, mobilise workers into action and interpret the goals of the movement into the language and idioms of the rank-and-file is performed by grassroots intellectuals in the midst of the workers. Whereas it is possible to identify the *imbongi* because poetry is largely an individual activity, it is not always easy or possible to identify those who compose and lead resistance songs. Yet song and dance are among the most powerful means through which the tradition of worker control was invented, transmitted and preserved. It is the participatory nature of singing which makes it such a powerful form of resistance. Resistance songs are also flexible in that they can be adapted for different purposes and situations. They can be used to condemn, commend, celebrate, mourn and mobilise. In addition, the words of some songs can be readily adapted to suit different occasions. An example is the following resistance song which was very popular among protesters during the liberation struggle.

*La mabhulu,
La mabhul' asiqhel' amasimba,
Sizolawula lonkil' ilizwe.*

In the anti-apartheid struggle this song which could be sung in Xhosa and Zulu expressed the growing determination of protesters to continue the struggle for democracy. It is hard to provide a literal translation but the song lamented the absence of democracy in the country and in workplaces and the fact that the *boers* were taking black people for granted and treating them “like shit”. It also expressed a determination by protesters to achieve democracy in the whole of South Africa. In 2000 the dismissed workers of Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) in Uitenhage sang the same song, only this time the workers’ anger was directed at one of their former shop stewards, John Gomomo, who had become a NUMSA leader, a COSATU president and eventually an ANC member of Parliament. The workers accused Gomomo of signing a ‘sell-out’ agreement which endorsed their dismissal. The adapted song was as follows:

*UGomomo,
UGomom' usiqhel' amasimba,
Sizolawula lonk' ilizwe.*

Worker autobiography is another form in which grassroots intellectuals expressed what other unionised workers could not.⁶⁵ These writings began to appear from the mid-1980s and include those by Petrus Tom, Mandlenkosi Makhoba and Alfred Temba Qabula.⁶⁶ Qabula says that writing his autobiography made him feel that “even as a lowly worker I had something to contributing to the broader community”.⁶⁷

Political developments in the 1980s and early 1990s created a conducive environment for many individuals and groups to come forward and occupy the important space which had been provided through cultural activities and structures within the union movement. Although many of these grassroots intellectuals had formal educational qualifications, others were self-taught workers who had developed their skills informally by performing and singing during workplace struggles and in general meetings and other gatherings of their fellow workers. In major centres such as Johannesburg, these grassroots intellectuals began to occupy other public spaces, for example, by singing, holding political discussions and reciting poetry in buses and trains on the way to and from work.⁶⁸

The Economic and Political Context in Which Democratic Unionism Emerged

Elsewhere in this thesis we have argued that unions cannot be studied in isolation from the social, political and economic milieu within which they operate. Similarly, the emergence and invention of traditions of democratic unionism cannot be understood outside of the national and international social, political and economic context. In this section we highlight important aspects of this context and how they conditioned and shaped the emergence of democratic unionism. Firstly, these traditions emerged against the background of militant worker struggles of the early 1970 and the 1980s. At the heart of these struggles were demands for democracy at work and in the broader society. When employers and the state went on a counter-offensive

characterised by bannings, detentions, and victimisation of unionised workers, democracy became an important defensive and survival strategy for the new unions.

Secondly, the invention of democratic union traditions occurred in a context of a struggle for liberation in South Africa. One of the measures of an organisation's seriousness about its commitment to this democratic struggle was that the organisation itself should be run along democratic lines. Undemocratic organisations were identified with the apartheid system which liberation movements were fighting to destroy. Thus, all progressive organisations did their best to project themselves as being democratic. Thirdly, the 1970s and the 1980s were characterised by liberation struggles in Southern Africa which sought to bring about a democratic order in the region. This inspired an entire generation of activists who experienced this period as the dawn of democracy in the region. Mozambique had achieved its independence in 1975 and set about building a democratic system centred around a co-operative economy and villages run along democratic lines.

Fourthly, events in the western world reached crisis proportions in the late 1960s indicating a deep-seated economic, political and moral crisis for capitalism and the political institutions that buttressed it. New Left activism and the student struggles of 1968 in Western Europe and North America symbolised this crisis on the one hand, and the search for participatory forms of democracy on the other. Finally, at around the same time Eastern European state socialism was going through a crisis of major proportions as manifested in the events in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. These events amounted to resistance against the authoritarianism of the state socialist system and a demand for democratisation.

In a nutshell, the tradition of democratic unionism in South African emerged during a time characterised by an offensive by democratic forces throughout the world. Some of these struggles were short-lived and did not succeed in bringing about meaningful change. However, all of them had an extremely important influence on unionism in South Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have provided an overview of how the democratic tradition of unionism, or worker control, was invented in the post-1973 unions. We have challenged the notion that this tradition is the creation of white intellectuals alone and instead argued that this tradition is a composite of the lived experiences of black workers such as African tradition and religion, and a range of intellectual influences including, but not limited to, that of white intellectuals. This is not to deny the crucial role of intellectuals. Our argument suggests that we must not underestimate or overestimate the role of intellectuals. All the various categories of intellectuals that we have discussed in this chapter shaped, but were also shaped by, the union movement.

We now turn to examine how the democratic tradition took specific forms in different unions depending on several variables such as union history, the nature of the labour process, the sector, the nature of the labour market, access to intellectual resources and rural/urban divisions within the workforce. The importance of these variables and the way they influence the character of a union will be demonstrated through three union case studies in *Part II*.

Notes:

1. In this thesis we use the notion of 'invented tradition' in the same sense that Hobsbawm uses it, that is, to include traditions which are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted" and those whose origins are much more difficult to trace but which establish themselves rapidly (p. 1). Invented tradition refers to a set of practices which are usually regulated by certain rules to engender particular norms and values. The repetition that is implicit in this process implies continuity with the past. Of relevance for our purposes in this discussion is Hobsbawm's assertion that 'ancient materials' and an "elaborate language of symbolic practices and communication" are often used to "construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes". He argues that new traditions could be implanted on old ones or they could be invented by borrowing from the "well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation - religion and princely pomp, folklore and freemasonry (itself an invented tradition of great symbolic force)" (p. 6). For a full discussion see Hobsbawm, E. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. The crudest version of this position is articulated by Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today: African workers in Trade unions, 1970 - 1984*, Johannesburg: Ravan.
3. Hobsbawm, E. J. 1964. *Labouring Men: Studies in the history of labour*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 371.
4. Thompson, E. P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 794.
5. Hobsbawm, E. J. 1964., *op. cit.*, p. 375.
6. *ibid.*, p. 373.
7. Lowry, D. 1999. *20 Years in the Labour Movement: The Urban Training Project and change in South Africa, 1971 - 1991*, Johannesburg: Wadmore.
8. Gabriels, H. 1992. "The leader of the Cape Town Municipal Strike in 1990 - Interview with Salie Manie", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 4, p. 77.
9. Zikalala, S. 1993. "Interview with Veteran Unionist Emma Mashinini, now deputy chair of the National Manpower Commission (NMC)", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 17, 4.
10. Since leaving the union in 1996, Kubheka has become active again as a part-time minister in the church.
11. Author interview with Philemon Bokaba, former vice-president of NUMSA, Pretoria, 24 February 2000.

12. Author interview with Moses Mayekiso, former general secretary of NUMSA, Johannesburg, 11 August 1999.
13. For a discussion of the role of these informal social networks or 'defensive combinations' towards union mobilisation of migrant workers in urban centres see Sitas, A. 1985. "Moral Formations and Struggle Amongst Migrant Workers on the East Rand", *Labour, Capital and Society*, 18 (2).
14. Hammond-Tooke, W. D. 1975. *Command or Consensus: The development of Transkeian local government*. Cape Town: David Philip, p. 141.
15. *ibid.*, p. 216. For a further discussion of the influence of traditional African political culture of consensus building see also, Moodie, D. 1994. *Going for Gold: Men, migrants and migration*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, and Wester, E. 1999. "Defusion of the Molotov Cocktail in South African Industrial Relations: The burden of the past and the challenge of the future", in Kurivilla, S. and Mundell, B. (eds) *Colonialism, Nationalism and the Institutionalization of Industrial Relations in the Third World*. Stamford, Connecticut: Jai Press.
16. Couzens, T. 1983. "An Introduction to the History of Football in South Africa", in Bozzoli, B. (ed.) *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist penetration and popular response*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
17. Adler, G. 1997. "Shop Floors and Rugby fields: The social basis of auto worker solidarity in South Africa", in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 51, p. 122.
18. "Instrumental collectivism" is a concept used by Webster and Kuzwayo to refer to collective forms of income accumulation such as the *stokfel* and *maholisana*. In a study which sought, among others, to establish levels of collective consciousness among African workers in Durban in the mid-1970s, the authors found a relatively developed collective consciousness. For example, 49 percent of the workers believed that their situation could only be improved through collective action. Webster, E. and Kuzwayo, J. 1978. "A Research Note on Consciousness and the Problem of Organization", in Schlemmer, L. and Webster, E. (eds.) *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 229.
19. Coplan, D. 1982. "The Emergence of an African Working-class Culture", in Marks, S. and Rathbone, R. (eds.) *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness, 1830 - 1930*. London/New York: Longman, p. 372.
20. For useful historical accounts of student uprisings in South Africa see Hirson, B. 1979. *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a revolution*. London: Zed Press, and Hyslop, J. 1999. *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and resistance in South Africa, 1940 - 1990*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
21. Author interview with Nelson Ndinisa, former president of SARHWU, Johannesburg, 20 April 1999.

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22. Author interview with Bobby Marie, former national organiser of NUMSA, Johannesburg, 26 October 1999.
 23. Lambert, R. V. 1988. Political Unionism in South Africa: The South Africa Congress of Trade Unions, 1955 - 1965, unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Chapter 4 (pp. 162 - 230) of the thesis is devoted to discussing the structure and function of the factory committees.
 24. Bonnin, D. R. 1987. Class Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 - 1987: The case of the B.T.R Sarmcol workers, M.A. dissertation. University of Natal, Durban, pp. 265 - 266. In this quote Gwala refers to the late Harry Gwala, who was a prominent South African Trade Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) leader and ANC activist in the Natal Midlands region. Gwala served several terms in jail for his political activism in SACTU and the ANC.
 25. Author interview with Johann Maree, professor of sociology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 9 May 2000.
 26. For a detailed discussion of the problems Tom and his fellow workers encountered at African Cables in Vereeniging see Tom, P. 1985. *My Life Struggle*. Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 37 - 40.
 27. Ginsburg, M. and Matlala, W. 1996. "At Home in the Union - Interview with Petros Mashishi", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 20, 6, p. 88.
 28. For a detailed discussion of the 'apartheid workplace regime' and how it operated to exclude and oppress black workers see Von Holdt, K. 2000. From Resistance to Reconstruction: A case study of trade unionism in the workplace and the community (1980 - 1996), unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Chapter 3 of von Holdt's study, "'A White Man's Factory in a White Man's Country': The apartheid workplace regime", is particularly relevant to our discussion here.
 29. Author interview with Jeremy Baskin, former general secretary of PPWAWU, Johannesburg, 24 February 2000.
 30. For a detailed discussion of these processes of inequality and social closure and the resultant racial division of intellectual labour, see Buhlungu, S. and Metcalfe, A. 2001. "Breaking the Racial Division of Labour in Knowledge Production: Reflections on Internship Programmes", *Perspectives in Education*, 19 (2).
 31. See, for example, comments by Andrew Zulu, then vice-president of FOSATU, on intellectuals as cited in MacShane, D., Plaut, M. and Ward, D. 1984. *Power!: Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*. Nottingham: Spokesman, p. 70. Petrus Tom (*op. cit.*) also made a similar comment at the end of his autobiography.
 32. Gramsci, A. 1971a. "The Intellectuals", in Hoare, Q. and Nowell-Smith, G. (eds) *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence and

Wishart.

33. For example Webster has disaggregated the concept and identified five sub-categories of intellectuals, namely, professionally-trained intellectuals, 'party' intellectuals, freelance research intellectuals, union-made intellectuals and grassroots intellectuals. See Webster, E. 1992b. "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement", in *Transformation*, 18, p. 88. In our discussion of the intellectual contribution towards the building of the democratic tradition in this chapter we have adopted the same categories.
34. Boggs, C. 1976. *Gramsci's Marxism*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 75 - 6.
35. Gramsci, A. 1971a. *op. cit.*, p. 10.
36. Gramsci, A. 1971b. "The Study of Philosophy", in Hoare, Q. and Nowell-Smith, G. (eds.) *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 325.
37. Moses Ndlovu is a veteran unionist whose involvement with the unions goes back to the 1973 strikes in the greater Durban-Pinetown-Pietermaritzburg strikes in 1973. Since then he has served the movement in various capacities, such as organiser for TUACC, FOSATU, MAWU, PPWAWU and SAAPAWU. He was interviewed by the author for this study in Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2000. Johann Maree, a freelance intellectual who was involved in the revival of the post-1973 unions in Cape Town during the 1970s and 1980s has also made a similar point about the different strengths of professional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. Maree was interviewed by the author in Cape Town on the 9 May 2000.
38. Author interview with Johann Maree, professor of Sociology at UCT and member of the SALB Board, Cape Town, 9 May 2000.
39. David Madupela, then MAWU shop steward and executive council member, cited in MacShane, D., Plaut, M and Ward, D. 1984. *Power!: Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*. Nottingham: Spokesman, p. 70.
40. Author interview with Jeremy Baskin, former PPWAWU general secretary, 24 February 2000.
41. Author interview with Johann Maree, Professor of Sociology at UCT and member of the SALB Board, Cape Town, 9 May 2000.
42. See for example, Bonnin, D. 1987. *Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 - 1987: The case of the B.T.R. Sarmcol workers*, unpublished Master of Social Science dissertation, University of Natal, Durban; Ginsburg, M. 1997. *Trade Union Education: Its past and future role in the development of the South Africa labour movement*, unpublished MA research report, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Sephiri, T. 2001. *The Emergence and Role of Black Intellectuals in the Development of the Trade Union Movement in South Africa: A case study of NUMSA, 1980 - 2000*, unpublished MA research report, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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43. This is term used by John Mawbey to describe the powerful position that white officials occupied in the post-1973 unions - Author interview with John Mawbey, SAMWU education officer, Cape Town, 8 May 2000.
 44. Author interview with Jane Barret, former general secretary and national transport co-ordinator of TGWU (now SATAWU), Johannesburg, 17 March 2000.
 45. *ibid.*
 46. Labour analysts Jeremy Baskin (interview, 24 February 2000) and Eddie Webster (interview 1 March 2000) also point to this as the period which marks the beginning of the loss of influence by white officials in the unions.
 47. Author interview with Eddie Webster, Professor of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand and member of the *SALB* Board, Johannesburg, 1 March 2000.
 48. *ibid.*
 49. Author interview with Kally Forrest, former Media Officer of TGWU, now owner-director of Umanyano Media Services, Johannesburg, 1 March 2000.
 50. *ibid.*
 51. For a discussion of this supportive role of freelance intellectuals see Callinicos, L. 1993. "Labour History and Worker Education in South Africa", in *Labour History*, 65.
 52. Lowry, D. 1999. *op. cit.*, p. 178.
 53. Gouldner, A. W. 1979. *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 32.
 54. Konrad, G. and Szelenyi, I. 1979. *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. Brighton: Harvester, p. 14.
 55. Lowry, D. 1999. *op. cit.*, p. 25.
 56. *ibid.*, p. 27.
 57. *ibid.*, p. 29.
 58. The term 'organisationally-based intellectuals' is used by Callinicos, L. 1993. *op. cit.* Her discussion also covers the contributions of these intellectuals, particularly in the area of worker education.
 59. Kubheka, S. 1994. "The Struggle to be Reborn: 20 years of the labour movement" (interviewed by Luli Callinicos). *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 5, p. 25.

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60. See Nzimande, B. 1986. "Managers and the New Middle Class", in *Transformation*, 1. These ideas are elaborated further in Nzimande, B. 1991. *The Corporate Guerillas: Class formation and the African corporate petty bourgeoisie in post-1973 South Africa*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban.
 61. Thompson, E. P. 1963., *op. cit.*, p. 716.
 62. Hobsbawm, E. 1983., *op. cit.*, p. 4.
 63. The role and function of shop stewards has been the subject of several studies in South Africa. See for example, Pityana, S. M. and Orkin, M. (eds.) 1992. *Beyond the Factory Floor: A survey of COSATU shop stewards*. Johannesburg: Ravan, and Ginsburg, D., Webster, E., *et. al.*, 1995. *Taking Democracy Seriously: Worker expectations and parliamentary democracy in South Africa*. Durban: Indicator Press. However, these and other studies fail to see beyond the mundane tasks of a shop steward such as organising and recruiting, collecting subscriptions, canvassing worker opinions on issues and raising them with management. In other words, the intellectual role of the shop steward has received little attention in the literature.
 64. For a discussion of grassroots intellectuals see Bonnin, D. 1987. *op. cit.*, pp. 49 - 58.
 65. For a discussion of worker autobiography and other forms of expression by unionised workers see Callinicos, L. 1993. *op. cit.*
 66. Makhoba, M. 1984. *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers: The story of Mandlenkosi Makhoba*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Tom, P. 1985. *My Life Struggle: The story of Petrus Tom*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Qabula, A. T. 1989. *A Working Life: Cruel beyond belief*. Durban: NUMSA.
 67. Qabula, A. T. 1989. *op. cit.*, p. i.
 68. The state-sponsored violence of the early 1990s which was unleashed on communities and organisations targeted these groups and individuals, particularly on the trains in the Witwatersrand region. Thus grassroots intellectuals in the union movement who were beginning to extend their reach by preaching democracy and socialist politics beyond their workplaces and unions were forced to retreat.

PART II

CASE STUDIES IN THE SHAPING OF THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION: THE DILEMMA EXAMINED

Part II presents three union case studies and, through these, explores how the democratic tradition of unionism emerged in specific unions and how it changed during the 27 years of the post-1973 unions covered by this thesis. In these case studies we identify four union traditions, namely, the coloured bureaucratic tradition of trade unionism, the political tradition of SACTU, the shopfloor tradition of FOSATU and the Black Consciousness tradition, and show how they were blended into a national union movement committed to democratic governance. We also examine why and how the tradition developed in the way that it did. In this regard we focus on five variables, namely, the nature of the labour process, the labour market, access to intellectual resources, the sector, union history and rural/urban divisions, to clarify how the tradition took different forms in different unions.

We then trace internal changes in the union movement as well as changes in the national and global economic and political environments and examine how these have impacted on the democratic tradition. In particular, we identify the changing role of the union official, including the transformation of the 'activist organiser' of the era of liberation into three types of union officials, namely, the ideological unionist, the career unionist and the 'entrepreneur'. The identification of these changes enables us to examine the dilemma identified in Part I and the processes of organisational modernisation which are impacting on the tradition of worker control discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, we examine the implications of organisational modernisation for the role of union officials in the post-1973 unions.

CHAPTER 3: THE UNION WITH 'VERY OLD ROOTS': SAMWU, 1960s - 1990s

The roots of the SAMWU of today are complicated by the fact that we are a product of mergers as well as recruitment. There is probably no union in COSATU which has such a variety of union roots. Two of these unions, the CTMWA and DIMES, were around for many years before SAMWU was formed - the CTMWA from at least 1928, DIMES from 1935. So we also have some have some very old roots.¹

A Brief History of the Union and its Traditions

This chapter presents discussion on the first of our three union case studies. The aim of the chapter is to examine factors which, over and above those discussed in Chapter 2, contributed towards the building of the democratic traditions of the union. In addition, we explore how this tradition has been changing in the light of several changes inside the union such as the growth in membership, and externally through the advent of a liberal democratic dispensation and the hegemony of a neo-liberal global economic order.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) was formed out of a 1987 merger of five unions organising local government workers in various parts of South Africa, namely the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association (CTMWA), the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), the Municipal Workers' Union of South Africa (MWUSA), Port Elizabeth-based General Workers' Union of South Africa (GWUSA) and the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU). In later years SAMWU absorbed a few other smaller unions such as the Union of Pretoria Municipal Workers, the Democratic Indian Municipal Employees Society (DIMES)² and the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (UJMW)³. SAMWU's founder unions came from different traditions of unionism and thus contributed in different ways towards the establishment of the democratic tradition of unionism in the new municipal union. These traditions were the FOSATU tradition (TGWU), the community union tradition which was aligned to the UDF (SAAWU, GWUSA and MWUSA) and the previously conservative but

democratising tradition of unionism (CTMWA). Thus what is significant about SAMWU is that it brought together an old registered, but unaffiliated, coloured trade union based in Cape Town and post-1973 non-racial, but predominantly African unions.

Black municipal unions before 1973

Information about black municipal worker organisation before 1973 is rather sketchy. However, Luckhardt and Wall's account of unionism in the 1950s and 1960s provides evidence of the existence of unions for African, coloured and Indian municipal workers. Several of these unions were affiliates of the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Many of the African unions were small local or regional unions based in Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and the Transvaal.⁴ All these unions were fragile and collapsed easily under the heavy hand of state repression and employer hostility. Thus, by the early 1970s there were six unions organising coloured and Indian municipal workers, but none for African workers. All of the coloured and Indian unions were registered; three were affiliated to TUCSA while the other three were unaffiliated. Their total combined membership was 11 242, but 84 per cent of this membership belonged to a single union, the CTMWA.

The 1976 TUCSA trade union directory listed CTMWA as an 'unattached' registered union whose membership was '9 476 coloureds'.⁵ The CTMWA originated from a different era and tradition of trade unionism, having been formed in 1928⁶ and registered in 1942⁷ for artisans, semi-skilled and unskilled coloured workers⁸ in the Cape Town City Council. Up to 1964 the union was a corrupt and bureaucratic organisation run by an autocratic leadership. John Ernstzen, one of the young rank-and-file activists who spearheaded a campaign for the democratisation of the union recalls that when he joined the union in 1962 he found "a body here called a union but not in my mind performing any of the functions that a union should fulfil". He remembers finding fear among the workers because "nothing less than gangsterism prevailed at the time".⁹ As a result most workers "dissociated themselves from the union"¹⁰ How did such a union become the "core founder" of SAMWU,¹¹ one of the democratic unions to emerge more than a

decade later? In a fascinating interview in 1984 Ernstzen provides an insight into how he became one of the key actors in what was essentially a successful rank-and-file rebellion against a decadent leadership which did not hesitate to unleash a vicious gang of *skollies* (thugs) on those members who dared to challenge their authority.¹² This crisis of leadership is one of the conditions which Voss and Sherman argue precipitate a process of revitalisation and democratisation of a bureaucratised union.¹³

The firm grip of the old autocratic leadership over the union, and the fact that they had the support of the Cape Town City Council and the police, forced the progressive group to develop creative ways of reaching out to and mobilising the membership to reclaim the soul of the union.

We started what we called *huisbesoek*. We observed at general meetings who else voiced their dissatisfaction. We followed that person up. We asked whether we could visit that person. Or whether that person would like to visit us at a central point. From a central group of five or six eventually we were something like 50 or 60.

We asked for access to the books of the union. This was denied to us. We applied pressure at a general meeting for permission to examine the minute books and financial position of the union. Four of us were in the union's offices on a Saturday when some of the office bearers brought a gang along. We were four compared to eight to ten hefty 'bodies'. All the notes we had made were torn up. We were physically beaten up right there in the office - one with a bloodied nose and in addition our shirts were torn. We were beaten up in the true sense of the word.¹⁴

The perseverance of the progressive faction paid off in 1964. At that year's Annual General Meeting (AGM), not only was the gang of *skollies* physically beaten out of the meeting but the existing office-bearers were suspended on the spot by the 350 to 400 delegates. A Caretaker Committee of which Ernstzen was part was mandated to run the organisation until the following AGM. At the 1965 AGM progressive group gained 67 of the 68 seats of the shop stewards' seats and Ernstzen was elected general secretary. Ernstzen points out that their next task was to convince the general membership that their approach was the correct one. This took some time but by the early 1970s attendance at their general meetings had improved from between 80 and

100 to about 1000!¹⁵ By 1984 the union had about 100 shop stewards and the rationale for having such a large complement was explained by Ernstzen.

We believe it is necessary to establish as much communication as possible between the leadership and the membership and we thus have a shop steward in every single depot in every branch. We maintain contact even with the small gangs which work out on the roadways. We keep members informed of developments and activities, and members assist the shop stewards in a variety of ways.¹⁶

It would appear that a number of events had a radicalising effect on the members and the new leadership of the CTMWA. Firstly, there was the fact that the coloured community in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape, occupied a contradictory position in that they were neither fully integrated into the oppressed group in that they had certain rights which Africans did not enjoy (e.g. trade union rights), nor were they part of the ruling white group. This applied to progressive groups in a number of coloured organisations in the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s. The removal of coloured people from the common voter's roll and actions such as the forced removal of residents of places such as District Six in Cape Town served to highlight the contradictions.

Secondly, the events of 1960 appear to have left their mark in the consciousness of young coloured people who were old enough to witness them. Ernstzen recalls this as one of the key moments in his political growth.

That was the period of Langa, Sharpeville. Can I ever forget working in a factory in the shadows of Table Mountain and particularly De Waal Drive, and looking to the slopes towards De Waal Drive one saw thousands of people walking towards Cape Town. That picture remains an indelible part of my memory and of my formative process. So that when I came to the City Council in March 1962 it was with that kind of background.¹⁷

Thirdly, the experience of the democratic challenge that the progressive group spearheaded within the union predisposed the group, once it was in leadership, to democracy and co-operating with a other progressive groups in society. An interesting aspect of the union's history is the

willingness in the 1980s of the leadership to work with other progressive groups, to engage in community actions and to embrace the notion of worker unity.

Finally, the union was locally-based and this made it possible for the pro-democracy group to mount a successful challenge to the bureaucracy.

Black municipal unions after 1973

Organisation of African municipal workers started in Johannesburg in the 1970s when the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) assisted municipal workers in Johannesburg and later handed them over to the FOSATU Workers Project because there was no union for African municipal workers in South Africa.¹⁸ Then in 1978 the TGWU started organising in the Transvaal and inherited the municipal workers from the FOSATU Workers Project. One of the first group of artisans who joined TGWU in this way was Petrus Mashishi, a plumber who had started working for the Johannesburg City Council in 1970. According to Mashishi, this first group of unionised municipal workers were artisans who were facing a threat of losing their right to work in the cities because the government wanted to restrict them to working in the bantustans.¹⁹

The municipal members of the TGWU became active members of TGWU's then Transvaal branch, participated in all the structures of the union and elected their own shop stewards. Mashishi, who has been the president of SAMWU since its launch in 1987, was elected a shop steward for the first time in 1978. These workers had been socialised into the FOSATU tradition of democratic unionism from the time they were still in the IAS and the FOSATU Workers Project. Mashishi recalls attending several seminars and workshops addressed by FOSATU leaders and FOSATU-aligned academics such as Phil Bonner and Eddie Webster, both of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.²⁰ They became steeped in the traditions of mandates, report-backs and leadership accountability. In addition, they were taught that workers are the union and that full-time officials are there to assist, educate and guide, not to lead.²¹

However, the vast majority of Johannesburg municipal workers did not join the TGWU. A small group joined a management-orchestrated sweetheart union, the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers. Launched on 23 January 1980, this union gained instant recognition by the Johannesburg City Council and was granted provisional registration six months later, with only 40 members.²² Aletta Sekele, a founder member and ex-shop steward of this union remembers that the union had a closed shop with the Council and all workers were forced to belong to it.²³

In 1971 Blacks were not allowed to belong to a union. Instead we had liaison committees. Then in 1980 the UJMW registered, and I became a member. We operated differently from SAMWU because with us we were more or less like some of the sweetheart unions. Officials serviced the union, not shop stewards. Workers only came in when union policy had been drawn up - we were not much involved. In 1993 when we merged with SAMWU I realised that I was a shop steward because now I was exposed to the workers at the workplace, and solving problems, and many other things that I had not done before as a UJMW shop steward.²⁴

UJMW did not enjoy the support of the majority of the municipal workers in Johannesburg. On 23 June 1980 these workers, mainly unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers, formed the Black Municipal Workers' Union (BMWU). Among the leadership of BMWU were Joseph Mavi (president), Phillip Dlamini (general secretary), Martin Sere (vice-president) and Gatsby Mazwi (additional executive member). Unfortunately the new union did not have time to consolidate itself and build proper structures as on 24 July, barely a month after its formation, workers at Orlando Power Station came out on strike demanding improvements in wages. The strike escalated when other workers, members of the BMWU, embarked on solidarity action until about 10 000 workers were out on strike. The Johannesburg City Council responded viciously to the strike by calling in the police, 'deporting' over a thousand workers to the bantustans and getting the leadership arrested.

Although it lost the strike, the BMWU survived the onslaught but suffered from loss of leadership when Dlamini broke away to form a new union and Mavi was tragically killed in a car accident. In 1982 the BMWU changed its name and became the Municipal and General Workers

Union of South Africa (MGWUSA) and later MWUSA, which belonged to the tradition of community unionism. Other general unions, such as SAAWU, also organised some municipal workers in several smaller towns across the country.

'One industry, one union'

All the unions organising municipal workers participated in the talks to establish a federation of unions which began in 1981. One of the most intractable, but crucial, issues about the unity process was to reconcile the different traditions, particularly in relation to registration, involvement in the community and governance and leadership questions within the unions. What seems to have been of critical importance for the municipal sector, however, were the positions taken by the CTMWA, by far the largest municipal union, on these issues. It appears that this union worked hard in preparing its membership to embrace unity long before the unity talks began. The 37th Annual Report of the union stated that the union wanted workers unity and was "desirous of taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure workers' unity".²⁵ The report went on to urge members to "direct our attention more than ever before to co-operation with other workers in other fields so as to ensure that we assist in the building up of a united working class".²⁶ This theme was repeated later in the same report.

For the first time for a long time in the history of South Africa the prospect of a strong working class movement throughout South Africa acting consciously in the interests of workers is becoming a real possibility. We in the CTMWA will be faced with this challenge, namely, were we going to be big enough, strong enough, determined enough and far-sighted enough to make whatever adjustments are required on our part and to make our contribution to the struggle of all workers in the country.²⁷

The CTMWA had been grappling with the question of community involvement since the 1970s. The 36th Annual Report urged the membership to avoid a narrow economic approach and to be far-sighted in their understanding of the struggle.

No matter how much we try to avoid, no matter how much we try to close our eyes, reality is there! The conflict is there! Where do we stand in this situation.²⁸

The union found inspiration in the liberation of Angola and Mozambique and in the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe and Namibia. More importantly, a year later the union saw in the 1980 schools boycott in Cape Town “a development of far reaching significance” that would “undoubtedly influence the future course of struggle in South Africa”.²⁹

With regards to democratic participation and leadership of the union, the leadership kept urging its members to become involved and to work with their elected shop stewards. The 39th Annual report of the union reflected on struggles it had conducted since the militant take-over of the union by rank-and-file activists in the 1960s. One of these struggles, the report noted, was,

To establish the Association as a democratic organization of workers. An organization, that is, which exists not for the benefit of officials, its office-bearers or for a small coterie of members but rather for its members as a whole and which is managed and controlled by its members. In other words, the association must be a trade union which is worker controlled.³⁰

Although the union was registered, it did not seem to make this a condition for co-operation with other unions. The importance of all these positions is that the CTMWA's history and the fact that it was based in one city made it possible for it to approach issues of unity with an open mind. But more importantly, as the largest and administratively stable union, the CTMWA held the key to the future success of unionism in the municipal sector. After the formation of COSATU the CTMWA was asked to convene a launching congress for a unified municipal union in COSATU in line with the federation's policy of 'one industry, one union'.³¹

Table 1: SAMWU Membership since 1987

<i>Year</i>	<i>Paid-up Membership</i>
1987	15 406 ³²
1988	23 638
1989	29 529
1990	59 014
1991	67 178
1992	69 156
1993	73 342
1994	100 410
1995	110 032
1996	113 056
1997	120 109

Source: SAMWU: Secretariat Report, 1997.

How and Why Did the Tradition Develop in the Way That it Did?

No single explanation is sufficient to answer this important question. In addition, the development of traditions should not be conceived of as a linear process, but rather a process which involves successes, setbacks, constraints and ongoing contestation among members and groupings within the union. In the discussion that follows, we identify some of the variables that shaped the development of a democratic tradition in a union such as SAMWU, namely, the

labour process, the labour market, the industry or sector, access to intellectual resources, the history of the union and rural/urban divisions.

The labour process

The labour process in municipalities is one of the key determinants of the form that democratic unionism takes in that sector. Indeed, the municipal sector is characterised by different labour processes which are not oriented towards the production of tangible products but are more geared towards the provision of a diversity of social services such as road maintenance, plumbing, refuse removal, sanitation, traffic control, transportation and the provision of health services. The fragmented nature of these labour processes and the fact that work is not performed at a single central station constitutes a structural reality which gives rise to a different version of union democracy, one which relies on charismatic leadership operating in a system characterised by loose accountability by shopfloor representatives. This is in contrast to manufacturing where the labour process is oriented to the manufacture of a single product and where workers are brought together under one roof for that purpose. The kind of unionism that develops under conditions in the municipal sector is necessarily different from unionism in the manufacturing industry for the following reasons:

i) Collective solidarity is not forged by the discipline and pace imposed on the workforce by the machinery in the course of the labour process. In other words, the fragmentation of the labour process undermines the formation of a strong collectivity and inhibits the emergence of a collective consciousness. Eastern Cape provincial education officer, Thobile Maso, argues that technology or 'the beating of the machine', as he termed it, such as one finds in manufacturing, sharpens the consciousness of the working class. He contrasted SAMWU with NUMSA to illustrate his point.

It helps to understand that NUMSA shop stewards are sharp because they work with technology. In SAMWU, in the municipalities, technology is still poor and it is only now

that we are starting to have white-collar shop stewards. For a long time, if you can assess, maybe five years back you will find out that if you can take shop stewards of SAMWU then, they were labourers and those white-collar workers were a little bit [few in number].³³

Thus, not only is the 'beating of the machine' absent in this sector in the sense that the labour process is not dependent or driven by modern technology, but the labour process is scattered as work is performed by small work teams working in isolation from one another.

ii) There is no central station where all workers can meet. Indeed, the labour processes in the municipal sector are such that it is impossible for the entire workforce to gather in the same premises for the purpose of performing their work. Jeremy Keenan observed that the fact that black workers in Johannesburg were physically divided between 19 compounds, some of which were more than 40 kilometres apart, and 'dozens of various worksites' (which elsewhere in the article he referred to as 'council workplaces') constituted a "major obstacle to any attempts to organise the entire labour force".³⁴ John Ernstzen found this out soon after he joined the Cape Town City Council in 1962 and became active in the CTMWA. He soon realised that uniting union members to take up common grievances was a difficult task because of a bureaucratised union and a fragmented municipal structure.

We were kept apart. The bureaucracy of the union themselves didn't really encourage people to attend meetings. And we were divided by a City Council structure which broke departments up from and amongst themselves, and which broke the departments up into branches and branches into depots. Then in the depots we were broken up into different designations. All along one could see a policy of keeping workers apart.³⁵

iii) More often than not, shopfloor worker representatives meet management away from the workplace, and this takes such interactions away from the watchful eyes of union membership. For this reason, it is also not possible for shop stewards to give speedy reports and feedback to all their members at once. Where individual shop stewards have to report to their depots and departments, it could make for considerable of unevenness in the way reports are given. Furthermore, there is no single mandating point or meeting by the entire workforce. Thus the

mandating process has to be mediated by the shop stewards and full-time officials as they have to reconcile different positions and competing interests of workers from different departments. This can give shop stewards and officials an inordinate amount of power to filter issues and demands from the workers.

The labour market

The segment of the labour market from which a sector draws its labour also plays a role in shaping the form of unionism that emerges in that sector. The municipal sector draws a substantial proportion of its labour force from the bottom end of the labour market with the result that the majority of union members are likely to be unskilled or semi-skilled workers with low levels of education. In the past, many of these workers would have been male migrant workers from the rural areas who were accommodated in municipal compounds or hostels in townships or on the fringes of the city or town. Managerial attempts to control labour through the municipal compound had a contradictory effect. On the one hand, it limited the freedom of workers in these hostels, but on the other hand, it facilitated union mobilisation and organisation. Indeed, municipal hostels presented unions with even greater organising opportunities than mining compounds in that they lacked some of the regimentation that was so characteristic of mining compounds, and they were located nearer to township and other working class communities. In the early 1980s the Johannesburg City Council employed a total of 14 000 black workers of whom 12 000 were migrants housed in 19 municipal compounds.³⁶ In such a situation, efforts to establish democratic unionism can be extremely exacting as such a membership requires patience and investment in union education to ensure that they are able to play a meaningful role. Failure to do this opens these members to what some in SAMWU call manipulation. According to Silas Letsimo, the Gauteng provincial secretary of SAMWU, the union members in the Springs City Council who sued the union for R5 million were misled by the lawyer who said that he could get some of their pension monies back. He attributes this to their lack of formal education and political consciousness.

If there is any person that has gone to Standard 3 there, they will be few and some of them were not there. But comrade, the truth of the matter, what is very clear is that these workers were misled and some of them retreated and that is why they are still members of this organisation. And the other thing, comrade, is that politically, the membership, I wouldn't say that these comrades are so capacitated politically. I mean, I understand the politics, real politics and the political implication of what they were doing, in the longer run, destroying the union. They wouldn't understand that.³⁷

This has also presented the union with a problem of a different sort. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, many of whom have low levels of formal education and literacy, often lack the confidence to take up positions and tend to elect literate and clerical workers into positions of leadership. The composition of the first executive committee of the BMWU is illuminating in this regard. It was made up of only educated workers as follows: 2 bus drivers, 1 bus conductor, 3 electricians, 4 clerks, 1 traffic department worker, 1 traffic licensing worker and 1 fireman.³⁸ A survey of COSATU shop stewards also found that "a significant number of shop-stewards are drawn from the middle strata - the higher skilled, supervisory and clerical levels - especially in the public sector unions such as NEHAWU, SAMWU and POTWA".³⁹ In recent years this problem has become much more pronounced for SAMWU.⁴⁰

Access to intellectual resources

As our discussion in Chapter 2 has shown, a key ingredient to the development of the democratic tradition of unionism is a union's access to intellectual resources. Intellectuals play the role of developing strategy, evaluating and re-evaluating options and opportunities which could enhance the organisational and political strength of a union. But intellectual resources go beyond personnel and include access to media production resources, resources and infrastructure to conduct education and training, access to books, newspapers, journals, libraries and legal and financial experts and access to networks, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, which can provide these resources and be a source of new debates and innovative ideas.

There is no doubt that SAMWU and its predecessors have had some access to these resources.

Petrus Mashishi recalls attending numerous workshops and seminars organised by the IAS and the FOSATU Workers Project. Similarly, Ernstzen remembers how in the 1960s, just before the rank-and-file take-over of the union, he worked hard to “improve” himself intellectually, reading up De Kock’s *Industrial Laws of South Africa* and acquainting himself with the Industrial Conciliation Act.

I supplemented my reading in other directions, wanting to know more about workers and workers’ struggles in other countries. I was encouraged by certain people who were doing degrees up at University. And I was virtually smuggled into Jagger Library [at the University of Cape Town] on their cards. I had no formal education, but I met with many of those with more progressive attitudes who were studying at the time and they helped to give me *an understanding from an academic point of view*. Then I had to apply a lot of what I had gained theoretically.⁴¹ [emphasis added]

SAMWU’s Eastern Cape Provincial Education Officer attributes a lot of his political growth to “being on board the South African Communist Party” because “always when you read its journals you find that you are able to assess how far the unions are”.⁴²

However, some of SAMWU’s predecessors did not have access to a lot of intellectual resources. SAAWU’s former vice-president, Sisa Njikelana, recalls that his union “didn’t have a lot of intellectual and academic back-up. We were never exposed to formal training in trade unionism. I started attending workshops very late.” A related problem which they neglected was to build administration and to train their officials. “Our organisers knew nothing about writing reports, they loathed that thing”.⁴³ In the early years, particularly before the formation of COSATU, this applied to most of the unions from the community tradition as they lacked most of the intellectual resources identified above. Of course many of these unions benefited intellectually and materially from their networks with underground structures of the exiled liberation movement.⁴⁴

Access to intellectual resources also determines the extent to which a union is able to produce and reproduce organic intellectuals from the ranks of its own membership. Both access to

intellectual resources and lack thereof, are part of a continuum which stretches from an extreme occupied by unions with good access to resources, to another extreme occupied by unions with little access to such resources. Of the three unions used as case studies in this thesis, NUMSA was one of the unions with access to the greatest number of intellectuals and enjoyed the use of a variety of intellectual resources. CEPPWAWU was in the middle while SAMWU had the least access to intellectuals and resources.

The sector

The sector or industry in which a union organises plays an extremely important role in shaping the nature of unionism. In general terms, in a capitalist economy such as South Africa's, it makes a difference if a union is organising in the public as opposed to the private sector. The peculiarities of the local government sector arise because of several factors. Firstly, the sector is made up of different employers or municipal councils which are located in different provinces of the country. Each one of these councils operates autonomously from the rest of the councils and thus the need for worker solidarity within and between workers in municipal councils is not as self-evident as it is in sectors such as manufacturing. Secondly, local government differs from other sectors in that it is governed by different and special national legislation and provincial and local government by-laws and ordinances. Thirdly, local government is an extension of the state and under conditions of authoritarianism it tends to be highly intolerant of unionism and other activities which are perceived to undermine the authority of the state. This intolerance shapes the nature and form of worker resistance in this sector; that is, in the face of such intolerance, worker resistance tends to have a mass character which favours specific forms of action such as the mass strike and the disruption of public services. Finally, local government does not operate under the same pressures of international competition under which the private sector operates. Employers in the sector often believe that they can act without reference to what happens internationally and, being an extension of the state, they always find repression more attractive in solving labour relations problems. Thus, in the period covered by this study there was always a temptation on both sides to adopt radical tactics and strategies to resolve disagreements with the

other side with a view to eliminating the opponents. On the side of the union this meant the adoption of mass action to the neglect of slow processes of building sustainable organisational structures. On the side of municipal management, it took the form of a preference for repression rather than negotiation.

More generally, there are certain sectors which, regardless of whether they are publicly or privately owned, are more conducive for the emergence of more democratic forms of trade unionism. To a large extent this has to do with the nature of the labour process as discussed above. On the one hand, the manufacturing sector and, to some extent, the mining industry provide the best milieu for democratic unionism to emerge and take root because they bring large numbers of workers together and because of the integrated nature of the labour process in those sectors. On the other hand, the informal sector, agriculture and local government are some of the least conducive for the emergence of democratic unions because of the fragmented nature of the labour process and the sectors themselves. This does not suggest that workers in these latter sectors are less militant or less inclined to join trade unions. On the contrary, they seem to display the same propensity to unionise as workers in other sectors as long they are convinced that political opportunities exist for successful mobilisation.

The problems of a fragmented sector and the difficulties this poses for unions are best illustrated by SAMWU. Richard Hlophe, the union's KwaZulu-Natal provincial secretary, refers to some of these difficulties.

Sometimes you will think that members are serviced, then only to find later that no, you went to the extent of settling on wages but you didn't know that you didn't have a mandate by the members. You see, like here at provincial level, you'll think that the organisers and shop stewards are reporting. You depend on calling a mass meeting of shop stewards. Ja, you report back to shop stewards and you tell the shop stewards to report back, you know. Then your shop stewards come back and agree on the settlement without the mandate. Some workers once said to me, 'Hlophe, next year you must call a mass meeting of all workers. Call us to the stadium and report back. Don't go around departmentally reporting back because we don't trust the union when it says "we agreed" because the majority of the workers agree. Where is that majority? We hear from you!'⁴⁵

Although SAMWU has tried to minimise the problems associated with a fragmented sector by expanding the number of shop stewards so that each department has one, it has not completely eliminated the problem as workers never meet at a central place to give a mandate. Thus, a sector such as local government engenders, at best, a loose representative form of trade unionism where it is hard for the membership to participate directly in union affairs or to keep their representatives accountable in the same way that such accountability operates in manufacturing unions. This is in contrast with manufacturing sector unions where it is possible to have a tighter model of leadership accountability and these unions can combine the representative model with a degree of direct participation by members in workplace general meetings which are much easier to organise and conduct.

Table 2: Employment in Local Authorities as on 31 December 1997
(Includes full-time, part-time and 'other' categories of employees)

	<i>Africans</i>	<i>Coloureds</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>Total</i>
City Councils	71 740	30 304	7 195	32 349	79 017	220 605
District Councils	4 374	3 510	202	2 981	2 653	13 720
Other	759	83	11	232	1 726	2 811
Total	76 873	33 897	7 408	35 562	83 396	237 136

Source: Statistics SA. 1998. *Statistical Releases: Employment and salaries and wages: public sector, P0251* (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/RELEASE/LABOUR/dec97/p0251.htm>).

History of the union

Different aspects of a union's history influence the traditions that take root in that union. For example, a union whose recent history was marked by a rank-and-file rebellion, as was the case with the CTMWA, is not likely to forget that experience easily. Such an experience may actually strengthen the democratic impulse within that union, at least as long as the generation of leaders

and members that led the take-over is still dominant within the union. On the other hand, a union that experiences a dramatic increase in membership over a very short period of time often finds that it has little time to consolidate its support and socialise its new members into the organisation, its principles and traditions. The figures in Table 1 above show that SAMWU may have experienced this as their membership skyrocketed from 29 500 in 1989 to 59 000 in 1990.

Thus each union's history contains both those tendencies that propel it in a democratic direction as well as those that act to diminish democracy. However, SAMWU's history from the early 1970s up to the late 1980s or early 1990s is dominated by those tendencies which favour democracy. This was a history which was marked by:

- ❑ mass mobilisation and mass militancy,
- ❑ efforts to encourage membership participation in union affairs,
- ❑ plant-based negotiations which allowed members to scrutinise decisions and the behaviour of their leaders,
- ❑ ideologically-driven full-time officials who saw democratic unionism as a step towards the creation of socialism and were therefore favourably disposed towards worker control,
- ❑ membership of a militant union federation which declared its intention to deepen worker control, and finally,
- ❑ in the 1980s a union's credibility depended on its preparedness to allow democratic processes to take their course.

However, since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a turnaround in the recent history of the union and the environment within which it operates. Firstly, the union's membership has grown exponentially, thus making it virtually impossible to reach all its members and socialise them into its traditions. Secondly, the centralisation of bargaining has made bargaining very remote, and this has had the effect of taking power away from workers and leaving it in the hands of a few officials and worker leaders. Thirdly, union democracy is now mediated through the full-time official and the union expert as they hold the key to workers' understanding of 'thick'

documents and complex decisions and negotiations. A SAMWU provincial secretary argues that this 'vast knowledge' is critical.

The reality is that when it comes to domination in discussion, it depends on vast knowledge that one has. I would say most of the comrades have that vast knowledge but you will find a difference between a shop steward and an official. Officials will have more knowledge than shop stewards. Today within local government there are so many Acts, those thick bibles of Acts, Electricity Acts, Water Acts, Recreation, Arts and all those things. So officials are the comrades who have time to go through all those Acts. So when it comes to discussion, obviously they will dominate the show. But at the same time you also have full-time shop stewards. There are a lot of full-time shop stewards within SAMWU. As a result all those shop stewards have vast knowledge.⁴⁶

Finally, over the last ten years the union has lost some of its most experienced leadership and this loss was simultaneously a loss of organisational memory, which is the "accumulation of experiences and knowledge that is organization-specific - and which cannot be rehired"⁴⁷.

Urban/rural divisions

The tradition of democratic unionism is also determined by the context in which union organisation occurs. In the municipal sector there is an unevenness due to the fact that some workers, mainly coloured and Indian, are urban while others, predominantly African, are migrants from the rural areas of South Africa. In an urban setting democratic unionism takes root much quicker and requires smaller outlay of resources than in a rural context. This is partly because literacy levels are much higher in urban centres, reading materials and other intellectual resources are more readily available, and it is much easier to organise meetings and workshops. A SAMWU official who has experience organising in rural as well as urban areas argues that rural organising can test the patience and commitment of full-time officials, but that perseverance can yield good results.

If you assess the Eastern Cape and Johannesburg, you will find that because Johannesburg is the industrial area, because of the beating of the machine, the

consciousness of the working class is sharp. You see, even the way people greet, it's unlike us here where we would say, 'hey, how are you Sakhela?' and try and tell a whole story. I mean, we are a semi-rural province here. We still think about grazing cattle here and the beating of the machine is also here. On the other hand, in Johannesburg people move and talk fast. And, even the mode of transport must be sharp.

Although there is a need that you have some students [as organisers] because in the interpretation of these documents the students assist, the constituency, the membership is at another level. You see, when I was in POTWA, most of the workers in East London were coming from Transkei and we had to take a long drive, we had to be patient. But I'm telling you, when they grasp that, it's difficult for them to be swayed by anybody. And then, these youngsters who come from university they don't have that patience.⁴⁸

However, this does not suggest an innate inability by rural workers to build democratic organisations. Indeed, rural workers who work in the cities as migrants have been the backbone of union struggles in South Africa. This is particularly so with the municipal sector where municipal employers in large towns and cities preferred migrant workers from the rural areas of South Africa because it was cheap and was also in line with the apartheid policy of restricting permanent urban residence for Africans.

The factors which shaped the democratic tradition are summarised schematically in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors Which Shaped the Democratic Tradition in SAMWU and its Predecessors

<i>Variable</i>	<i>SAMWU</i>
Nature of the labour process	Fragmented. Providing service.
The labour market	Predominantly unskilled with smaller component of semi-skilled workers and artisans.
Access to intellectual resources	Weak.
The nature of the sector	Public sector. An extension of the repressive apartheid state. Not exposed to competition. Different legislative regime of regulation.
Union history	“Deep roots” - pre-1973 registered and democratising and post-1973 militant and democratic predecessors.
Rural/urban divisions	Uneven - large number of African migrants and some coloured and African urbanised workers.

Full-time Officials and the Dilemma of Leadership: An Assessment

All the unions that formed SAMWU employed full-time officials to serve in various capacities in these unions ranging from clerical workers to organisers and specialised officials such as research, media and legal officers. Unfortunately these unions do not seem to have kept systematic records of their staffing numbers, policies and practices and thus information is sketchy and often unreliable. In 1984 the CTMWA had a staff of “some eighteen, nineteen people”, but no further details were given regarding the positions these people occupied within the union. There is no information available on the other unions. What is puzzling, however, is the fact that although the CTMWA had this number of staff in 1984, the total number of staff of the SAMWU in 1988 was only 10 people (see Table 4 below). However, it would seem that the new union managed to keep some relatively reliable records, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4: SAMWU Full-time Officials, 1988 - 1997

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total staff</i>	<i>Total Members</i>	<i>Ratio of Staff: Members</i>
1988	10	23 638	1 : 2 364
1989	17	29 529	1 : 1 737
1990	38	59 014	1 : 1 553
1991	54	67 178	1 : 1 244
1992	76	69 156	1 : 910
1993	81	73 342	1 : 905
1994	103	100 410	1 : 975
1995	107	110 032	1 : 1 028
1996	129	113 056	1 : 876
1997	131	120 109	1 : 917

Source: SAMWU. 1997. Secretariat Report.

This discussion now turns to an assessment of the role of full-time officials in SAMWU and how it has changed over time.

Organisational management

As Table 4 above shows, SAMWU employed very few full-time officials when it was established in 1987. Up to about the mid-1980s all the emerging trade unions operated under severe financial constraints and thus did not employ many officials. Added to this was the fact that their membership was relatively small and large numbers of officials would have been a heavy financial burden on them. In addition, full-time officials were not seen as a category to be

‘managed’ but rather as activists who were there to build a working class movement. A number of issues flowed from this assumption. Firstly, union work was generally regarded as self-supervised political or ‘struggle’ work and unions did not have procedures or systems to assess productivity and performance. In this situation, formal educational qualifications were not important. Secondly, although there were some forms of segmentation in union employment, these were not pronounced and union employment was characterised by an absence of hierarchy, a flat salary structure, and an absence of differential forms of reward and recognition of contribution. Except perhaps for the CTMWA, union work in all the other founder members of SAMWU was not seen as a career but as a self-sacrificing contribution to the workers’ struggle. Mashishi remembers a time just after the merger when they had officials from all the previous unions but no money to pay their salaries. The union simply told the officials that any organiser who services membership that did not bring in money was not going to be paid. So, officials had to go and fight for stop-order facilities.⁴⁹

Finally, unions did not have to do anything to attract and retain officials. There were always activists looking for work in the unions regardless of pay and conditions.

The increase in the number of full-time union officials as shown in the above table gave rise to a need to manage its full-time officials as employees in the same way that employees are managed in the private or public sectors. This implied that staff management procedures had to be developed to deal with, among others, staff recruitment, remuneration, benefits, training, discipline and retention. In addition, the increase in the number of officials made it difficult for the union to socialise all its new officials to its values and traditions. One of the consequences of this was the erosion of the culture of self-sacrifice and self-supervision, with the result that the union had to develop mechanisms to monitor, supervise and assess the performance of its officials. In this thesis we have referred to all the processes born out of these new requirements as organisational management. Below we will return to a discussion of this and other related processes of organisational change.

Organisational governance

The CTMWA contributed a great deal to the new union, particularly by way of administrative infrastructure, skills and financial resources. The other unions brought very little in that regard.⁵⁰

However, with regard to organisational governance, the strongest influence came from the FOSATU tradition through the TGWU. Mashishi argues that the structures and principles of organisation were adapted from the TGWU constitution which in turn had been modelled on FOSATU structures and organisational principles. In essence the model of union governance that was adopted by SAMWU sought to empower workers and shop stewards and to curtail the power of full-time officials. The principle that best captures this model is worker control and it entailed the following:

- ❑ Subjecting full-time officials to the authority of worker-dominated union structures.
- ❑ Ensuring accountability of all leadership to ensure that they acted according to the wishes of the rank-and-file. This was achieved through a rigorous adherence to a system of mandating and reporting back.
- ❑ Holding regular elections of leadership and putting in place a system which enabled workers to recall leadership.
- ❑ Only workers could table motions and vote in union organisational structures and meetings.

On the whole, worker control was intended to give workers the power to run the affairs of their unions and to have full-time officials as back-up. Full-time officials were expected to show their commitment by building, not sabotaging, worker leadership. Many of the functions that organisers and other officials normally perform in a bureaucratic union were to be assumed by shop stewards and other rank-and-file activists. SAMWU president, Petrus Mashishi, recalls how the initial group of Johannesburg municipal workers organised themselves into the TGWU and then went to other local authorities to organise other workers. This is what they had learnt in FOSATU, that *they* were the union and that they had to take control of the organisation and its functioning.⁵¹ This, in part, explains why it was possible for a single full-time official to service

2 364 union members in 1988 compared to 917 in 1997 (see Table 4 above).

Roger Ronnie recalls that when he first joined SAMWU in the late 1980s⁵² the national executive committee (NEC) of the union was predominantly blue-collar and all the proceedings were cross-translated into the languages spoken by the NEC delegates. All these, and other practices were intended to ensure that all workers had a fair chance of participating and influencing the direction of the union. Of course, there is a danger of romanticising this particular model of organisational governance. In reality there were many departures from the practice and many officials engaged in undemocratic practices at different times in the history of the union and its predecessors. However, it is possible to refer to a *tradition* of worker control within SAMWU which was manifested in different organisational practices, norms and values. The observance and reproduction of this tradition was seen as being crucial for the achievement of liberation and, for many, it was the key to the achievement of a socialist society.

It must be emphasised that the democratic tradition of unionism emerged at a time when union membership was small and, in some cases, declining. Jeremy Baskin has argued that this tradition emerged as a defensive strategy against the anti-union onslaught by employers and the state in the 1970s, but that unions later “made a virtue out of this necessity”⁵³. What unionists and union intellectuals did not anticipate at the time is the process which has been referred to in this study as organisational modernisation and which is accelerated by rapid membership growth. The implications of this process for the democratic tradition of unionism are discussed in later sections of this chapter.

Organisational culture

Unions like SAMWU were able to maintain stability in their employment policies and practices because of the particular organisational culture that was cultivated during the 1970s and the 1980s. This culture was founded on the tradition of democratic unionism which sought to empower workers and limit the influence of the full-time official in union affairs and was

reinforced by values and principles which were generally accepted and taken for granted by most in the unions. Firstly, this culture was characterised by a collective and self-sacrificing ethos as opposed to individualism. Under such a culture it was possible for SAMWU full-time officials to put the organisation first and, if needs be, to accept that they might not be paid until the union was able to get stop-order facilities from employers. As Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, observes, this culture was present in all the affiliates of COSATU.

The first union officials only got their salaries if they were able to organise sufficient workers. Many of them worked for next to nothing. I remember in the early days as a shop steward in CCAWUSA, we couldn't pay officials. So they were working on a commitment basis towards the aims and objectives of the union movement and a lot of them were sharp politically and therefore in the political debates they were able to make a contribution.⁵⁴

Secondly, this organisational culture, which was strongest in the TGWU component of the new union, emphasised leadership accountability to the rank-and-file, integrity and humility. Being a worker acquired a new dignity and respectability within this culture and organisers were expected to lead lives characterised by modesty and an unswerving commitment to the working class and its struggle.

Finally, this culture which was often presented as a model of working class morality and norms within organisations became self-reinforcing as new organisers and worker activists became socialised into it in the absence of any other credible morality outside the liberation movement. In other words, full-time officials who wanted to gain acceptance as 'genuine comrades' had to modify their values and conduct to be in line with this union organisational culture. Those who failed to observe the norms and values inherent in this culture often got dismissed and found themselves disgraced for showing disrespect for workers. In such cases many officials did not contest the union's decision to discipline them.

Of course there were many occasions when union officials departed from these norms and principles. An example is 'empire building' where a full-time official builds a power base around

himself or herself. According to a leading SAMWU leader, this practice existed even in the past when people developed these empires for political reasons or to hide some inadequacies and improprieties such as in the case of an official who had affairs with workers.⁵⁵

Gender relations

There is a rigid gender segmentation in union employment and SAMWU is no exception. The segmentation takes the form of occupational differentiation, or what some have referred to as functional differentiation,⁵⁶ and it is born out of an inequality of power relations between men and women in unions and in the broader society. Ronnie admits that most of the women employed by SAMWU are office-bound administrators or clerical workers and that the union has had only three “real fieldwork organisers”, all of whom have since left the union.⁵⁷ The highest ranking of these women was a legal officer at the union head office in Cape Town while the others were an organiser and a regional secretary.

Unlike the older unions of the FOSATU tradition which at some stage in their history had women in top elected national full-time positions, SAMWU has never elected a woman to a full-time position above the position of regional secretary⁵⁸. Women full-time officials in SAMWU and other unions do not only face a glass ceiling which prevents them from rising up the organisational hierarchy. They also face other forms of discrimination and humiliation. Eastern Cape provincial educator, Thobile Maso, argues that women are not given scope to prove their capabilities and, in addition, have to endure constant sexual harassment by their male colleagues. He argues that when it comes to sexual harassment, women officials find themselves in “a situation similar to that in private companies” and similarly their problem is compounded by the fact gender discrimination is hard to prove.

It's not like a toilet written 'whites only', 'blacks only'. It's like a toilet with a sign that says, 'lady clerks only' whereas you know that there are no black lady clerks. It's a hidden form of discrimination.⁵⁹

It is not very clear how the union would undo the inequality between the genders. Tshoaedi's 1999 study on the position of women full-time officials found that this inequality exists throughout COSATU and its affiliates.⁶⁰ In a context where there is growing competition for top positions among officials and where top positions also carry political power, the struggle for gender equality is not going to be won easily. Indeed, the situation in SAMWU suggests that even the few women in top positions may be outvoted, outmanoeuvred or their stay may become so untenable that they will leave.

The social and political environment

The democratic tradition of unionism that emerged in the 1970s was partly a defensive strategy in a context where unions were facing an onslaught by employers and the state. The assumption was that a union movement that is rooted among its membership had better chances of surviving these attacks and achieving real improvements on behalf of its membership. In addition, democratic unionism was seen as a form of legitimating trade unions as alternative institutions in a context where established institutions were deemed undemocratic and illegitimate. This enabled the new unions to occupy the moral high ground and union activists used it to good effect in their recruitment and mobilising campaigns.

However, the democratic tradition of unionism has been in flux since the demise of apartheid, particularly because there is now a legitimate democratically-elected government which recognises unions as important institutions in society. In addition, unions now participate in industry and tripartite national forums with employers and the state and thus the adversarialism of the 'struggle years' has given way to social partnership. All these have had an effect on the democratic tradition of trade unionism and the role that full-time officials play within trade unions.

Firstly, the deracialisation of society has resulted in the emergence of opportunities for black

people in general, unionists included, thus giving rise to processes of upward social mobility. Within the trade union movement full-time officials and high profile elected worker leaders have been the biggest beneficiaries of these processes. Although SAMWU has not been affected to the same extent as some other affiliates of COSATU, it has also found that the moral and political consensus of the past is disintegrating and full-time officials are taking advantage of new opportunities. A good example is their former deputy general secretary who was elected at a SAMWU national congress but resigned three months later to become a human resources manager in the Johannesburg City Council.

Secondly, under apartheid full-time officials who honoured the democratic tradition were rewarded while various sanctions were applied against those who failed to honour it. In the new social and political environment since the demise of apartheid, unions have lost the power and the moral authority to enforce democratic rules among full-time officials. In other words, unions have lost the monopoly of being one of a few social institutions which have legitimacy in society. Today state institutions, parastatals, private employers and many non-governmental organisations also have legitimacy and full-time officials can easily switch employers rather than tolerate the exacting demands of a democratic union. Ronnie argues that the form that political change has taken in South Africa contributed to “the decline in democracy in the union movement” and the emergence of a “new kind of organiser” who is not prepared to sacrifice for the sake of the union movement.⁶¹

Finally, as noted above, the new social and political situation has been characterised by the dissolution of the collective struggle ethos and the emergence of individualism. This has given rise to a host of new tendencies within the union movement, particularly the emergence of hierarchy and segmentation in union employment along the lines of occupational position, formal education qualifications, skill, income and gender. In those cases where forms of segmentation existed previously, such as in the case of gender, they have now become sharper. SAMWU exhibits this individualism and the associated segmentation and political competition among full-time officials.

The global economic and political environment

The changing global economic and political environment has also had a bearing on the role of full-time officials in COSATU unions. In particular, the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the hegemony of capitalism has resulted in an environment which is not conducive to radical notions of social transformation. Ronnie argues that developments in Eastern Europe left many full-time officials, even those who did not necessarily subscribe to the Soviet model of socialism, without a “pole around which they could possibly gravitate”. Many of these officials ended up taking “the short way out” by going into government and business. Thus, “reformism almost won out at the end of the day from what started out as a very radical influence and perspective”.⁶²

All these changes have contributed to the change in the role of full-time officials discussed above.

Organisational Modernisation in SAMWU

The figures presented in Table 4 above showed a dramatic increase in staffing numbers and a decreasing staff/membership ratio. It would appear that the increase in numbers is, in part, a response to membership growth since the early 1990s. But this increase is also indicative of broader processes of organisational modernisation as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this study. As SAMWU’s 1997 Secretariat Report observed,

Our administration in almost all offices is not one that is geared towards responding to the needs of a union. The fact that in some of our offices it would take a day to locate a document recently received is a matter of great concern.... There is a need for us to create an environment in all our regions, that enhances *productivity, creativity and innovation*... The recommendations under staffing directly flow from some of the problems that are related to functioning of administration. There is a long held problem that the administrative staff are not appreciative of administrative procedures and this results in the collapse of these *procedures and systems*.... As mentioned elsewhere, the Union has been unable to fill certain posts at Head Office. In similar fashion, Regions are

experiencing problems attracting suitably qualified persons. The move towards *specialised appointments* in Regions will exacerbate the situation.⁶³ [emphasis added]

The manner in which the union has been modernising its organisational management with regard to staffing seems to have been characterised by the following:

- ❑ Increasing the number of officials to meet the pressures of increasing membership.
- ❑ Emphasising productivity, creativity and innovation.
- ❑ Putting in place procedures and administrative systems.
- ❑ Moving towards specialised appointments.
- ❑ Reviewing the remuneration structure so as to attract and retain full-time officials.

However, the processes of modernisation, particularly those related to staffing and leadership, in a union which has practised, and is still committed to, internal democracy and worker control, are resulting in a contradiction which we have referred to as the *dilemma of leadership*. Today the dilemma of leadership arises because on the one hand, unions are trying to modernise (which includes enabling leaders to exercise their leadership) while on the other hand, the tradition of worker control seeks to curtail the power of leadership, particularly full-time officials. This dilemma is accentuated by the fact that organisational modernisation implies that unions and union functionaries should operate on the basis of principles and procedures which apply in other institutions in society. Taken to its logical conclusion, this includes the elitist notion that top union leadership should exercise power in the same way as, say, top leadership in private business institutions exercise power, that they should earn more or less the same salaries, that they should drive the same cars and that they should have the same dress code as corporate bosses. Some unionists have been grappling with these changes within COSATU.

I mean, I asked myself a question which might seem a petty thing, that why does a general secretary all of a sudden have to wear a tie. It might appear like a petty thing, you know what I'm saying. But before, general secretaries never had to like [wear a tie]. There wasn't a dress code when we used to go to meetings with management. The dress code was actually to go in your union T-shirt supporting socialism. Now I look at these

people with their hair styles and suits and everything and I say, but there is certainly no difference between the bosses and unionists now. This has become some kind of a boys' club.⁶⁴

Popular notions of leading unionists, which are reinforced by media representations of union leaders as 'union bosses', take it for granted that full-time officials perform the same social roles as managers or government bureaucrats perform in their respective institutions. At the core of the case of *Sikhwezeli Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs. SAMWU* which was heard before a magistrate in Springs from 1996 to 2000 was the principle of 'duty of care' for full-time union officials on which is founded the notion of the union boss. The plaintiffs were SAMWU members who hired a lawyer to sue the union for R5 million in lost wages. The workers' legal team argued that the union official, as the 'boss', had a duty of care towards the workers and should have stopped them from going on strike. The magistrate concurred with the plaintiffs' case and ordered the union to pay the sum demanded by the workers.

Even some union members themselves seem to hold this view about their leadership as Mashishi found during a visit to the SAMWU branch in Butterworth in the Eastern Cape. There a worker told him, "*Uyabona, e-Eastern Cape xa uyishop steward ufanele ubenebrief-case nesuti nethayi ukuze xa ume ngaphambili kwethu uhlonipheke.*" [You see, if you are shop steward in the Eastern Cape, you must have a briefcase, a suit and a tie so that you look respectable when you stand in front of us.] It was made clear to Mashishi that if a shop steward did not have those things, even he or she was a good leader, he or she would never be respected by the workers.⁶⁵

Within the ranks of the leadership of the unions and union intellectuals, there are many who now argue that worker control can, and does, inhibit leadership in the exercise of the leadership roles and functions. As early as 1992 Bobby Marie, then national organiser of NUMSA, made an impassioned argument to demonstrate that worker control was an outmoded way of taking decisions in unions.

This approach to representation was functional in the early period of the unions' growth when the organisation was smaller, the issues were simple and were related to problems that the local could identify. However, with the development of the national level and the need to make decisions on complex, long term issues, the usefulness of the old process of decision making is today seriously questioned.... Today the practice of worker control has become cumbersome if not impractical. The failure to find a solution to this problem has resulted in a decline in the level of participation, particularly at local levels of the union. Fewer shop stewards and officials have a full grasp of the issues and these are concentrated in the regional and national levels.⁶⁶

Although we should be careful not to overstate the nature of the contradiction between modernisation and worker control, the dilemma of leadership implies a political contestation, and on both sides the line-up of forces changes constantly depending on the specific issue or set of issues around which the contestation revolves. For example, ardent supporters of worker control may find themselves arguing, like SAMWU, for 'productivity, creativity and innovation' at one time and against bureaucratisation at another time.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown how SAMWU is a union with deep 'struggle' roots. The union also has a rich history of building worker control, from the rank-and-file take-over of the CTMWA in the mid-1960s, through the systematic organisation building of the FOSATU tradition, to the militant struggles of the Black Municipal Workers Union and other community-linked unions in the early 1980s. This history highlights the importance of understanding the democratic tradition of unionism as a hybrid rather than the result of a contribution by a single strand of unionism. The case of the CTMWA, whose tradition is highly understated, or not stated at all in the literature, underscores the need to examine the contribution of forces other than the traditional FOSATU/COSATU unions that emerged in the early 1970s, towards the building of democratic unionism.

We have argued that the municipal sector is not conducive to building democratic unionism

along the tradition of worker control that developed in South Africa since the early 1970s. It is more conducive to the emergence of a loose representative model led by powerful charismatic leaders. However, the period of mass mobilisation and other factors made it possible for the union to build a model that very closely approximates the worker control tradition that had emerged in manufacturing and other sectors. However, this is likely to change with the democratisation of local government and decline of mass mobilisation and militancy.

The growth in the membership of the union has made it virtually impossible for the union to socialise all these members into this tradition and maintain its democratic character. The growth in size of the union together with the changing social and political context have resulted in accelerated processes of organisational modernisation which are resulting in anti-democratic tendencies within the union movement as a whole. Among these changes are new notions of leadership and models of governance which have positioned shop stewards and full-time officials in a very powerful position as intermediaries in the relation between workers and management whose power lies in filtering and processing the mandate from the workers and what gets reported back to them.

We have argued that in an organisation that is worker-controlled, organisational modernisation results in a dilemma of leadership for the full-time official in that it creates a tension between the expectation that leaders should be given a free rein to lead on the one hand, and the requirement that leaders should be accountable to their members on the other. The negative aspects of organisational modernisation can give rise to what we have referred to here as business unionism which, at best, implies leadership by a powerful charismatic leader whose accountability to the workers is tenuous and, at worst, refers to leadership by bureaucratic 'business agents' who provide 'services' to union members in return for the subscriptions members pay to the union.⁶⁷

In conclusion, it is hard to characterise SAMWU in a definitive way with regard to any of these features and tendencies as there seems to be a fluidity that makes such a task almost impossible. This fluidity suggests that issues of governance and leadership are in transition but that there is a

fierce contest, not just between membership and leadership, but rather between competing projects of organisational modernisation. On the one hand, the traditional worker control school of unionists seems to be pursuing a particular project of modernisation which seeks to make adjustments and refinements to the model of unionism that SAMWU has been part of in the light of the changes discussed in section 3 of this chapter. On the other hand, the group led by what Ronnie describes as “the new organiser” seems to be pursuing a project which would eventually jettison worker control in favour of a model of unionism based on the notion that there should be “a kind of equilibrium of all institutions in society”⁶⁸ regarding pay, benefits, models of leadership and the exercise of power. The decisive factor in this contest is going to be the power of the ‘new organiser’ and the full-time shop steward. Ronnie describes the role of this organiser.

The kinds of the decisions and policies that are emerging are ones that are aimed more at seeking to build a consensus with government and capital in this kind of amorphous national interest. So people now see themselves coming in and becoming researchers in the COSATU policy unit. So, that is the kind of role that the new union official is coming in. If you look at the way the adverts have changed, for example, they are looking for people who have para-legal skills at least, people who have university degrees, research skills, etc., in order to bolster and back up that kind of role that COSATU is getting involved in now. The new union organiser that is coming in, the bulk of them, are now coming in at least provincial level and above. It’s all geared towards supporting a programme of action that is based first and foremost on negotiations. I think that, coupled with the emergence of a black elite through the kind of political change that is taking place, is what is giving rise to this new typical kind of organiser that is emerging.⁶⁹

This new organiser has an ally in the new shop steward that is also emerging.

I must say that the more articulate shop stewards now, have to some extent also started pushing out union officials. Not the newer ones. The older ones, the ones that have been around a long time, who didn’t necessarily come with good writing abilities, but were committed. They were the solid ones who would plod to go and sign up workers, would fight for a recognition agreement, but couldn’t really advance beyond that. A lot of these organisers now are feeling alienated from union organisation, and hence their pre-occupation now is one which is starting to focus on benefits and that kind of thing. So there is that layer of union officials, who I think have just become totally alienated by the change and the growth of the union firstly. So, they don’t have control over their little area that they are operating in, negotiations don’t take place there anymore.⁷⁰

The significance of the above observations goes beyond the specific contexts where they originate and the details which are described and give an insight into larger processes of contestation for specific projects of organisational modernisation. The alliance that is emerging between the 'new organiser' and the full-time shop steward will be decisive in this contestation, more so because the layer of full-time shop stewards is likely to expand enormously in the near future following an agreement between SAMWU and employers at the central negotiating level. According to this agreement, each location will have a full-time shop steward for every 1 000 members, up to a maximum of eight. Smaller municipalities where the union is unable to make 1 000 members can be combined at the level of district councils and get a full-time shop steward in the same way.⁷¹

If this contestation results in a victory for the new organiser and the new shop steward, the outcome will not be the classical notion of bureaucracy so long as rank-and-file SAMWU members retain the right to undertake independent action. This contention will also depend on how successful the old generation of unionists within SAMWU, and COSATU, have been in ensuring that elements of the organisational culture of democratic unionism are passed on to future generations of unionists. This will be explored further in *Part III*.

Notes:

1. SAMWU. 1997. "The Early Years", *SAMWU Workers News*, 10th Anniversary Special Edition, p. 6.
2. Although the union kept the acronym, DIMES, it changed its names several times between the time it was formed and when it finally got absorbed into SAMWU. The first union which was established in 1934 and became registered in 1935 was known as the Durban Indian Municipal Employees Society until 1980 when it changed its name to the Durban Integrated Municipal Employees Society. Then in 1990 it changed its name yet again to become the Democratic Indian Municipal Employees Society after it had merged with a small municipal union based in Ladysmith.
3. The UJMW was established in January 1980 at the initiative of the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) as a way of pre-empting the independent and militant black unions. In 1980 it got registered and had a closed shop agreement with the JCC. The UJMW was clearly a sweetheart union and black workers responded by forming the militant Black Municipal Workers' Union (BMWU).
4. See Luckhardt, K. and Wall, B. 1980. *Organise ...or Starve: The history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. These authors do not devote space to a discussion of black municipal unionism. As a result the information on these unions is scattered and brief. Its use for us in this discussion is to confirm the existence of these unions before the 1970s. The unions mentioned are: the African Municipal Workers Union in Cape Town under the leadership of M. Qumbela (p. 431); the African Municipal Workers Union in Durban which had become moribund and was revived by 1960 and then affiliated to SACTU; the union which had 650 members and was led by SACTU activist, Memory Vakalisa as secretary (p. 249); the Municipal Workers' Union which was formed in Port Elizabeth with 156 members some years after 1956 (p. 232); the Transvaal Municipal Workers' Union (later City & Town Council Workers' Union) was formed in 1959 with 100 members (p. 223). Finally, the authors make reference to the Indian union, DIMES which in 1960 had 1 600 members and joined SACTU (p. 249).
5. Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). 1976. *Official 1976 Trade Union Directory*. Johannesburg: TUCSA, p. 195.
6. SAMWU. 1997. "The Early Years", *SAMWU Workers News*, 10th Anniversary Special Edition, p. 6.
7. Southern Africa Labour & Development Research Unit (SALDRU). 1991., *Directory of South African Trade Unions: A complete guide to all South Africa's trade unions*. Cape Town: SALDRU, p. 396.
8. Lewis, D. 1983. "Registered Trade Unions and Western Cape Workers", in Webster, E. (ed.)

9. Budlender, D. 1984. "Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association: Interview with John Ernstzen", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 10, 2, p. 45.
10. Maree, Johann. 1977. *Notes taken during John Ernstzen's talk given as part of a course on the Theory and Practice of Trade Unionism*, University of Cape Town, June 1977.
11. SAMWU. 1997. "The Early Years", *SAMWU Workers News*, 10th Anniversary Special Edition, p. 8.
12. Budlender, D. 1984. *op. cit.*
13. For a full discussion of the conditions which encourage or promote the democratisation of a bureaucratised union see Voss, K. and Sherman R. 2000. "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union revitalization in the American labor movement", *American Journal of Sociology*, 106 (2).
14. *ibid.*, p. 47.
15. *ibid.*, p. 53.
16. *ibid.*, p. 54.
17. *ibid.*, p. 44.
18. Author interview with Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU President, Johannesburg, 20 January 2001; and SAMWU. 1997. "A Message from the president", *SAMWU Workers News*, 10th Anniversary Special Edition, pp. 2 - 3.
19. Author interview with Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU President, Johannesburg, 20 January 2001.
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. Keenan, J. 1981. "Migrants Awake - The 1980 Johannesburg municipality strike", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 6, 7, p. 7.
23. Nkoenyane, Andrew. 1997. "SAMWU Veterans Look Back: Interview with Petrus Mashishi, Aletta Sekele, Christopher Mabaso and Molapisi Mathibe", *SAMWU Workers News*, 10th Anniversary Special Edition, p. 29.
24. *ibid.*, p. 30.
25. CTMWA (A1939). 1980. *37th Annual Report of the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association*

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- for the year ending 31 December 1979, p. 5.
26. *ibid.* p. 14.
 27. *ibid.* p. 15.
 28. CTMWA (**A1939**). 1979. *36th Annual Report of the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association for the year ending 31 December 1978*, p. 1.
 29. CTMWA (**A1939**). 1980. *37th Annual Report of the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association for the year ending 31 December 1979*, p. 2.
 30. CTMWA (**A1939**). 1982. *39th Annual Report of the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association for the year ending 31 December 1981*, p. 1.
 31. Baskin, J. 1991. *Striking Back: A history of COSATU*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 197.
 32. There is a discrepancy between this figure and the figure supplied to COSATU in the same year. COSATU general secretary's "Report to Second National Congress" in 1987 reported that the municipal sector unions represented 16 967. Similar discrepancies have been noted with figures of other unions such as the CWIU in Chapter 5.
 33. Author interview with Thobile Maso, SAMWU Eastern Cape Provincial Education Officer, Port Elizabeth, 15 May 2000. Apart from his official position as an education officer in the union, Maso is also a poet who contributes poems regularly to union publications such as COSATU's *The Shopsteward* and *SAMWU News*.
 34. Keenan, J. 1981., *op. cit.*, p. 7.
 35. Budlender, D. 1984. *op. cit.*, p. 45.
 36. Keenan, J. 1981., *op. cit.*
 37. Author interview with Silas Letsimo, SAMWU Gauteng provincial secretary, Johannesburg, 14 September 1999.
 38. This information is based on a list of names of the BMWU executive committee, their portfolios and their jobs in the Council, in Keenan, J. 1981., *op. cit.* p. 25.
 39. Pityana, S.M. and Orkin, M. (eds). 1992. *Beyond the Factory Floor: A survey of COSATU shop-stewards*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 22.
 40. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000. (At the time of the interview he was an acting legal officer at the union's head office in Cape Town. Later in 2000 he was re-elected general secretary of the union.)

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41. *ibid.*, p. 48. [emphasis added]
 42. Author interview with Thobile Maso, SAMWU Eastern Cape Provincial Education Officer, Durban, 15 May 2000
 43. Sisa Njikelana cited in NEHAWU. 1997. *NEHAWU History - The unfinished story: The history of the National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union, 1987 - 1997*, Johannesburg: NEHAWU, p. 15.
 44. Mashishi gives an example of a group of ANC-aligned officials who were dismissed by SAMWU soon after the merger. The leadership of SACTU in exile criticised SAMWU for this and continued channelling money to the dismissed officials until SAMWU met SACTU in London to discuss the matter. Thereafter SACTU stopped supporting and funding the group. (Author interview with Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU President, Johannesburg, 20 January 2001.)
 45. Author interview with Richard Hlophe, SAMWU provincial secretary in KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 23 March 2000.
 46. *ibid.*
 47. Kransdorff, A. 1998. *Corporate Amnesia: Keeping know-how in the company*. Oxford: Butterworth/Heinemann, p. 20.
 48. Author interview with Thobile Maso, SAMWU Eastern Cape Provincial Education Officer, Port Elizabeth, 15 May 2000.
 49. Author interview with Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU President, Johannesburg, 20 January 2001.
 50. *ibid.*
 51. *ibid.*
 52. Ronnie had been a CCAWUSA (now SACCAWU) shop steward before he joined SAMWU in 1989.
 53. Author interview with Jeremy Baskin, former general secretary of PPWAWU and administrative co-ordinator at COSATU Head Office, 24 February 2000.
 54. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000.
 55. *ibid.*
 56. This concept was used by Reskin, B. and Roos, P. 1997. "Status Hierarchies and Sex Segregation", in Bose, C. Spitze, G. (eds), *Ingredients for Women's Employment Policy*. New

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- York: University of New York Press. It has been applied to the South African trade union movement by Tshoaedi, C.M. 1999. *Functional Differentiation in Trade Union Employment: A Study of Gender Inequality with Specific Reference to Women Union Officials*. M.A. Research Report, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
57. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former General Secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000.
58. For example, TGWU, MAWU (now NUMSA), PWWU, and CCAWUSA (now SACCAWU) once had women general secretaries.
59. Author interview with Thobile Maso, SAMWU Eastern Cape Provincial Education Officer, Port Elizabeth, 15 May 2000.
60. Tshoaedi, C.M. 1999. *op. cit.*
61. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000.
62. *ibid.*
63. SAMWU. 1997. *Secretariat Report to the 4th National Congress*.
64. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000.
65. Author interview with Petrus Mashishi, SAMWU President, Johannesburg, 20 January 2001.
66. Marie, B. 1992. "COSATU faces crisis: 'Quick fix' methods and organizational contradictions", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 5.
67. This term 'business unionism' is used here in the same sense as it is used in the American labour movement, namely, an approach to representing union members whereby 'business agents' service workers by resolving shopfloor and other problems for them. For a discussion of this approach in the American union movement see Voss, K. and Sherman, R. 2000. *op. cit.*
68. Author interview with Roger Ronnie, former general secretary of SAMWU, Cape Town, 5 May 2000.
69. *ibid.*
70. *ibid.*
71. *ibid.*

CHAPTER 4: THE MODERNISING UNION: CEPPWAWU, 1970s - 1990s

A Brief History of the Union and its Traditions

The Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (CEPPWAWU) is the subject of our discussion in this chapter. Formed in 1999 as a result of a merger of two COSATU affiliates, the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU), this union is the second of our three union case studies. Given its recent origins, CEPPWAWU does not provide us with enough material to evaluate its history, traditions and practices. Thus, in reality the discussion that follows in this chapter is a discussion of the histories, traditions and practices of CEPPWAWU's two predecessors, namely, the CWIU and PPWAWU. Each one of these unions has a long history which spans the entire 26 years since the revival of trade unions in the early 1970s.

Black chemical, energy, paper, printing and wood workers' unions before 1973

Out of our three case studies, CEPPWAWU is the only union which was formed by unions which were formed after 1973. Whereas SAMWU had the CTMWA, and NUMSA several of its founder unions such as NUMARWOSA and MICWU which had been in existence for many years before 1973, PPWAWU and the CWIU were products of the wave of worker mobilisation in the early 1970s. However, PPWAWU emerged from a tradition of unionism which came into existence a few years before the 1973 strikes, namely the Urban Training Project (UTP) tradition which we discuss below.

Information about the organisation of black workers in these sectors of the economy before 1973 is almost non-existent. However, Luckhardt and Wall and Lambert have recorded some of the struggles and activities of several small unions in the 1950s and 1960s, many of which were

affiliated to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Although none of these unions survived the wave of state repression and employer harassment in the 1960s, it is important to note their existence here for four important reasons. Firstly, it helps us examine whether or not there was a relationship between the union experiences of some of the workers in the 1960s and the struggles of the early 1970s. For example, in the 1960s workers at Lever Brothers in Durban were members of the African Chemical Workers' Union and had an established workers' committee although not a majority of the workforce.¹ but they did not participate in the 1973 strikes.²

Secondly, available information shows that these unions were extremely fragile, in terms of both their organisation and their size. For example, of the 33 unions which attended the inaugural conference of SACTU only 10 had membership above 900 and only two had more than 3 600 members.³ This provides a context within which to understand the preoccupation of unionists in the 1970s with building a solid organisational and membership base.

Thirdly, the organisational structures adopted by these unions, and the role of the full-time officials therein, provides some basis for comparisons with the post-1973 unions. Lambert, for example, has demonstrated that some SACTU unions had very active workplace committees⁴ and it is worth commenting on the similarities between these and the shop stewards committees which the post-1973 unions established to ensure democratic control of the unions by the workers.

Finally, it is worth comparing the role of the full-time official in these unions and in the post-1973 unions such as the CWIU and PPWAWU.

The history of unions which emerged in the wake of the 1973 strikes in Durban and other parts of the country is often presented without reference to unions which existed in the same sectors before 1973. Yet there is sufficient evidence to show that in the 1950s and 1960s unions existed in most of the sectors where unions re-emerged after 1973. A survey conducted in 1975 among

members of the CWIU, the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) and the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) found that 11 per cent of these workers had belonged to SACTU in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ Regarding these workers' experience of unionism during the time of SACTU, the researcher observed that,

It [SACTU] ceased to be active publicly in S.A. in 1964 after a wave of bannings and state harassment. It was interesting to note that many respondents were aware of this and said that they had been reluctant to join the present unions because of SACTU's experience of banning, exile and banishment. They contrasted SACTU's concentration on politics on a national level, with the present unions' concern with the day-to-day issues in the factory and their stress on the need to resolve complaints through shop stewards and not at the trade union offices.⁶

With reference to the sectors that the CWIU and PPWAWU organised, several unions existed in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1940s the Gas and Power Workers' Union organising workers who supplied electricity to mines was active and even went on strike in 1942.⁷ Luckhardt and Wall also record that one of the unions which attended the inaugural conference of SACTU was the Durban-based non-racial Chemical and Allied Workers' Union (Natal) which was represented by Billy Nair at the conference. It had 400 members at that time.⁸

The African Chemical Workers Union existed at more or less the same time. Little is recorded about it other than a heroic struggle fought by its members at SA Titanium Products at Umgababa, south of Durban, in the late 1950s. This union was an affiliate of SACTU.⁹ Other unions whose existence and activities are documented in Luckhardt and Wall are the following:

- ❑ African Publisher, Newspaper and Distributor Workers' Union (formed in 1956). No membership figures given.
- ❑ The South African Glass Workers Union (formed in 1960). 150 members.
- ❑ Printing and Allied Workers' Union (formed in 1962). 250 members.
- ❑ Transvaal Broom and Brush Workers Union (revived in 1955). 600 members.
- ❑ Match Workers Union based at Lion Match in Durban. No figures given.

- ❑ Printing Workers Union (Transvaal). No details given other than that Edmund Cindi was its secretary.
- ❑ Timber Workers' Union, formed in 1955 in Cape Town.

None of the above unions survived into the 1970s and thus it is difficult to find a direct relationship between workers' union involvement and experiences in the 1960s and their involvement in the 1970s. However, three comments regarding this earlier phase of unionisation are germane at this point. Firstly, it is crucial to acknowledge that post-1973 worker mobilisation and union organisation had its antecedents in the 1950s and 1960s and that some of these experiences may have shaped the behaviour of workers in the post-1973 period. The initial reluctance of some of the workers to join unions because they had experienced the repression of SACTU unions in the 1960s seems to suggest that these workers had learnt something about what Tarrow calls a "pattern of political opportunities and constraints" which had taught them to employ their "repertoire of collection" strategically.¹⁰ It is also plausible to argue that there was no discontinuity between union organisation in the 1960s and in the 1970s. If we conceptualise these periods as cycles of protest or mobilisation, it is possible to argue that the "repertoires of contention" or "learned conventions of contention" which are "culturally inscribed and socially communicated"¹¹ are part of the reservoir of knowledge which was carried from one cycle of mobilisation to the next. It is this reservoir of knowledge which enabled workers to be creative in their engagement with employers and the state, such as the tactic of refusing to elect leaders to speak for them during the strikes in 1973 for fear that they would be victimised in the same way as SACTU leaders were.¹²

Secondly, Lambert has shown that SACTU unions had active factory committees which performed a dual function, namely, to "implant, develop and extend industrial unionism" and to ensure the participation of the workforce in resistance campaigns against the state.¹³ Indeed, many of the chemical, printing and timber unions discussed by Luckhardt and Wall had factory committees, but no information is available regarding their effectiveness. What is important for our discussion is the fact that by the 1970s the practice of electing shopfloor representatives was

already part of the workers' repertoire of collective mobilisation. Of course the shop stewards' committees of the post-1973 unions later became much more established and pivotal to the structures of the unions compared to SACTU's factory committees.

Finally, and this is related to the above point, full-time officials in the 1950s and 1960s seem to have played a much more active role as leaders and thus possessed more power than officials under the worker control model of the post-1970 period. For example, Billy Nair, a SACTU official, was the sole representative of three unions at the founding conference of SACTU.¹⁴ In fact, the majority of the delegates at this conference were full-time officials, something which was not allowed by the constitutions of many of the post-1973 unions and federations. In the latter unions, the majority of delegates to congresses and conferences had to be workers who were shop stewards at their workplaces, and in many union meetings full-time officials could participate in debates but not vote.

Black chemical, energy, paper, printing and wood workers' unions after 1973

The two key founder unions of CEPPWAWU were formed in the same year but in different parts of the country and out of different political and union traditions. PPWAWU's predecessor, the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PWAU) was formed under the auspices of the UTP in Springs on 31 May 1974. Although in this thesis we have categorised the union as being part of the post-1973 unions, its formation was driven by an organisation which came from a pre-1973 tradition of unionism and politics. Formed in 1971 with the help of former Trades Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) unionists and various church bodies, the UTP's aims were to promote the development of black trade unions through advice and training. This included direct involvement in the formation of several unions for black workers such as PWAU, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA), the South African Chemical Workers' Union (SACWU) and the Glass and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU). The UTP's race-based approach sought to build black working class leadership and discouraged direct involvement in leadership roles by non-working class activists. By contrast, the class-based

Marxist tradition associated with FOSATU did not discourage the interventionist and power-driven approach of non-working class activists.

On establishing PPWAWU, the UTP appointed one of its organisers, Benjy Mngoma, a graduate of the Young Christian Workers (YCW), as the first secretary of the union. The UTP undertook to pay his salary until the union was able to pay him.¹⁵ The environment in which the PWAWU was formed was one which encouraged and supported the emergence of democratic unions led by elected shop stewards. The UTP produced training materials and ran training workshops on such subjects as trade unions, shop stewards and worker rights.

Around 1976, PWAWU joined other UTP unions to form the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions (CCOBTU), a loose body which, according to one commentator, was little more than a forum for union general secretaries.¹⁶ Then in October 1978, PWAWU, together with GAWU, left the CCOBTU and joined the initiative to form the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU).¹⁷ PWAWU's conflict with the UTP and the CCOBTU was over the union's decision to participate in the feasibility talks to establish the new union federation, a step which these bodies did not favour.¹⁸

As the membership figures in Table 5 show, PWAWU remained small for the rest of the 1970s, and during this time, its activities were confined to the East Rand area of the then Transvaal province. Its activities were to a large extent driven by the secretary himself who acknowledged that the problem with the union was that "the shopfloor is dead – what's destroying the union is no activity on the shopfloor".¹⁹ Thus despite the commitment to building worker control, by 1979 the UTP unions, and this includes PWAWU even though it left this body in 1978, had not yet attained this goal.²⁰ Below we argue that this union was only able to begin to achieve this goal during the FOSATU years.

The CWIU was formed in Durban on 24 November 1974, and from its inception, it belonged to a different tradition of unionism which, at that time, found expression in a co-ordinating body

called the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council (TUACC).²¹ In 1974 Omar Badsha was appointed by TUACC to organise workers in the chemical industry into a separate union and when the union was formed later that year he became its first secretary. For some years the TUACC unions which included the CWIU, MAWU, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) and the NUTW operated in Natal, specifically the greater Durban/Pinetown/Pietermaritzburg area.

During the first few years of its existence, the union seemed to be making inroads in recruiting membership. However, according to one observer, by the end of 1975 membership had declined to a point where the union was "almost in a state of collapse" because of a strategic miscalculation on the part of the union's officials.

The major responsibility for the union's decline lay with the strategy adopted by union officials. They had unrealistically high expectations that the union would gain rapid and easy recognition and failed to build up an adequately strong workers' base at any of the factories that the union organised.²²

At this time the union was run very much in a top-down fashion. Johann Maree has argued that the post -1973 unions had oligarchic origins in that they "were controlled by their founders, who were mainly White intellectuals, and were not elected by, nor accountable to, the African workers they were trying to organise".²³ However, the "gradual reconstruction" of the CWIU in the late 1970s necessitated a different approach to organisation-building. On the one hand, it implied building a strong shopfloor base and, on the other hand, it made it imperative for the union to establish democratic structures. A CWIU memorandum to a TUACC Council meeting in 1975 noted the co-ordinating body's new approach to organising which shifted emphasis away from signing up mass membership and instead focused on building strong shopfloor leadership.²⁴ As the discussion of NUMSA in Chapter 5 will show, a similar process was also taking place in other TUACC unions at the time. MAWU, a predecessor of NUMSA, termed their strategy 'decentralisation' and its aims were very similar to what the CWIU had initiated.²⁵

The new strategy was to take a long time before it produced results. During 1976 the nascent union movement suffered from the banning of several unionists, a counter-offensive by employers and a slump in the economy which resulted in many retrenchments. According to the union's official history, this created real difficulties for the CWIU.

Many workers did not want to join the union for fear of victimisation by employers or the state. The state was banning and detaining activists in increasing numbers. Workers were watching to see what the union could do for them, and what struggles the union had won, before they joined. The union was in a difficult situation - without membership it did not have the power to put pressure on management, but without gains the union could not build up membership.²⁶

In a nutshell, then, the unions which merged to form CEPPWAWU are part of the union movement which emerged after 1973, but they had very different political origins and histories in the beginning. However, from 1979 onwards their destinies began to converge as a result of the move by PWAWU to join the new federation, FOSATU. Both unions also experienced, for the first time, sustained membership growth and achieved unprecedented levels of organisational stability, because of the changing political and labour relations environment as well as the economies of scale achieved through the sharing of resources and personnel in a federation.

The FOSATU years

The years which we refer to as the FOSATU years represent a very important phase of unionism for both the CWIU and PPWAWU for it was during these years that a particular tradition of trade unionism was built on a sustainable basis. This tradition centred on building the power of shopfloor organisation and de-emphasising the role of the full-time official. The shop steward assumed a central importance in this new strategy as he or she had to undertake enormous leadership responsibilities to ensure the functioning of the union. However, the implementation of the strategy was a "slow and arduous task" and it was not until 1977 that most of the TUACC unions were implementing the strategy fairly consistently.²⁷ The importance of FOSATU is that it ensured coherence and uniformity in the implementation of the strategy. Union constitutions

were rewritten to ensure this uniformity and coherence. At federation level the constitutional structure ensured that “all office-bearers of FOSATU other than paid officials must be worker members of their affiliates and all executive committees of FOSATU have a constitutional majority of worker representatives from the factory”.²⁸ All this was aimed at encouraging worker involvement and control of the federation and its affiliates by workers.

‘One industry, one union’

The unions that make up CEPPWAWU went through several stages of consolidation through mergers during the FOSATU years and after the formation of COSATU. Although some of the unions were small, the significance of the mergers is more in the consolidation of unions in these sectors. The first of these took place in 1979 when the CWIU merged with the small unregistered Port Elizabeth-based Chemical and General Workers’ Union.²⁹ The second chemical industry union merger was when the 500-member Glass and Allied Workers’ Union (GAWU) merged with the CWIU in 1982.³⁰ GAWU had been formed on the 5 April 1975 under the auspices of the UTP but, together with PWAU, it left the UTP/CCOBTU fold in October 1978 and joined the initiative to form a new federation. During its years of existence, its membership never exceeded 600. Then in 1986 the unaffiliated and Cape Town-based Plastics and Allied Workers’ Union (PAWU), with a membership of 1 600, merged with CWIU. PAWU had been formed in the early 1980s in Cape Town. John Apollis, now the Gauteng regional secretary of CEPPWAWU, was its general secretary. At the time of the merger with CWIU the union had three organisers and two of them went over to CWIU as part of the merger process.³¹

In the paper and printing industry, only one merger took place, namely, between PWAU and the National Union of Printing and Allied Workers (NUPAWO) in October 1987. This merger resulted in the renamed PPWAWU. NUPAWO was a small UDF-affiliated union whose membership did not exceed 3000.

Table 5: CWIU, PPWAWU and CEPPWAWU Membership Figures, 1974 - 1999: ³²

<i>Year</i>	<i>CWIU</i>	<i>PWAWU/PPWAWU</i>
1974	1 000	200
1975	247	200
1980	1 600	1 000
1981	3 600	6 800
1982	5 230	4 030
1983	6 260	5 030
1984	13 752	11 430
1985	16 551	11 856
1987	29 808	23 310
1988	32 553	29 965
1989	36 062	32 586
1990	41 195	38 406
1991	44 485	42 430
1993	44 500	37 951
1994	43 321	36 630
1995	41 462	53 425
1996	43 000	52 407
1997	45 198	51 590
1998	45 850	47 000
	CEPPWAWU	
1999	72 149	

Source/s: FOSATU Annual Reports (various years); CWIU (1994); PPWAWU Annual Reports (various years); CEPPWAWU Joint Secretariat Report (1999); COSATU Secretariat Reports. (various); SALDRU, 1992; Baskin (1991); Naidoo (ed.) (1999).

The membership of the two main unions and their successor is presented in Table 5. One of the factors which forced them to consider mergers was the stagnation of their membership due to massive retrenchments in their industries. It will be noticed that from the mid-1990s the membership of both unions stopped growing or started to decline. At the same time as this was happening, COSATU took a resolution which committed the federation in principle to mergers which would result in 'broadly defined sectors/cartels'³³. However, the idea of a merger between the two unions was first mooted in 1989 when the CWIU congress took a resolution to seek co-operation with PPWAWU with a view to working towards a merger.³⁴ Discussions were initiated in the early 1990s and indeed, the 1991 Bi-annual Report of PPWAWU to the 4th National Congress reported that "comrades in CWIU (COSATU) are discussing the possibility of a merger with PPWAWU since some of our sectors are also dealing with chemicals".³⁵ However, all these discussions came to naught until 1997 when the two unions resolved to merge into one union.

By the time the two unions merged, they had many features in common including some aspects of their history and their democratic traditions, and they were more or less the same size in terms of membership. However, the unions were also different in a number of respects. Firstly, they did not share the same political outlook. The CWIU was among those unions often referred to as 'workerist' while PPWAWU tended towards Congress movement or so-called populist politics. This was illustrated at the second national congress of COSATU when delegates were debating whether or not to adopt the Freedom Charter as a political policy document of the federation. The CWIU argued against adopting the Charter and instead argued for the adoption of a workers' charter as the basis of a socialist programme. On the other hand, PPWAWU, together with unions such as the NUM, FAWU, SARHWU and NEHAWU, argued in favour of the Charter. Secondly, the CWIU has always been administratively more organised and financially more stable than PPWAWU. Finally, the CWIU not only employed more full-time officials but it also offered them better pay and conditions of employment.³⁶ This discussion now turns to a discussion of the democratic tradition in CEPPWAWU.

Table 6: CEPPWAWU Membership, April 1999 (by Region)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Eastern Cape	6 994	9.69
Free State/Northern Cape	1 284	1.78
KwaZulu-Natal	14 861	20.6
Mpumalanga	7 730	10.71
North West	4 775	6.62
Western Cape	9 194	12.74
Witwatersrand	27 311	37.85
TOTAL	72 149	

Source: CEPPWAWU Membership department report, 29/07/1999

Table 7: CEPPWAWU Membership, April 1999 (by Industry/Sector)

<i>Industry/Sector</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Consumer chemicals	2 611	3.62
Furniture	4 457	6.18
Glass and pottery	3 981	5.52
Industrial chemicals	10 574	14.66
Petroleum	3 861	5.35
Pharmaceutical & wholesale	3 723	5.16
Plastic	7 293	10.11
Printing and packaging	9 217	12.77
Pulp and paper	5 117	7.09
Rubber	1 171	1.62
Sasol Mines	5 369	7.44
Woodworking and sawmills	10 770	14.93
Others	4005	5.55
TOTAL	72 149	

Source: CEPPWAWU Membership department report, 29/07/1999

How and Why Did the Tradition Develop in the Way that it Did?

Sipho Kubheka is a former unionist who served in different capacities in the union movement, particularly PPWAWU. He became active in the early 1970s as a worker in a Transvaal mail order house. After being dismissed from this company he became a full-time organiser for the newly-formed MAWU. He is one of the union activists who participated in the establishment of union principles and traditions and argues that the tradition of worker control was based on “a simple formula”.

The method that was used in building what was termed the ‘worker controlled organisation’ was in fact a very simple method or formula. You build your factory committee, shop stewards’ committee. And the shop stewards were to get a mandate from employees from the members of the unions. And, the shop stewards then would in turn discuss with their union official. They would not shift from such ideas or demands without mandates from the workers. Yes, they would make recommendations, but as for the actual agreement that would be arrived at between the shop stewards or the union representatives and the employers, that would remain in the hands of the workers. Remember those up and down consultations. Now, in a situation where union officials are in complete control, they will go to a meeting, make demands and arrive at agreements with employers. But, in this case, they would not do that because the term ‘worker control’ was in the minds of the workers, that ‘we must control, this is our union. We have employed you as a union official, but you are paid by us. So, you need to be controlled by us’.³⁷

The emergence of this tradition of unionism in CEPPWAWU is not a function of a single factor, but rather the product of a multiplicity of factors and processes. In the discussion that follows, we discuss some of the variables which shaped the development of a democratic tradition in unions such as CEPPWAWU and its predecessor, namely, the labour process, the labour market, the industry or sector, access to intellectual resources, the history of the union and rural/urban divisions.

The labour process

In addition to providing important information on membership, Table 7 above presents information on the sectors where CEPPWAWU organises. As will be obvious from a cursory glance at these sectors or industries, most are primary or manufacturing sectors. In Chapter 3 we argued that the manufacturing sectors provide the best conditions for democratic unionism to emerge because of the concentration of large numbers of workers under one roof and the way in which work is organised. The Fordist labour process which was, and still is, dominant in these sectors and the assembly line type of work organisation common in most of these sectors create the structural conditions which favour collective solidarity and militancy among workers. The interconnectedness of the labour process gives workers the power to organise collectively and to disrupt production at critical moments.³⁸ In addition, this kind of labour process creates conditions which make possible the emergence of a direct (through membership general meetings) as well as a representative form of democracy (through shopfloor representatives elected by small constituencies or departments).

Specific sectors which have been observed include pulp and paper, woodworking, printing and packaging and sawmilling. For example, in a typical pulp and paper plant, the union will demarcate each department as a constituency and union members in each constituency will elect a shop steward. Shop stewards operate on the principle of representative democracy. However, the nature of the labour process and the organisation of work make processes of mandating, reporting back and accountability much tighter than in sectors such as local government. The reason is that the shop steward is always among his or her colleagues and is visible and is thus under constant pressure to take up worker issues and to report back afterwards. As a study conducted in 1995 showed, most union members have almost unlimited access to their shop stewards.³⁹ In addition, in the majority of cases, not only is the shop steward a representative, but he or she is also a witness and participant in the same activities as the rest of the workers.

Direct democracy operates through the plant or factory general meetings which are provided for

in the unions' constitution. Because of the proximity of the different work stations to one another, in many cases it is possible to call a plant general meeting at very short notice and to carry on meeting until a few minutes before the workers resume work. In the past unions would also make use of the workers' own free time, such as tea and lunch times, to hold meetings and the logistics of arranging such meetings would be minimal.

In a nutshell, the sectors which CEPPWAWU organises are conducive to the emergence of democratic unionism for the following reasons:

- i) The labour process is driven by technology; its integrated nature enables workers to disrupt production to assert their power and thus imposes a collective consciousness among the workers.
- ii) Workers meet at one central station on the same premises and this ensures the building of very strong bonds of solidarity at the workplace.
- iii) Until the time when bargaining became centralised, worker representatives met workers on the shopfloor under the watchful eye of the membership.
- iv) Under these conditions, it is possible for shop stewards to obtain mandates relatively quickly and to report back to workers speedily.
- v) Finally, the fact that there is a single mandating point, that is, one general meeting, means that the mandating process is not mediated by the shop steward and the full-time official who have to filter issues and reconcile often conflicting mandates from different workplaces.

Of course, we must qualify the above by pointing out that centralisation of bargaining can and does change the conditions significantly by introducing the difficulties identified for fragmented sectors such as local government as discussed in Chapter 3.

The labour market

Up until the mid 1970s a significant proportion of PPWAWU's and CWIU's membership was located at the bottom end of the skills hierarchy. A survey conducted in 1975 among members of the NUTW, MAWU and the CWIU found that 57 per cent of CWIU members were unskilled and 29 per cent were in the lower semi-skilled bracket. The study also found that 22 per cent of these workers had no formal education, that only 14 per cent had formal schooling beyond Standard 5 and that none of them had completed Form 2.⁴⁰ However, Hindson and Crankshaw have argued that structural changes in the economy in the 20-year period from 1965 to 1985 meant that there were fewer unskilled jobs in relative terms, and more semi-skilled jobs and skilled jobs.⁴¹ They argue that despite the fact that African workers suffered from unemployment and a declining standard of living during this period, they did benefit in other important ways.

The biggest change in the occupational and racial structure was the movement of African workers from unskilled into semi-skilled jobs. In 1987, most African workers (in the formal sectors) were semi-skilled.⁴²

These changes also had an impact on the character of the trade union movement that was emerging during this period. One of these was the fact that semi-skilled employment tended to attract younger workers, many of whom had higher levels of formal education. Many of these younger, better educated and more militant workers later became shop stewards in their unions in the 1980s. Pityana and Orkin have shown that in 1992 46 per cent of COSATU shop stewards had formal education levels of Standards 6 to 8, while 38 percent had Standard 9 and above.⁴³

Related to the above changes was the fact that an increasing number of workers in these sectors were urban residents, even though both the CWIU and PPWAWU had significant numbers of migrant workers from the rural areas. The changes coincided with the emergence of a layer of organic intellectuals who not only championed union democracy, but played a very important role in shaping the form that democracy took.

Access to intellectual resources

As argued in Chapter 3, intellectual resources are more than just personnel and include a variety of other resources and infrastructure which are necessary for the processing, refining, packaging and articulation of ideas. Both the CWIU and PPWAWU had better access to intellectual resources than SAMWU and many of the other smaller unions in the 1970, the 1980s and the 1990s. In this regard the FOSATU years were decisive as it was during this period that enormous amounts of intellectual resources were invested in building the union movement associated with that tradition. Kubheka's account of events in the early 1970s shows that different groupings, including white academics, white unionists and students and SACTU/ANC activists all performed the role of providing intellectual capacity to the embryonic movement.⁴⁴ Elsewhere he argues that although there were many intellectual currents shaping the movement, those with formal university qualifications (almost all white) brought additional skills with them.

As union officials from universities, they were able to, in writing, articulate their positions. It could be in the [*South African*] *Labour Bulletin*. If you go back you will find that most of the people who were writing political articles were those white university intellectuals. You had a few other people writing or commenting on these political issues. Now, also books that were written, people, some of them consciously chose to select, to write selectively.⁴⁵

The intellectual resources which the FOSATU unions commanded or had access to were not limited to those internal to the movement in the form of officials with university qualifications. They also included resources and personnel based outside the movement but which could be mobilised to build the federation and its affiliates. Before and during the FOSATU years a network of labour-supporting organisations (LSOs) emerged. Collectively, these organisations made one of the strongest contributions towards building the democratic union tradition in the form of general union education and training, research, health and safety training, legal support and training and dissemination of ideas in the form of newspapers, journals and other publications. While the UTP/CCOBTU unions had access to some of these resources in the form of UTP training and support, the FOSATU unions had a much wider network of support and

resources which extended beyond the borders of South Africa. One observer has referred to this access to a larger pool of resources gave the Marxist tradition of unionism represented by FOSATU a “cultural hegemony” which enabled FOSATU intellectuals and their sympathisers to “write UTP out of the story”.⁴⁶ After the formation of COSATU this network and the pool of intellectual resources expanded further. Some of these bodies are listed in Appendix 4.

The sector

As argued in Chapter 3, the manufacturing industry provides the best milieu for the emergence and development of a democratic union tradition. As discussed above, this is largely due to the nature of the labour process in manufacturing which fosters collective solidarity among the workers. The sectors organised by CEPPWAWU include a fair number of large multi-national corporations and export-oriented firms which are vulnerable to local and international competition. Indeed, the two unions made their initial breakthroughs at companies such as Lever Brothers, Sappi, Mondi, BP, Shell, Adcock Ingram and Ciba Geigy. Not only did this increase the leverage and power of workers in these sectors but it also encouraged the development of worker militancy and the emergence of more democratic forms of union governance.

In addition to the labour process, the formal education and skills requirements of a sector may attract a particular kind of worker who is easily predisposed to a democratic, as opposed to a bureaucratic, union organisation. For example, among the large numbers of semi-skilled workers employed by the pulp and paper industry in the 1980s, there were many who brought relatively high levels of education and who were willing to put their education at the disposal of the union movement in ways which promoted the democratic operation of the unions. Many of these workers became secretaries, chairpersons and treasurers at various levels of the union movement. This can be contrasted with the forestry sector which PPWAWU used to organise until it was handed over to the new South African Agriculture, Plantation and Allied Workers’ Union (SAAPAWU) in 1995. The relatively lower levels of skill and education in that sector tended to militate against the establishment of stable, worker-controlled union structures because of a

tendency among the workers to depend on the few individuals, such as union officials, who can read, write and communicate in English. Of course, this inferiority complex is present in all sectors. For example, Jerry Mphahlele recalls that when workers at his factory first joined the CWIU in 1982 the workers elected him as their chairperson because “I could read, write, take minutes and communicate with management”.⁴⁷ However, this phenomenon is more pronounced in those sectors where the workers’ educational attainments and skills levels are low.

Table 8: Size of Workforce in the Major Sectors Organised by CEPPWAWU, 1994⁴⁸

<i>Industry/Sector</i>	<i>Employees</i>
Manufacture of industrial chemicals	40 533
Manufacture of other chemicals	67 339
Glass and pottery	Figures not available
Petroleum	Figures not available
Electricity, gas and water	43 479
Manufacture of furniture	45 371
Manufacture of rubber and plastic products	61 585
Printing, publishing and reproduction of recorded media	45 371
Manufacture of paper and paper products	49 708
Woodworking and sawmills	60 189
Sasol Mines	Figures not available
TOTAL	353 386

Source: *Manpower Survey*, P0201, 29 August 1996. (http://www.statssa.gov.za/Statistical_releases/Statistical.htm).

History of the union

Like SAMWU, the history of CEPPWAWU and its predecessors has been characterised by the following:

- ❑ Militant mass mobilisation.
- ❑ Efforts aimed at encouraging worker participation in union affairs.
- ❑ Plant-based bargaining which enabled union members to monitor decisions and the behaviour of union leaders.
- ❑ Ideologically-driven full-time officials who saw democratic unionism as a step towards socialism.
- ❑ Membership of two militant union federations committed to worker control.
- ❑ Participation in community struggles.

This history reinforced the democratic character of the two unions in that new members had to live up to the principles set by earlier generations of members and leaders. In a context where unions were fighting defensive battles for survival, their history became a very potent tool to lend legitimacy to the struggles of the workers in general during that time. Thus the history was continually invoked and in the process of doing so, union leaders and intellectuals conferred a special status on certain principles and practices which marked this history. The leaders and intellectuals often referred to these unions as the “independent unions” or the “democratic unions”. What this highlights is the fact that in the course of establishing a movement’s traditions, its leaders and intellectuals often extol the positive aspects of the movements’ history and downplay its negative aspects. This process of appropriating history is part of tradition-building in a movement. History is thus one of the most powerful methods to shape its traditions. Also important is the fact that once traditions are established, they also play an important role in shaping the subsequent history of a movement. In this way, current activists who are part of making that history and new activists who only experience it as discourse find themselves having to conform to tradition. In CEPPWAWU, as well as other affiliates of

COSATU, history continues to play an important role in shaping and reinforcing union principles and practices.

However, a change in the economic and political context in which unions operate may strengthen tendencies which undermine established traditions and diminish the significance of the history which gave rise to those traditions. Since the beginning of the 1990s CEPPWAWU and its precursors have experienced new tendencies which undermine the tradition of democratic unionism. Firstly, the unions experienced massive membership growth which made it impossible to socialise all the new members to their history and traditions. According to Livingstone Matiwane, CEPPWAWU's Eastern Cape regional educator, this is also linked to the change in the political context.

In my view, you get a union in the '80s and a union today. The member of the '80s was more politically grounded, maybe because of the broad context, politically speaking. There was political oppression and everyone of us had to contribute in one way or another. That old context produced a different member, a member who joined the union with a purpose, not only for an increase in wages *et cetera*. That member has gone with the emergence of the democratic state. The member that we have now is the member who is narrowly looking at the services, the quality of the services that you give to him. The quality of the services to the member today means that if you've got a case, you must win that case. If he calls the union for any advice, the union must simply respond. His ideal precedes any other ideal. Yet the worker of the '80s was subjugating his individual view to the broad view of the collective.⁴⁹

Although he acknowledges that these changes are due, to a large extent, to the changing political context, Matiwane is critical of a tendency within his union to "neutralise education, to ensure a functional role, in other words, to be used only when necessary".⁵⁰

Secondly, CEPPWAWU has experienced a growing centralisation of bargaining which makes it remote with the result that a lot of power has shifted into the hands of a few full-time officials and some worker leaders. In 1999 the union and employers established a bargaining council for the chemical industry, and reached an agreement with the rubber employers to join the Metal

Industries Bargaining Council. In addition, they had successfully persuaded Wood and Paper employers to set up a new council for that sector and were in the process of campaigning for centralised bargaining for the pharmaceutical wholesale, tissue, and furniture sectors.⁵¹

Thirdly, as in SAMWU, union democracy is now mediated through union officials and specialists whose power derives from their formal education qualifications, skills and general knowledge of industrial relations issues in a context where unions are recognised by the state and employers and collective bargaining is centralised. CEPPWAWU's Western Cape regional organiser, Elias Maboe, argues that general economic and political issues which are discussed at the national level and in forums such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) are never discussed in shopfloor and local shop stewards' council meetings.

You see, the problem is that what is happening in NEDLAC is very difficult even for us as organisers because we just get reports. What is happening is that, I think, several executives discuss these things with COSATU. At the lower levels we are just told 'these are the processes' which they are engaged in. And, you can't take that because it's broad, you were not part of it. You yourself do not understand it. Now, in most cases COSATU is getting specialisers [*sic*] and researchers in those sections who work on them. And, for me it's those people who are given most of these things.⁵²

This problem is accentuated by the arrival of younger officials who are recruited to replace those who have left or to perform specialised functions necessary for engaging in an increasingly complex environment of union-management-state relations. Themba Mbokazi, a CEPPWAWU shop steward at Interpak in Pietermaritzburg and a former regional office bearer, argues that the younger and more recent officials who have no previous union experience tend to be arrogant and have no respect for worker control. He says this kind of official is someone who does not take advice from anybody because "all he knows is that he is now in a job and he is the *isikhulu* (boss) around here".⁵³ It is not far-fetched to argue that many of these officials now understand their role in their interactions with employers to be deal-making.

Finally, CEPPWAWU has also lost scores of experienced and skilled unionists to the civil

service, management and non-governmental organisations.

It is this changing history which is now reshaping the traditions of the union. Whereas the earlier history of the two founder unions acted to reinforce the democratic traditions of the unions, developments over the last ten years contradict those traditions and introduce a fluidity which compels us to problematise the notion of worker control in the post-1973 unions.

Urban/rural divisions

Elsewhere in this thesis we have argued that rural/urban divisions among the workforce and the location of industries and/or workplaces do impact on the traditions that emerge within a trade union. Although there are differences between small rural towns and the large industrial centres such as the Johannesburg/Reef complex, the Durban/Pinetown/Pietermaritzburg area and the greater Cape Town area, these differences do not represent a severe or serious divide for CEPPWAWU. The bulk of the union's membership is urban-based and, indeed, the democratic tradition of the union was built in urban environments and later transferred to small towns and semi-rural areas. PPWAWU was formed in Springs on the East Rand, and for many years remained confined to the area until it opened a branch in the largely rural Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Similarly, the CWIU was formed in Durban and for many years remained in the greater Durban area until it opened the Transvaal branch which was also urban-based. However, rural workers influenced the form of the democratic tradition in several ways. Many of the urban workers who joined the early unions were actually migrants from the rural areas of South Africa. The presence of these and other workers based in the rural areas forced the new largely urban-based unions to incorporate terms and experiences and discourses of traditional African communities into the new discourse of democratic unionism.

Table 9: Factors Which Shaped the Democratic Tradition in CEPPWAWU and its Predecessors

<i>Variable</i>	<i>CEPPWAWU</i>
Nature of the labour process	Integrated and Fordist. Large numbers of workers under one roof.
The labour market	Initially unskilled but became predominantly semi-skilled in the 1970s and 1980s.
Access to intellectual resources	Strong through UTP and FOSATU (later COSATU).
The nature of the sector	Private with a presence of multi-national corporations. Key firms and sectors operating in competitive markets.
Union history	Limited pre-1973 influence. Predominantly post-1973, militant.
Rural/urban divisions	Rural, 'rural-in-urban' (migrants) and urban.

Full-time Officials and the Dilemma of Leadership: An Assessment

CEPPWAWU's founder unions have historically employed people in full-time positions to perform a variety of functions. But information on these full-time employees of the union is incomplete, particularly for the early years, because of the failure of these unions to keep reliable records. The figures presented in this section were gleaned from different sources, many of which are inadequate or incomplete. The situation began to improve in the late 1980s when these unions started to have staffing as a standard item in their annual or bi-annual reports to their national congresses.

In 1975 the CWIU employed four full-time officials, one of them working part time, and in 1979 it had two officials.⁵⁴ The drop was probably due to the drop in union membership during the mid-1970s and also to the fact that union employment was very unstable due to the lack of resources to retain those officials. It was only in the 1980s that full-time employment in the

union grew. At the end of 1979 the union employed four organizers and GAWU, which was to merge with the CWIU in 1982, had one organiser and an administrative assistant. From its inception in 1974 until the end of the 1970s PPWAWU employed one organiser, who was also its secretary.⁵⁵

The expansion of full-time employment in the two unions was a function of, and corresponded with, the new wave of recruitment and membership growth in the early 1980s. Table 10 presents figures of full-time staff in the CWIU, PPWAWU and, later, CEPPWAWU. It will be noted that these figures show consistent growth throughout the period when union membership was on the increase and only began to stabilise when union membership stopped growing in the mid to late 1990s.

Table 10: Full-time Staff (CWIU, PPWAWU and CEPPWAWU), 1980 - 1999

CWIU				PPWAWU		
Year	Organizers/ secretaries/ specialists	Administrators	Total Staff	Organizers/ secretaries/ specialists	Administrators	Total Staff
1980	4	0	4	1	0	1
1986	17	4	21	16	4	20
1987	19	5	24	19	4	23
1988	29	7	36	34	5	39
1989	26	10	36	40	6	46
1990	31	14	43	n/a	n/a	n/a
1991	n/a-	n/a	n/a	46	8	54
1992	n/a	n/a	n/a	51	11	62
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	51	11	62
1994	44	15	59	51	11	62
1996	59	18	77	51	11	62
CEPPWAWU						
1999	n/a	n/a	136			

Source/s: CWIU. 1994; Buhlungu, 1997; FOSATU. (AH1999/C1.9.2.9) *Donors Report on the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU)* by Alec Erwin, General Secretary, August 1979; PPWAWU Annual/Bi-Annual Reports, 1989, 1991, 1993; CEPPWAWU, 1999;

This discussion now turns to a consideration of the implications of this growth in the number of full-time union officials and the role that they played inside the two unions and their successor, CEPPWAWU.

Organisational management

Up until the mid-1980s the CWIU and PPWAWU were small unions which employed few full-time officials. These were the days of the *activist organiser* where the roles of the political activist and the full-time union official were fused and embodied in one individual. Siphso Kubheka, the former general secretary of PPWAWU, started organising in MAWU in 1975 and he maintains that there are big differences between organisers in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s.

Here [in the 1970s] involvement in the union was more of a question of saying that 'I'm here because of the political call'. Secondly, 'there are dangers accompanying this call, but regardless of those dangers, I'm going to be involved'. There were very few benefits in the 1970s, but still people were involved because of the political kind of calling that they actually perceived at that time. They were there because of sacrifice. 'Yes, I will not be with my wife and children, but it is for a just cause. I must sacrifice.' If you look at the 1980s, towards the end of the 1980s, that was slowly eroding. You are having people who have come in looking for jobs. Okay, the part that I forgot here is that people were volunteering in the 1970s and accepting any conditions. For instance, organisers were using trains to go to organise, to go to meetings that were far away such as Durban. We had to take trains to NECs in Durban. In the 1980s you had that slowly being eroded. Demands for going by planes, demands for cars, demands for more benefits - it could be pension, medical aid - all those we did not actually entertain to talk about in the early 1970s.⁵⁶

The days of the activist organiser were also characterised by the absence of hierarchy and by self-supervision by officials, and at most, union work required minimal co-ordination rather than management. As suggested in Chapter 6, the growth of union membership, the increase in full-time union employment and other changes in the broader environment in which unions are operating have resulted in the emergence and expansion of an area of union work which we have

termed organisational management. This area encompasses all tasks and processes to do with the recruitment of full-time officials, the design of their conditions of employment, the co-ordination of their activities, including monitoring their work performance, the handling of grievances and disciplinary matters and strategies adopted by the union to retain officials. This management function is performed at the national level as well as at the regional level. One of the union officials who perform a managerial function at the regional level is Keith Jacobs, the regional secretary of the union in the Western Cape, who manages a staff of 12, including two administrators.

We have this thing where organisers on a weekly basis, you know, must submit a weekly report to me. You know, what are their activities going to be for the week. And, I need to ensure then, you know, in any particular given time in a week that these comrades are complying with the union constitution. Mine is also to, I'm also the link between the union and COSATU. I'm like the eyes of the regional office-bearers, and the REC and RCC, you know, to see that, look, organisers are basically doing what they are supposed to do.⁵⁷

One of the implications of the above is that the union is now an employer with legal and contractual obligations just like any other employer. This has meant that the union has to manage staff issues in a way which ensures that union work is performed efficiently while ensuring that it meets these legal and contractual obligations towards its officials. Some of the issues which organisational management entails are discussed in Chapter 1. Suffice it to say here that the approaches adopted by the union to address questions of efficiency, staff performance and the legal and contractual obligations of the parties towards each other, are in the realm of what we have termed organisational modernisation which is examined in section 4 below.

Organisational governance

We have argued above that the FOSATU years were a crucial formative phase in the development of both the CWIU and PPWAWU because although both unions were always committed to building worker leadership, it was during these years that a coherent model of

governance emerged. This model was centred on the concept of worker control. In this model of governance, the position of the shop steward was of cardinal importance and was written into the constitutions of both unions. In addition, the majority of delegates to all union structures beyond the workplace, from the local shop stewards council right up to the national congress, had to be shop stewards. Joe Mahlangu, a former shop steward at Novartis in Johannesburg, recalls that when they were new in the union and before they were socialised into this model of union operation they as shop stewards would go to negotiations and “become statues and leave everything to the organiser”. The change came after they had been given training and guidance on worker control.

You see, worker control is that officials can't take decisions without workers. Officials will be given any decision to be implemented, by the workers. Organisers are employees. As workers we pay them. They are only our spokespersons in terms of negotiations and the like. In the beginning, yes, we were learners. We were relying on the organisers. But I was fortunate to get an organiser who was very much experienced, who taught me how to negotiate. We will caucus first before we go to the negotiating table and he would say, 'comrade, look, today you are our spokesperson. I will only jump in as a backup. You do all the negotiation, opening remarks, argument and whatever. I'll just back you up'. And I thank that comrade, Brian Maholo. He taught me. He said 'look, comrades, these demands are yours. It's not my demands. Who must express these demands? Aren't they yours, comrades? Then it's your opportunity to hit your management and show really that you have put these demands, not the organiser'. And we started to realise that he was right because we were just folding our hands. Actually, we were just bodyguards. And, he changed our mindsets.⁵⁸

During its high point, the tradition of worker control had two outcomes which are relevant to this discussion. The first one is that it inspired many full-time officials to defer to worker leadership and to work hard to build that leadership. Hundreds of full-time officials invested a great deal of time and resources in doing what Brian Maholo did in the CWIU, namely, to train and empower workers so that worker leaders could assume a leading role. The second outcome of the worker control tradition is that it resulted in the production of a very broad layer of shopfloor, middle level and national worker leaders. Indeed, the majority of unionists interviewed for this study are

products of processes of worker education and empowerment associated with the tradition of worker control.

However, in both unions, worker control was a contested concept. Firstly, there were officials who were not interested in empowering workers. For example, Elias Maboe remembers how some leading officials in his former union, the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers union (SACTWU), failed to build worker leadership and instead always tried to manipulate these worker leaders and dress their ideas up as if they came from the workers.⁵⁹ This occurred in all the unions under COSATU. But the political environment at the time discouraged such behaviour and those involved had to make sure their true intentions remained unknown in their unions. Secondly, many workers who were provided with opportunities to develop were unable to extract themselves from the clutches of fear of their employer or the tutelage of their union officials.

However, the living testimony of the legacy of efforts to build a different model of institutional governance in the CWIU and PPWAWU is the fact that many of the leaders and officials brought up to operate under worker control are still in the union, either as rank-and-file activists, shop stewards or full-time officials. Many others, some of whom were interviewed for this study, have moved on to take up leadership positions in other institutions in society.

Organisational culture

The organisational culture that was dominant in both the CWIU and PPWAWU was the same as the one that prevailed in SAMWU as described in Chapter 3. In short, it was a culture characterised by a collective consciousness, personal commitment, self-sacrifice and leadership accountability. Of course, it must be emphasised that organisational culture entails much more than this. For example, it also encompasses dimensions such as gender relations, race relations and class relations. The question of gender relations is discussed separately below. The race and

class dimensions of the organisational culture in the CWIU and PPWAWU are not dealt with specifically in this thesis.

The changing social and political environment in which unions operate today has introduced changes which have induced a shift away from this collective and altruistic culture of unionism. Unionists today constantly refer to the lack of commitment among workers, worker leaders and the new generation of full-time officials. In a similar way, the self-sacrificing ethos has all but disappeared as most full-time officials expect financial reward for time spent working on union business. For example, in the past union officials used to work unlimited hours, including working on Saturdays and Sundays. Today, those offices of the union where officials still work on Saturdays have had to make arrangements for people to work on a rotational basis. CEPPWAWU's Western Cape regional secretary says that officials in his region have two Saturdays on and then two Saturdays off.

People make it a point that my two Saturdays when I'm supposed to be off, I'm off, you know. And, whatever arrangement workers want to make, you know, they must do it with those who are in the office, or they must wait. So, you don't have that commitment any more, you see.⁶⁰

Today CEPPWAWU is riddled with cliques and power bases at the centre of which there are full-time officials. Themba Mbokazi, a long-standing shop steward and former branch and regional office-bearer in the KwaZulu-Natal region of the old PPWAWU argues that an official's interest in a clique or 'empire', as some call it, is to undermine worker control. He says that it is hard to find an official who is "serious about worker control" working with cliques or empires.⁶¹ Thus, at the centre of this organisational culture change are the new generation of full-time officials, many of whom view worker control as an irritant and an obstacle to the achievement of personal ambitions and plans.

Gender relations

Union employment in CEPPWAWU is characterised by occupational segmentation or functional differentiation based on gender. Compared to its predecessors, the union has taken a step backwards as there are now fewer women in political positions (organisers and elected positions) than before. In the past PPWAWU had a woman general secretary, Refiloe Ndzuta, a woman national organiser, Thuli Madonsela, regional secretaries such as Nocawa Nondumo in Port Elizabeth, Thembelihle Ngcobo in Pietermaritzburg and Sandra van Niekerk in Cape Town, and organisers such as Geraldine Kennedy in Cape Town, Jabu Ndlovu in Durban and Aninka Claasens, Pat Horne and Jeanette George in Johannesburg. The CWIU records also show that some women have occupied high positions in the union. The union's second general secretary in the 1970s was Mbu Dlamini, a woman. For many years Chris Bonner was the branch secretary of the union's Transvaal branch and, at different times in its history it has had a few women as organisers such as Ruth Cole and Grishelda Hartman. Other women have worked for the union in specialist or support positions such as education, research and health and safety. Examples are Shirley Miller, Jocelyn Vass, Anita Simon and Tanya van Meelis (Rosenthal).

One difference between the two unions regarding the few women who were able to rise above clerical and administrative jobs is in relation to their social backgrounds. Whereas most of the PPWAWU women were African women drawn from working class backgrounds and often came with modest educational attainments, the women in the CWIU were mostly white, coloured or Indian, many of whom were from middle class backgrounds and came with tertiary educational qualifications. Of course, by the time of the merger, PPWAWU no longer had these African women in elected or organiser positions.

Notwithstanding the above examples, the reality is that union employment in both unions was always male-dominated and today there are fewer women in elected and other politically significant positions in the union. Bengeza Mthombeni, the former general secretary of PPWAWU and now deputy general secretary of CEPPWAWU, admits that unions are 'trapped

in a mentality' that discriminates against women by assuming that only men are suitable for certain union jobs.

It is true that if the post for an organiser is advertised, as the union leadership we do not expect that a female can also apply. For instance, a position for a local organiser post and there is a woman who has applied for that post, normally it is true that people will look at the CV and then say, 'look, it's a woman'. Already your judgement will be biased because you will think that because she is a woman she will not do the job well. This happens across trade unions. We always anticipate that if a post for local organiser comes it is for men. So we are still trapped in that mentality, that certain jobs are suitable for particular sexes.⁶²

This legacy of occupational segmentation along gender lines has been inherited by the new union. Today almost all women in the union are in office-bound, routine and politically uninfluential positions. The fortunate few who are in positions other than those of administrator tend to be women from particular social backgrounds, that is middle class, white, Indian or coloured women with tertiary education levels. In the majority of cases these women come in as specialists rather than organisers.

The social and political environment

The general context presented in section 3.5 in Chapter 3 applies to CEPPWAWU as well and there is an acknowledgement by the union's leadership and full-time officials that this context presents new challenges to membership and leadership alike. With regard to full-time officials, a critical change that has accompanied the democratisation of society has been the disappearance of the altruistic culture of activism and the emergence of individualism among union officials. This has given rise to new cleavages among full-time officials (see Chapter 7).

Although some in the union attribute these changes to indiscipline or 'lack of political maturity' on the part of individual officials, our analysis shows that they are part of a broader disintegration of the 'liberation struggle culture' in a new social and political environment

dominated by individualism which encourages personal achievement and private wealth accumulation. Thus, according to one regional secretary, the “lack of political maturity” which results in officials forming cliques exists because “Some of them [officials] will definitely have personal interest. I mean, interest which is not organisational that sometimes leads to cliques”.⁶³

The global economic and political environment

The political and ideological outlook of many union officials in CEPPWAWU has been deeply affected by developments in the global economic and political environment. The theoretical assumptions which underpinned the politics of these officials have been called into question by the collapse of Eastern European state socialism and the unchallenged hegemony of capitalism today. This unipolar environment is useful for understanding the political projects pursued by the three types of organisers described above. Nostalgic ideological unionists views the collapse of state socialism as a setback rather than proof of the non-viability of socialism. They blame the collapse on an autocratic and corrupt leadership that had betrayed the working class. Most career unionists, on the other hand, do not appear too concerned about the collapse of state socialism as their orientation to unionism is non-ideological. By contrast, the entrepreneurial official thrives in the conditions brought about by the hegemony of capitalism as it is under these conditions that opportunities for personal advancement and upward mobility can be pursued without reference to the collective. In the face of global economic pressures entrepreneurial officials opt for a model of organisational modernisation which seeks to reconcile unions to these pressures rather to challenge them.

Organisational Modernisation in CEPPWAWU

Organisational modernisation is a process which encompasses all the processes and practices of an organisation which are oriented towards enhancing efficient organisational management in response to the growth in the size of the organisation, the expansion of its interaction with other

social institutions and actors, a high turnover of staff and an increasing complexity of the issues that the organisation deals with. In CEPPWAWU and its predecessors the first area of organisational modernisation in relation to full-time employment has been the change in authority relations among the officials which has resulted in the emergence of hierarchy in the form of grading structures. The irony of this is that while unions have been calling for flatter hierarchies in private companies where their members are employed, the modernisation project that CEPPWAWU has opted for introduces a more hierarchical structure. For example, in 1996 PPWAWU had only four grades for full-time officials,⁶⁴ and, as Table 11 below shows, the new union has become more hierarchical with 6 grades.

Table 11: CEPPWAWU Grading Structure, July 1999

	CEPPWAWU		
<i>Grade</i>	<i>Positions</i>	<i>No. of Staff</i>	<i>New Rate of Pay</i>
1	General secretary Deputy general secretary	1 1	R6 820.00 R6 200.00
Notch	Unelected secretary	1 1	R6 820.00 R6 200.00
2	National Educator, Collective Bargaining, Provident Funds, Health Safety and Environment, IR, Research, Paralegal, National Organiser, Regional secretaries and Accountant	22	R5 720.00
3	Media, ABET, Regional Educators and Regional Organisers, Admin. Head, PRU, Gender, Benefits and Sector Co-ordinators	87	R5 137.00
4	Membership Admin., Bookings Admin., Finance Clerk, Reg. Finance Admin, Reception Admin. and Typist Admin.	17	R4 400.00
5	Reg. Admin, Reg. and local Admin.	6	(R4400)- R4 180.00
6	Cleaners		R2 000.00
TOTAL		136	

Source: CEPPWAWU. 1999. "Staff Basic Conditions and Working Conditions", in *CEPPWAWU Operations Manual*, July 1999.

Part of the explanation for the emergence of a more hierarchical structure is that the union is hoping to stem the tide of a very high turnover of full-time officials. As early as 1989 PPWAWU started experiencing this turnover.

The most disturbing problem about branches is the high turnover of staff. In the past 12 months we have lost eight staff members in the branches. Each one of them left for different reasons. This is seriously affecting the growth, strength and continuity in our branches because some of them were skilled comrades.⁶⁵

The same report appealed to delegates at the Congress to “look for ways of minimising the high turnover of staff” and to explore ways to ensure that the union was able to “function effectively regardless of this turnover.”⁶⁶

The second area of organisational modernisation is in relation to a division of labour, particularly in the form of departments and areas of specialisation. In the Bi-Annual Report to the 4th National Congress, 13 - 16 June 1991, the general secretary of PPWAWU reported that the union’s head office was “in the process of being restructured into departments to allow for efficiency and proper division of labour”.⁶⁷ At the time of the merger in 1999, both unions had a clear division of labour at all levels, but the quest for efficiency did not end there. The third aspect of modernisation in the union has been in the area of rules and procedures. From the late 1980s the two unions started developing administrative procedures, particularly those relating to the recruitment, remuneration, management and the disciplining of full-time officials. These ranged from selection criteria, contracts of employment and conditions regulating leave through to procedures on grievances and disciplinary matters. However, in the 1991 Bi-annual Report of PPWAWU expressed frustration about a number of areas of the union’s operation.

There are still a number of weaknesses identified among our staff members, e.g. poor quality of service, negotiating bad agreements, poor discipline, lack of administrative skills, etc.

9.3.3 Proposals for formalising staff conditions of employment are being discussed by the NEC. Among these is a suggestion that each official should sign a contract of

employment and that the conditions of employment should be written down to avoid confusion.

- 9.3.4 The NEC is also discussing introducing benefits for staff, e.g. a Provident Fund, Medical Aid, a Car Scheme and study leave.
- 9.3.5 There is also a proposal for formal disciplinary and grievance procedures in order to avoid confusion and to protect the interests of both the Union and the staff members. These are intended to deal with problems of discipline or indiscipline within the Union in a more formalised and fair manner.
- 9.3.6 The problem of staff turnover was discussed at our last two Congresses (1988 and 1989) but the Union has continued to lose staff since then, either through resignation or dismissal.
- 9.3.7 Finally, it seems that the Union will have to develop a systematic method of regular assessment of staff members regarding their performance of work so that their weaknesses and training needs can be accurately addressed. Without this the problems we face presently will never be corrected.⁶⁸

PPWAWU was one of the first unions to use the term 'modernising' to refer to solutions that it was developing to address the above concerns. In 1997 the union's national office-bearers adopted a document entitled "Modernising PPWAWU" and circulated to all its structures for discussion.⁶⁹ The document was inspired by the ideas of Siphso Kubheka after he had spent a year's study leave in Britain in the mid-1990s. On his return, Kubheka undertook an evaluation of the union and produced discussion documents which urged the union to find ways to become efficient and effective.⁷⁰ One of these papers noted that change is inevitable and that it is important to 'manage' such change. It lamented the fact that PPWAWU did not have 'change management skills'.⁷¹

The theme of 'modernisation' was taken up with great vigour in the Bi-Annual Report to the 1997 congress of the union.

The challenge of modernising Unions remains the key one. We should avoid becoming prisoners of past traditions, regardless of new conditions. We need to amend our way of working.⁷²

The solutions that were suggested in the report were plagiarised, word for word, from the 1996 NUMSA General Secretary's Report to National Congress. It even repeated the NUMSA general secretary's appeal that "If we are serious about repositioning our Union so that we can emerge as an important force then we must grit our teeth and make these changes".⁷³ Bengeza Mthombeni was the general secretary of PPWAWU at the time and he presented the report to the union's national congress.

Since the merger CEPPWAWU has developed an *Operations Manual*, a comprehensive document which seeks to address the above concerns by modernising all aspects of union work through written rules and procedures. The manual covers areas such as administrative and financial procedures, a code of good practice for full-time officials and other union leaders, rules and procedure relating to staff benefits, disciplinary and grievance procedures, organising guidelines for officials and staff basic wages and working conditions. The manual includes specific forms, model agreements and model letters for specific aspects of union work

The section of the *Operations Manual* which deals with staff basic wages and working conditions has a section which deals with 'professionalism' which, among others, specifies that "a leader and staffer should behave in a professional way in his/her union work" and puts emphasis on "being efficient and effective in getting the work done in an efficient manner".⁷⁴

The manual also seeks to regulate the "personal behaviour" of full-time officials and other leaders. It seeks to regulate, among others, the following areas of personal behaviour:

- ❑ It prohibits the drinking of alcohol by officials and leaders while on union business.
- ❑ It discourages "love affairs between people in the union".
- ❑ It appeals to officials to ensure that "your personal appearance should be neat between casual and smart".
- ❑ It asks officials to show "respectful behaviour and attitude to leaders and in general".⁷⁵

In Chapter 3 we argued that in a union committed to worker control, organisational modernisation creates a dilemma of leadership because it seeks to enable full-time officials to exercise leadership while worker control seeks to curtail that power. But this dilemma has not manifested itself as an open conflict between full-time officials and membership in the way that it did in SAMWU and NUMSA. However, the CEPPWAWU case is useful as it illustrates the processes of modernisation much more vividly than the other union case studies. Indeed, in CEPPWAWU this dilemma manifests itself in a different way in that worker leaders are of the view that full-time officials wield too much power, while some full-time officials argue that a handful of worker leaders have too much power and this results in the alienation of full-time officials. The implementation of a rule-bound process of organisational modernisation is part of the process of contestation between worker leadership who assert worker control, and full-time officials who are arguing for greater scope to exercise power through impersonal rules and procedures.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the emergence and development of the democratic tradition in a union which is part of the post-1973 tradition of unionism. The development of this tradition was particularly assisted by the nature of the labour process, the labour market and the union's access to intellectual resources. However, over the last decade the union has experienced changes which have changed its character and threaten to destroy its democratic character. These changes have manifested themselves as pressures on the union to modernise the way it operates. Although this case study clearly shows competing projects of modernisation, the dilemma of leadership has not manifested itself as an open conflict as has in the other two case studies. The process of modernisation that the union has embarked upon may be setting the basis for the emergence of a powerful layer of full-time officials whose power is based on rules and procedures. But the implementation of these rules and procedures has not yet had a negative impact on processes of worker control to the extent that union members perceive it as a threat to worker control.

The union has access to a large pool of internal and external resources. However, it must be stressed that this access played a decisive role when these resources were specifically deployed to build democratic unionism as strategy to ensure survival under a hostile environment.

However, intellectual resources can be put to use for different reasons. Trade unions today have access to a large pool of intellectual resources but most of these are being used to support elitist projects of organisational modernisation in a union context where questions of internal democracy and survival are no longer a priority.

Notes:

1. Lambert, R. V. 1988. Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955 - 1965, PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p. 488.
2. Von Holdt, K. 1993. "Unilever: Testing worker participation", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 17, 3, p. 44.
3. This information is based on a list of unions present at the launch of SACTU, in Lambert, R. V. 1988., *op. cit.*, pp.477 - 79.
4. See for Lambert's (*ibid.*) discussion in Chapter 4 entitled "Factory Committees".
5. Webster, E. 1979. "A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 8, p. 11.
6. *ibid.*, p. 51.
7. Luckhardt, K. and Wall, B. 1980. *Organise ...or Starve: The history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 67.
8. *ibid.*, p. 245.
9. *ibid.*, pp. 253 - 4.
10. Tarrow, S. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social movements and contentious politics*, second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 19.
11. *ibid.*, p. 20.
12. Baskin, J. 1991. *Striking Back: A history of COSATU*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 18.
13. Lambert, R.V. 1988. *op. cit.*, 164.
14. Luckhardt and Wall, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
15. Lowry, D. 1999. *20 Years in the Labour Movement: The Urban Training Project and change in South Africa, 1971 - 1991*. Johannesburg: Wadmore, p.117.
16. Baskin, J. 1991. *op. cit.*, p. 19.
17. FOSATU. (AH1999/CI.9.2.9) *Donors Report on the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) by Alec Erwin, General Secretary, August 1979*.

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18. Maree, J. 1992. Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy: The Rebirth of African Trade Unionism South Africa in the 1970s, unpublished manuscript, p. 470.
 19. *ibid.*, p. 472.
 20. *ibid.*, p. 475.
 21. Maree (*ibid.*, p. 254) has noted that the CWIU was the first union to emerged directly out of the Durban-based General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (GFWBF). The need for a chemical union arose after GFWBF had successfully assisted workers at AE&CI near Durban. After the workers had organised themselves into a force TUACC came in to provide them with personnel and other resources.
 22. *ibid.*, p. 258.
 23. Maree, J. 1982. "Democracy and Oligarchy in Trade Unions: The Independent Trade Unions in the Transvaal and the Western Province General Workers Union in the 1970s". *Social Dynamics*, 8 (1), p. 51.
 24. CWIU (AH1999/B4.4) Memo to the TUACC Council, 24 August 1975.
 25. MAWU (AH1999/B4.4) Report to the 4th TUACC Council Meeting, 24 August 1975 (written and presented by MAWU secretary, A. Mthethwa).
 26. CWIU. 1994. *Struggle for Workers' Rights: A history of the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union*. Durban: CWIU, p. 13.
 27. Maree, J. 1992. *op. cit.*, p. 691.
 28. FOSATU. (AH1999/C1.9.2.9) Donors Report on the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) by Alec Erwin, General Secretary, August 1979.
 29. FOSATU. 1980. (AH1999/C1.9.1) FOSATU Annual Report, April 1979 - April 1980, p. 1.
 30. FOSATU. 1982. (AH1999/C1.9.1) FOSATU Annual Report, 1982, p. 1.
 31. CWIU. 1994. *op. cit.*, p. 38.
 32. All these figures are those of paid-up members. There are vast discrepancies in available membership figures of all COSATU unions. Not only are these discrepancies between figures which appear in official union records and those which appear in FOSATU/COSATU records, but in many cases there are discrepancies in figures contained in different documents of the same union. It would seem there are two major reasons for these. Firstly, until recently, many of the post-1973 unions have been very poor in terms of record keeping, particularly with regard to membership and shop stewards' figures. The second reason pertains to gaps between internal union figures and those submitted to FOSATU and COSATU. Invariably, the figures submitted

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- to the federation/s are higher than internal figures. The reason for this seem to be political, namely, the bigger the membership claimed in the federation, the greater the power and profile of that union. In this regard, it would seem that unions were/are willing to pay higher subscriptions to the federation in return for a higher profile. This applies to figures in virtually all the years under discussion, but two examples illustrate this point. When COSATU was formed in 1985 the CWIU had 16 551 members (CWIU, 1994: 19), yet the credentials report at COSATU's launching congress in the same year reflect that the union had 20 700 members. Similarly, in 1995 PPWAWU records show a membership of 53 425 (PPWAWU, 1997: 8) while COSATU records showed that it had 61 463.
33. COSATU. 1997. *Resolution on COSATU Demarcation*, COSATU 6th National Congress, September 1997.
 34. CEPPWAWU. 1999. *The Secretariat Merger Report* to the launching of CEPPWAWU on the 24 - 26 February 1999, p. 1.
 35. PPWAWU. 1991. *Bi-annual Report to the Fourth National Congress*, 13 - 16 June 1991, p. 25.
 36. For information about numbers of officials, see Chapter 6. The information regarding conditions and pay came out of the author's interview with Elias Maboe, Western Cape Regional Organiser, Cape Town, 8 and 10 May 2000.
 37. Author interview with Sipho Kubheka, former general secretary of PPWAWU, Johannesburg, 16 August 1999.
 38. Webster, 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 253.
 39. Buhlungu, S. 1996. Trade Union responses to Participatory Management: A Case Study. M.A. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This study was conducted at two manufacturing plants, one a woodworking plant and the other a printing and packaging plant.
 40. Webster, E. 1979. "A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 8, pp. 48 - 49.
 41. Hindson, D. and Crankshaw, O. 1990. "New Jobs, New Skills, New Divisions: The changing structure of South Africa's workforce", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 15, 1, pp. 27 - 28.
 42. *ibid.*, p. 29.
 43. Pityana, S. M. and Orkin, M. 1992. *Beyond the Factory Floor: A survey of COSATU shop-stewards*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p.16.
 44. Kubheka, S. 1994. "The Struggle to be Reborn: 20 years of the labour movement (interviewed by Luli Callinicos)", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 5.

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45. Author interview with Sipho Kubheka, former general secretary of PPWAWU, Johannesburg, 16 August 1999.
 46. Lowry, D. 1999. *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 47. Matlala, W. and Vlok, E. 1999. "Jerry Mphahlele: CEPPWAWU ex-shop steward at Fedgas", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 23, 3, p. 94.
 48. The figures in this table are incomplete as indicated. In addition, some aggregate figures such as those for "Electricity, gas and water" include sectors outside the scope of CEPPWAWU. No recent figures are available. Given the large-scale loss of jobs in all these sectors, up-to-date figures would probably be much lower than suggested in this table.
 49. Author interview with Livingstone Matiwane, CEPPWAWU Eastern Cape regional educator, East London, 17 May 2000.
 50. *ibid.*
 51. Buthelezi, M. 1999. "CEPPWAWU Assessment and Organization Issues Since the Inaugural Congress in February 1999", Report by Muzi Buthelezi, CEPPWAWU general secretary to the [first] National Staff Workshop of CEPPWAWU, 4 - 6 August 1999, Johannesburg.
 52. Author interview with Elias Maboe, CEPPWAWU Western Cape organiser, Cape Town, 8 and 10 May 2000.
 53. Author interview with Themba Mbokazi, CEPPWAWU shop steward at Interpak, (Pietermaritzburg) and former KwaZulu-Natal regional office-bearer of PPWAWU, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2000.
 54. Webster, E. 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 46.
 55. This information is contained in FOSATU. 1979. (AH1999/CI.9.2.9) "Donors Report on the Federation of South African trade unions (FOSATU) by Alec Erwin, General Secretary, August 1979" and FOSATU Annual Report, 1980 (AH1999/CI.9.1)
 56. Author interview with Sipho Kubheka, former general secretary of PPWAWU, Johannesburg, 16 August 1999.
 57. Author interview with Keith Jacobs, Western Cape regional secretary of CEPPWAWU, Cape Town, 8 May 2000.
 58. Author interview with Joe Mahlangu, former CWIU shop steward at Novartis, Spartan, Johannesburg, 12 March 1999. (At the end of 1996 Mahlangu was offered and accepted a position as Industrial Relations Manager at his company).

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59. Author interview with Elias Maboe, CEPPWAWU Western Cape organiser, Cape Town, 8 and 10 May 200.
 60. Author interview with Keith Jacobs, Western Cape regional secretary of CEPPWAWU, Cape Town, 8 May 2000.
 61. Author interview with Themba Mbokazi, CEPPWAWU shop steward at Interpak, (Pietermaritzburg) and former KwaZulu-Natal regional office-bearer of PPWAWU, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2000.
 62. Bengeza Mthombeni, former PPWAWU general secretary cited in Tshoaedi, C. M. (1999) Functional Differentiation in Trade Union Employment: A study of gender inequality with specific reference to women union officials, M.A. Research Report, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, pp. 90 - 91.
 63. Author interview with Lucky Mhlongo, CPPWAWU's KwaZulu-Natal regional secretary, Durban, 26 March 2001.
 64. These were: The Secretariat; Head of Department and Branch Secretaries; Head Office Administrators and Branch Organisers; Branch Administrators. This is based on information provided by the union at beginning of the first phase of this research.
 65. PPWAWU. 1989. *Annual Report to 3rd National Congress*, 14 - 17 September 1989, p. 11.
 66. *ibid.*, p. 20.
 67. PPWAWU. 1991. *Bi-Annual Report to the 4th National Congress*, 13 - 16 June 1991. p. 9.
 68. *ibid.*, pp. 17 - 18.
 69. PPWAWU. 1997. *Bi-Annual Report to the National Congress*, 26 - 29 June 1997, p. 9.
 70. Kubheka, S. 1995. *A New Working Style in PPWAWU Through Team Work*, September 1995; and Kubheka, S. 1996. *Addressing PPWAWU Weaknesses: Let's be efficient and effective*, June 1996.
 71. Kubheka, S. 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 72. PPWAWU. 1997. *op. cit.*, p. 1.
 73. The plagiarised section of the report was lifted from page 244 of the *General Secretary's Report* to NUMSA 5th National Congress (1996) and reproduced in pages 8 - 9 of the PPWAWU *Bi-Annual Report* to the National Congress (1997).

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74. CEPPWAWU. 1999. "Staff Basic Wages and Working Conditions", in CEPPWAWU *Operations Manual*, July 1999, p. 17.
75. *ibid.*, p. 19.

CHAPTER 5: THE VANGUARD UNION: NUMSA, 1970s - 1990s

Brief History of the Union and its Traditions

Worker organisation in the metal industry goes back many decades as union activists have always identified the industry as being key to their organising efforts. For example, in the 1950s leaders and organisers of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) regarded the industry as being 'difficult' but allocated resources and personnel to organise it because it was one of the strategic industries that the federation had identified.¹ In the two sections below we trace the history of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and examine its relationship to previous phases of black worker organisation in the industry.

Workers divided: black metal unions before 1973

The history of black worker organisation before 1973 is characterised by racial division and unevenness in the levels and forms of organisation which emerged during that period. On one hand, there were African workers who did not have a legal right to form or belong to registered unions and on the other, there were coloured and Indian workers who enjoyed the right to join and establish trade unions. During the time of SACTU in the 1950s it seemed that this division might be overcome with the establishment of small non-racial unions, and eventually the formation of the Metal Workers' Union at the end of that decade.² However, the divisions persisted until the 1970s and the 1980s, with registration and employer recognition being key variables that put coloured and Indian workers in a position of relative advantage.

Two key observations regarding the organisation of black workers in this period are relevant here. Firstly, none of the African or unregistered black unions affiliated to SACTU survived the

wave of state repression in the 1960s. Although it is hard to establish a direct causal link between the earlier phase of unionisation and the re-emergence of unions in the 1970s, it is significant that metal workers were the first to establish a union in the wake of the 1973 strikes in the greater Durban/Pinetown/Pietermaritzburg metropolitan area. In her study of unionisation at BTR Sarmcol in the Natal Midlands Bonnin has argued that there was the continuity of the “SACTU experience” and the discontinuity of “new modes of organisation” as adopted by MAWU in the 1970s.³

Secondly, the registered coloured unions which originated from a different tradition of unionism came to play a pivotal role in the re-emergence and consolidation of unions in the 1970s and 1980s. Two of these deserve special mention. The Western Province Motor Assembly Workers’ Union (WPMWU) which organised coloured workers in the greater Cape Town area was formed and registered in 1963.⁴ Joe Forster, who was to become the second general secretary of FOSATU, was a long-serving general secretary of this union. The National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) was a coloured affiliate of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) led by Fred Sauls, its general secretary.⁵ Formed in 1967 as the National Union of Motor Assembly Workers of South Africa (NUMAWOSA), the union was registered in 1971 and by the late 1970s it had membership in the centres where auto assembly plants and components manufacturers were located, namely, Port Elizabeth, East London, Pretoria, Durban and Uitenhage.⁶

These two unions were to play a crucial role in union struggles and union consolidation in the 1970s and 1980s. The history of NUMARWOSA is particularly illuminating. In a way similar to the rank-and-file take-over of the Cape Town Municipal Workers’ Association (CTMWA) discussed in Chapter 3, this union went through an assertion of rank-and-file control in 1971. Following the take-over, a new union structure placing shop stewards at the centre of the union was instituted. This was an extremely important development in the democratisation of the union.

The shop stewards were not only responsible for signing up new members and conducting union business inside the plant, but also took up workers' grievances with management. Though these latter duties were not yet codified in written grievance and disciplinary procedures, as would later be the case, the stewards came to act as the workers' lawyers, representing them before management. Furthermore, the stewards were to take on, with the assistance (if necessary) of union officials, negotiations with management over a range of issues. The union's constitution forbade a shop steward from meeting management alone, and they were expected to report-back to the members about any discussions. In theory, no decision was to be taken with management which was not mandated by the membership.

Shop stewards were the bulwark of the union at factory-level, giving the union a direct presence at work. This was in itself a major innovation in trade union organization in South Africa. But the steward system had a second innovative role, in that it served as the leadership core for the union as a whole. The shop stewards formed an in-plant shop stewards committee, which elected individuals to sit with representatives from other factories in a particular area on a Branch Executive Committee (BEC). The BEC was staffed by full-time officials, such as Branch Secretary, but these officials had no voting power, and the meetings were conducted by shop stewards. In turn the BECs elected representatives to the union's National Executive Council, and as in lower structures, this body was comprised entirely of worker leaders, though national officials were present in a non-voting capacity.⁷

A similar rank-and-file challenge was mounted at about the same time by activists, among them Joe Foster, within the WPMWU in Cape Town.⁸

The above serves to emphasise the fact that the tradition of unionism which NUMSA came to represent is a hybrid of, on one hand, the tradition of registered and administratively-stable coloured unionism which has its roots in the 1960s and earlier, and on the other, the militant and shopfloor-based tradition of post 1973 African unions.

Workers united: black metal workers' unions after 1973

Although there were several other African metal unions formed after 1973, the post-1973 tradition of African unionism can be illustrated by focusing on the history of two of these unions. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) was formed on the 28 April 1973 in

Pietermaritzburg. The union grew out of the activities of the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (GFWBF) and the Wages Commission of the University of Natal.⁹ The GFWBF was established for African workers in 1972 at the suggestion of Harriet Bolton, a Durban trade unionist, to provide social security for African workers. There was a third, less recognised influence, namely the "regrouping of trade union activists of the period of mass struggle of the 1950s and early 1960s" who were attempting to revive SACTU.¹⁰ The Transvaal branch of the union was established in 1975 following the transfer of metal workers from the Industrial Aid Society (IAS).

In the period 1974 to 1979 MAWU's organisational fortunes ebbed and flowed, beginning with a period of militancy and rapid growth in 1974, through a period which an observer has described as "total collapse" in 1976, to one of "reconstruction" in the years 1977 to 1979.¹¹ However, it was also during this period that the union's leadership displayed their ability to experiment with organisational ideas and to introduce innovations in their organising strategies. In a report to the 4th TUACC Council meeting held on 24 August 1975, MAWU secretary Alpheus Mthethwa announced a change in the union's organisational strategy, citing several factors that had induced the change.

Previously organization had been based on a mass drive for membership without a thorough assessment of the direction of the Union or the consequences of such a drive. The heightened militance of Durban workers, following the strikes made the mass organizational drive appear successful but the subsequent lessening of militancy on the workers' part and the need suitably qualified personnel to deal with the problems of the Union have necessitated a reassessment of strategy. Broadly speaking, this reassessment has resulted in two major changes in strategy:

- (a) Decentralization
- (b) Concentration of resources upon a few carefully selected factories.

Decentralization:

This has taken two directions:

- (i) The union officials now concentrate primarily upon training of workers in shop-steward committees, making it in turn the responsibility of these shop-steward

committees to recruit and organise members, and to collect subscriptions. Regular meetings of shop-stewards from particular factories are held and training is integrated with the ongoing process at these factories.

(ii) The office in Jacobs was established in order to encourage more participation in union affairs by members whose place of work is in that area.¹²

In the report MAWU complained about the fact that the strategy was hampered by “the shortage of suitably qualified organizers” which it termed “a perennial problem not easily solved” and expressed hope that the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) would train more people to become organisers.¹³ However, the lofty ideals contained in this strategy were not implemented and the union continued on a downward slide towards a state of near-collapse. The economic slump and the wave of state repression and harassment of leading activists in the form of detention and banning orders made things worse for the union. However, the significance of the MAWU strategy lies in the fact that it represented a realisation that a change was necessary and that only membership support would ensure long-term resilience and viability of the emergent unions. Indeed, during the later years of MAWU’s reconstruction, the central tenets of this 1975 strategy were of fundamental importance. The strategy represented the beginnings of the tradition of worker control and democratic unionism and, in an indirect way became the foundation upon which the FOSATU unions built this tradition.

As with the CWIU (discussed in Chapter 4), MAWU was an affiliate of the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) from the time that this council was established in January 1974. TUACC came to play a very crucial role in building and ensuring the survival of its affiliate unions in the Natal area. This occurred in a context where, by 1975, “fund-raising and the provision of infrastructural resources to the unions, as well as the formulation of policy of the unions” had been centralised at TUACC level.¹⁴ In its early years, TUACC was a forum for union secretaries, organisers and other leading activists to take decisions affecting unions. A cursory examination of the minutes of TUACC’s secretariat and council shows that these were extremely powerful bodies which discussed and took decisions on a variety of issues. One of the examples of centralisation was with regard to employment and remuneration of full-time officials. At a TUACC Secretariat meeting held on 1 December 1975, the NUTW’s Johnny

Copelyn told the meeting that he was “annoyed and upset” that certain TUACC unions had introduced holiday bonuses independently of the council despite the fact that TUACC had a policy to encourage uniformity in wages for full-time officials.¹⁵

The irony about this period is that at the same time as centralisation was taking place inside TUACC, the discourse of worker control was increasingly finding expression at various levels of the Council and its affiliates. At various times and in various unions this was known as decentralisation, localisation, worker control and worker democracy. By this time all the unions had managed to set up representative structures such as shop stewards’ committees, branch executive committees and national executive committees. However, as noted above, the strategy of decentralisation did not take root until the late 1970s by which time it had become obvious to the unions that the strategy was no longer a choice but a necessity for the reconstruction and survival of the unions. At a meeting of the TUACC National Executive Committee (NEC) held at Wilgespruit near Roodeport, TUACC secretary reported that adjustments had been effected on all TUACC union constitutions to ensure that they were similar. In particular, the secretary reported that key areas which had been made uniform were those relating to the following questions:

- 1) Are workers in control of the union?
- 2) What are the powers of officials?
- 3) Is it possible that officials could overrule workers?¹⁶

As the decade drew to a close, MAWU began showing signs of stability and modest growth. As the figures in Table 12 below suggest, it was during the subsequent years that the union was to experience its phenomenal growth and organisational strength which allowed it to exercise a tremendous influence within the burgeoning union movement.

The other union which was formed in the aftermath of the 1973 strikes was the United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers’ Union (UAW). Formed in 1973 as an unregistered African parallel union of TUCSA-affiliated coloured NUMARWOSA, the UAW was to become

a very important affiliate of FOSATU. A notable contribution which is missing from Maree's detailed and authoritative history of the UAW is the role of the Urban Training Project (UTP) towards the formation of this union. Both Friedman and Lowry show that the UTP co-operated with NUMARWOSA towards the formation of the UAW.¹⁷ Indeed, Lowry argues that Michael Faya, the UAW's first national secretary, was paid by the UTP for a while after he had been elected into his position¹⁸ and that he was later arrested for PAC activities.

In the 1970s the UAW managed to establish democratic structures at various levels of its organisation. At the workplace level they had a general meeting of union members which met once every three months. Members then elected a factory branch executive committee on which most departments had elected representatives or shop stewards. This committee had to meet once a month, but in practice, it met more often. In addition, there was a 'union BEC' on which all factories had elected members. Finally, the national executive committee (NEC) comprised elected delegates from the various regions of the union.¹⁹ In addition to this, the union seems to have developed a very shrewd strategy of taking over, rather than isolating and antagonising, existing liaison committees. This strategy seems to have worked particularly well in the early stages of organisation at particular workplaces.²⁰

By the end of the 1970s the UAW had membership in Port Elizabeth, East London, Uitenhage, Durban and Pretoria and many prominent metal worker leaders such as John Gomomo and Daniel Dube came from its ranks. In the late 1970s this union was one of the first unions to participate in the initiative to establish a new federation, FOSATU.

The FOSATU years

The FOSATU years mark probably the most significant period in the successful organisation and consolidation of metal unions in South Africa. It was around this time that metal unions came to the fore as pioneers in several areas of union organisation and consolidation. Indeed, the union which took the lead in initiating moves towards a new federation was NUMARWOSA, the

coloured registered union which pulled out of TUCSA at the end of 1976.²¹ In 1979 it was the largest metal union and FOSATU affiliate with approximately 7 000 members. The union which was a member of the Eastern Province Industrial Council for the Motor Industry had branches in the Eastern Cape, Natal and the Transvaal and worked closely with the UAW, which it had helped establish in 1973.

Two other non-TUACC metal unions which were to play an important role in FOSATU were the UAW and the WPMWU. For some time after the establishment of FOSATU, the WPMWU was the only FOSATU affiliate in the Western Cape and the federation mandated it to initiate the establishment of a FOSATU regional structure in that region. During 1980 NUMARWOSA, UAW and WPMWU merged to form the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) with a membership of close to 12 000. According to Les Kettledas, a former official of NAAWU and NUMSA, the merger was made possible by the amendment in labour legislation which permitted African workers to belong to recognised unions.²² This was to become the first phase of union consolidation in the metal/auto sectors.

Table 12: Membership of Metal and Auto Unions, 1979 - 1987

<i>Year</i>	<i>MAWU</i>	<i>NUMARWOSA</i>	<i>UAW</i>	<i>WPMWU</i>	<i>NAAWU</i> <i>(est. 1980)</i>
1979	1 490	4 500	2 950	1 250	---
1980	4 900	6 700	4 000	1 300	11 500
1981	10 000	---	---	---	17 817
1982	16 900	---	---	---	18 300
1983	20 050	---	---	---	18 390
1984	36 000	---	---	---	20 257
1985	38 789	---	---	---	20 338
1987	65 500	---	---	---	21 000

Source: *FOSATU Annual Reports, 1979 - 1984 (AH1999/C1.9.1)*; Baskin, 1991, MacShane, *et. al.*, 1984.

For the metal and auto unions, the most significant development during the FOSATU years was the strengthening of the tradition of worker control in a context where these and other unions had existing structures and unions were, for the first time, making inroads in terms of gaining state and management recognition. Explaining the structures of FOSATU and its affiliates and drawing a distinction between these and structures of the old registered unions, the 1984 *Annual Report* of FOSATU observed:

FOSATU unions are based on a structure of shop stewards representation in each factory. Shop stewards are elected in departments and shifts and they form a shop steward committee. There are slight variations but in general it is these shop stewards who then represent their factory at the Branch level and their Branch at a national level. There is therefore a network of representation feeding back into every factory.

This structure marks an important difference between our affiliates and the older registered unions. In these latter unions Branch and National representatives are usually elected at AGMs. However, given the transport and accommodation problems caused by apartheid laws it is difficult to make such meetings representative of all factories. In practice these unions have seldom developed shop stewards. The links between Branch and National structures is therefore weak and often non-existent.

Within FOSATU most general meetings of members were most active at the factory level. By and large AGMs were not that well attended. However from 1982 a trend developed to try and use the AGMs as a means of mobilising members so that members in each factory had a greater sense of being part of a larger union.²³

In his discussion of union democracy, Maree argues that the democratisation process in the unions had two phases. The first phase, namely, the setting up of structures, was “more or less successfully carried out at the end of 1979” by all the independent unions. The second phase was the “development of the capacity of workers in the unions to take control of the democratic structures”.²⁴ It is in relation to the second phase that the FOSATU years are significant as it was under FOSATU that the movement began to take worker education seriously and to put aside an enormous amount of resources for education and training. The centralisation of education and training, and of certain strategic planning functions and the economies of scale which came with belonging to a large federation enabled unions such as MAWU and NAAWU to develop a strong

culture of democratic participation by its membership. However, this education and training had a certain political bias. The federation forced the IIE to close down and its education and training functions were relocated to an internal FOSATU education department.²⁵ Centralisation became a weapon wielded by a network of certain powerful professionally-trained intellectuals inside the unions to tighten their political control over the emerging unions. As we argued in Chapter 2, by centralising education and training, these intellectuals sought to achieve political domination by positioning themselves as power brokers and gatekeepers who controlled the access of others, particularly party and freelance intellectuals, to the new unions.

Nevertheless, the winning of recognition and trade union rights, the fact that shop stewards were able to learn by doing in representing their members and the fact that a number of younger and relatively more educated workers were joining the workforce, and therefore the unions, also contributed immensely to the growing capacity of unionised workers to take control of their unions. In addition, plant bargaining which was the norm in FOSATU unions, with few exceptions such as NAAWU, enabled members to develop an interest in union matters and the outcomes of negotiations with management and to 'police' the activities of their shop stewards.

However, maintaining membership participation in a union is a difficult task, and in the case of MAWU the growth of the union resulted in a further division of labour such as in the case where the Transvaal BEC appointed its first full-time administrator because, BEC delegates argued, "not everyone can be an organiser".²⁶ An observer has also argued that the gap between the theory and practice of worker control was illustrated by the nature of decision-making over the registration of MAWU in 1979 where only a few people were involved in taking the decision. This point is important as it helps us see beyond the "romanticism underlying the theory of worker control",²⁷ a lot of which had to do with the political point-scoring and competition between the different political tendencies which were contesting for hegemony in the emergent unions.

A final note on the history of NUMSA's predecessors regards the split which occurred in the

Transvaal branch of MAWU in 1984. Although the split is not a central concern of this study, it does raise issues which are pertinent to our discussion.²⁸ The unionists who were suspended by MAWU²⁹ alleged that MAWU and FOSATU were controlled by a small bureaucratic elite of white officials who were opposed to involvement in community issues by the unions and union activists. On the other hand, MAWU and FOSATU argued that the group had incited internal division and that “there was sufficient evidence of very serious financial corruption by [David] Sebabi and possibly others in the breakaway group”.³⁰ MAWU leader and FOSATU vice-president Andrew Zulu was suspended by his union at about the same time and joined the group. The suspended group constituted itself into a new union called the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers’ Union of South Africa (UMMAWOSA) and was to join the merger process to form NUMSA in 1987.

Although the facts of the case were never tested through an inquiry or investigation, the split certainly raises several issues about the worker control tradition within MAWU and FOSATU. Firstly, the split highlights the contested nature of worker control within MAWU. In other words, beneath the veil of “romanticism”, worker control meant different things to the emerging grassroots leadership on the one hand, and the formally trained intellectuals who, by virtue of the skills they possessed, were able to control decision-making on the other. Thus while for Bernie Fanaroff the cause of the split was lack of worker control and an absence of “a tradition that organisers are controlled by the BEC”, for a number of the emerging worker leadership worker control also meant that working class organisation had to go beyond the workplace.³¹ An activist worker saw the role of the shop stewards councils (SSC) which had emerged on the East Rand as being to represent the interests of workers beyond the factory floor.

So the SSC has got a role to play not only in the workplace, but in anything that affects the interests of the workers in general. In the absence of a clear-cut organisation that does take these aspirations into effect, the SSC is going to take action.³²

Although the issue of worker control might have been a problem within MAWU at the time, it would seem that in the specific circumstances surrounding the split, worker control may have

been invoked to rein in unionists whose politics were considered wayward and out of step with the dominant intellectual current at the time. The broader context to the split is that there was an ongoing political conflict among full-time officials (black and white), white university students and academics associated with the emergent unions in which, according to one former MAWU official, people from the different tendencies used “dirty tricks” to gain the upper hand in the union.³³

Secondly, the split marked an important phase in the history of the post-1973 union movement in general, namely, one where a critical mass of black worker leaders and grassroots intellectuals had emerged and were beginning to assert themselves and to challenge the power that formally-trained intellectuals possessed by virtue of their expertise, networks and different social backgrounds. An observer of the conflict noted that “leading” or “advanced” shop stewards tended to be the ones who supported UMMAWOSA whereas the rank-and-file were “divided over whether to follow them or not”. He further noted that these leading shop stewards joined UMMAWOSA “out of a sense of frustration with MAWU”.³⁴ Part of the reason for the confusion among the workers may be due to the fact that some officials made it a point to shield workers from the raging political debates.³⁵

Thirdly, the split shows that non-racialism as practised in MAWU and other FOSATU unions inadvertently served to protect the power that white officials exercised and severely weakened the hand of those who believed they had reason, whether justified or not, to question or criticise the organisational and political conduct of these powerful officials. The unionists who eventually split from MAWU directed most of their criticism and attack against “white intellectuals” or a “white bureaucratic elite” which was seen to stand in the way of grassroots working class leaders who were supposed to take control of running the union. Attacks such as these led the union and FOSATU to accuse the ‘dissidents’ of racism, that is, “using racism to justify their actions which is contrary to MAWU’s principle of non-racialism”.³⁶

Yet similar sentiments against some leading white officials were present in MAWU before and

after the split, and in later years, in NUMSA, too. A leading unionist in NUMSA who asked not to be named on this particular issue argues that some of these officials actually worked to discourage the emergence of strong and independent black worker leaders and full-time officials.

They were responsible for that because they were very, very afraid of contestation. Immediately they found out that we were contesting them, they will create an environment where there will be a conflict in the organisation, conflict to such an extent that you will be seen as a trouble maker and marginalised by your fellow comrades in the union. They were good in doing that. Although politically they argue against Stalinism, but they were Stalinists of the first order, you know. Those guys were brutal!³⁷

Finally, the split brought into the open issues of race and power in the post-1973 unions which, although they were always present in these unions, had been shrouded in secrecy and silence for a long time. This theme will be revisited in Chapter 7.

'One industry one union'

The history of NUMSA and the specific merger process that brought it into being is well-documented in several sources. Suffice it to say that the union was a result of a merger of six COSATU unions and one former TUCSA union. The significant COSATU unions were MAWU and NAAWU, but the Motor Assembly and Components Workers' Union of South Africa (MACWUSA), the General and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU), UMMAWOSA and the TGWU also brought some members. In addition, the Motor Industries Combined Workers' Union (MICWU), a conservative registered coloured former TUCSA affiliate joined the largest ever metal workers' union in the history of the country. According to the minutes of the 1987 launching congress of the union the 131 000 membership figure of the new union was made up as follows:

MAWU	=	65 500
NAAWU	=	21 000
MICWU	=	33 000

MACWUSA	=	3 250
GAWU	=	3 500
TGWU	=	1 500
UMMAWOSA	=	3 250. ³⁸

Table 13: NUMSA Membership, 1987 - 1999

<i>Year</i>	<i>Membership</i>
1987	130 796
1989	188 013
1991	220 000
1993	180 000
1994	169 598
1995	185 750
1996	182 592
1997	177 845
1998	173 754
1999	169 258

Sources: Baskin, J. (ed.) 1994. *Unions in Transition: COSATU at the dawn of democracy*. Johannesburg: NALEDI.
Naidoo, R. (ed.) 1999. *Unions in Transition: COSATU into the new millennium*. Johannesburg: NALEDI.

Much can be said about NUMSA as part of the post-1973 union movement, but for the purposes of discussion in this chapter we have identified four areas which make its overall contribution to this movement remarkable and worthy of academic examination. Firstly, the union and some of its predecessors such as NUMARWOSA and MAWU have played a pioneering and innovative role. MAWU was the first post-1973 union to be formed and, despite difficulties at certain stages of its development, it continued to play a crucial role in building the emerging movement. As indicated above, this was the union which developed the 'decentralisation' strategy in order to cope with the counter-offensive of employers and the state in the aftermath of the wave of

militant worker action of the early 1970s.

NUMSA's other predecessor, NUMARWOSA, also played a key role in building the movement, the main example of which is its initiative proposal in 1977 to establish a non-racial federation. The launching of FOSATU in 1979 was the outcome of this initiative. Little did the union understand at the time that the launching of FOSATU represented a milestone in the building and consolidation of the democratic union movement in South Africa.

The pioneering role of the union and its forerunners was not always free of controversy. Two examples of initiatives taken by one of the former unions help to illustrate this point. In 1979 the union took a decision to register, a decision taken at a time when registration was rejected by the emerging unions on the basis that it was tantamount to co-option by the state.³⁹ This decision triggered the now well-known registration debate among the emerging unions, but eventually by the middle of the decade all the unions had followed in the footsteps of MAWU. The other example is the decision by the union in 1982 to apply to join the National Industrial Council for the metal industry. It was the second union to do so, with the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) having done so earlier in the same year. This decision represented a departure from the union's approach of factory level bargaining which, according to one observer, was about "negotiating, policing and enforcing a factory agreement on the shopfloor".⁴⁰ However, the union saw this shift as a tactical one which did not signal a jettisoning of the fundamental principles of democratic unionism and factory-based structures operating on the basis of mandates and report-backs. Recognising the significance of the move and MAWU's pioneering role within the independent movement, one commentator cautioned against a premature condemnation of the MAWU decision.

Other independent unions would, therefore, be wise to refrain from too hasty a judgement of MAWU as this union is likely to foreshow changes and trends within the worker movement. MAWU, as the largest of the emerging unions, shows to the others the challenges in their own future.⁴¹

MAWU became the first union to establish local shop stewards councils (locals) in the early 1980s. Not only was the local important for building organisation in the sense of helping in recruitment, building factory structures and running basic union education, it was also a crucial structure to build solidarity and extend worker control in the union. The first local was formed in the Germiston/Wadeville industrial area and Moses Mayekiso who was Transvaal branch secretary at the time found that the council “worked miracles” because workers and their leaders took ownership of the union thus releasing him to concentrate on “educating and conscientising the workers”.⁴² By the mid-1980s not only had the local been adopted by all COSATU unions, but it had also been built into the constitutions of these unions as a permanent structure which provided a powerful platform for grassroots leadership and organic intellectuals of the post-1973 unions.

In 1993 NUMSA became the first COSATU union to adopt a long-term bargaining strategy which entailed the adoption of a Three-Year Bargaining Strategy and a shift towards a five-grade, skills-based grading system. The aim of this approach was to reduce the wage gap between artisans and workers in other grades and to allow workers to rise from the lowest to the highest levels of the grading system. In addition, it was envisaged that the strategy would help ensure the recognition of prior learning and portability of skills. At the time of its adoption by the union one observer referred to the strategy as the “new plan pioneered by NUMSA” which represented a “potential for strategic unionism”.⁴³ Although seven years after the adoption of the strategy the union’s secretariat observed that progress “varied between the sectors” and identified serious problems with the approach,⁴⁴ the strategy represented a considerable far-sightedness and sophistication by the union at the time.

The 2000 Secretariat Report to the 6th National Congress of NUMSA proudly asserted the union’s role in “providing leadership to the Federation at all levels shaping policy positions of the Federation and the Alliance”. One example of such leadership was demonstrated when the union first mooted the idea of a reconstruction and development programme which was later debated and accepted by COSATU and the tripartite alliance. This, according to the report, could

be attributed to the union's "tradition of open, frank and robust organisational and political discussion" which was the hallmark of its militant struggles against capital and engagement in broader socio-economic battles by COSATU.⁴⁵

Secondly, the union's past and current policies and practices epitomise the democratic tradition of unionism with all its revolutionary idealism, complexity and contradictoriness and thus offer the best organisational setting within which to examine the possibilities and limitations of this tradition. Clause 5 (b) of Chapter 1 of NUMSA's constitution is explicit about the union's commitment to democracy in the union and in other spheres of society. With regard to union organisation the constitution commits the union to democracy which is outlined as follows:

- (i) to support the spirit of democracy in all the Union's activities;
- (ii) to build a strong and democratic organisation of workers at the workplace;
- (iii) to build strong and active shop steward structures to ensure democratic worker control;
- (iv) to achieve full and effective participation by workers in all decision-making affecting them in the workplace;
- (v) to end all forms of discrimination in employment.⁴⁶

An important dimension of NUMSA's notion of worker control is that of the socialisation and worker control of production. Over the years, the union's strategy produced a vast corps of leading worker leaders and organic intellectuals. Even at a time when NUMSA seemed to be haemorrhaging some of this leadership, it was able to reproduce others to replace those who had left very rapidly. The union also attracted and retained a critical mass of university-trained intellectuals. While criticism has been levelled at the dominating role these intellectuals with "non-working class backgrounds" played within the union by virtue of their expertise,⁴⁷ few deny the importance of their contribution to building the union.

A living testimony to the union's efforts in building working class leadership was the ability of these worker leaders and organic intellectuals to challenge and eventually replace the non-working class intellectuals. These are worker leaders who had emerged despite the fact that some

of the white officials limited the scope for emergence of worker leaders and expected “an official or leader that is following their own political ideology”.⁴⁸ This theme is discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Suffice it to say that there was often a contradiction between the theory and practice of worker control as the following quote by Moses Mayekiso shows. Here Mayekiso provides an insight into the dynamics of power and manipulation of decision-making processes by officials, particularly those with tertiary education qualifications.

The officials used to have information. Take negotiations. Those are the people who knew figures and who could manipulate. Even if you talk theory, those are people who could come in and say, ‘hey, Karl Marx said this and that’. Then you don’t have time to read as workers.

The intellectuals, okay, intellectuals in the sense of degrees, these people had time. Five years in university, seven years. Others were doctors. They spent time reading. Well, those people, their mere sense of coming into the unions, they want to influence ideology, influence the politics in the union. Whereas if you take an organiser who was a shop steward, he just wanted to organise against the brutal treatment by the bosses. Then without really getting into books, *et cetera*, he is going to be dependent. He or she is going to be dependent on those officials until he realises later that ‘hey man, no’, also after the exposure of reading all those ideologies. Then that is where the conflict comes in. You can view it in COSATU. When the conflict came in and people started realising that ‘no man, what we are fed is not right’ and therefore a hot debate started and splits and all those things because of that. That was a problem, maybe it was a challenge to black, mostly African organisers, that then listening to these people, another one will come with his own, another one will come with his own. Therefore, you are bombarded with this because all of them want support. Then you must take a stand and you must also have some understanding. It forced them to read, to build their own ability to understand. Take Enoch Godongwana and others, they had to read. But they were told by the [white] officials, ‘don’t read, it’s enough. You are a worker, you have power. There is no need to read’. That was a problem. And also if you talk women and men, then one was told that ‘ag, it’s a woman. She is a woman’. Though it was not that strong. But the white/black gap, the education gap was a problem.⁴⁹

Another manifestation of this contradiction between the theory and practice of worker control was the inequality of power between full-time officials in general and the general membership of the union. In his autobiography, Petrus Tom, a long-standing union activist and full-time official

of MAWU and, later NUMSA, relates his experiences in MAWU in the mid-1980s which he argues were due to a lack of education among the workers.

It is my experience that the people who have the most information in the trade unions are the officials, not the workers. You will find the workers are elected to the BEC and the NEC but they don't know the powers, they have - they have to be told by officials.... A lot of workers on the shop floor leave everything to the organisers and the shop stewards. They don't see themselves as the people who have to participate in activities of the union. If there is a problem they feel the organisers will come and solve the problem or will approach lawyers and take the company to court.⁵⁰

Thirdly, like SAMWU, the democratic tradition in NUMSA is a combination of organisational practices of the old, registered unions and the new post 1973 unregistered unions. This is an extremely important point as it suggests that the FOSATU tradition is, in reality, an amalgam of organisational experiences and practices of unions established before and after 1973. It is not too clear why the contribution of the pre-1973 has been down-played in the literature. However, it would appear that the hegemony of the FOSATU tradition may have something to do with the political competition and point-scoring among activists involved in the re-emergence of unions in the early 1970s.⁵¹

Finally, full-time employment in NUMSA exhibits the full spectrum of issues that are to be found among all post-1973 unions, including issues to do with gender, race, social background of officials, formal educational qualifications and the 'brain drain' of full-time officials since the beginning of the 1990s. Research conducted for this study shows that race has always been a highly explosive issue within NUMSA and its predecessors. Yet, as Mayekiso aptly points out, there has been a silence about the issue.

At some stage it was ignored, but not that it was not existent, not that people were not feeling it. Again, maybe because of one thing that, 'we don't want to lose this organiser or that organiser. Maybe if we argue against him as a whitey, a racial argument, we will lose him'. Then you find that debate is constrained. People are constraining themselves. It's not that people were not understanding that there was a race problem. There was also racism from those white officials. They [black workers and officials] knew racism in the

townships, being treated brutally by white police. They knew that 'this is an *umlungu* [white person]. He is doing this because he is *umlungu* and all that'. Therefore if they knew that, that means that they were just nursing them. You tended to depend upon these people. You don't want to lose them, you don't want to lose their skills. Therefore you don't want to rock the boat. But sometimes we know that 'this is an *umlungu*, that's how he is used to doing this. Anyway, we are doing what we are doing. Therefore, ignore him'. So therefore it's not a question that it was not there. It was there, but people were not raising it. They were not arguing racially because sometimes they didn't want to lose these people. Sometimes they were saying that 'oh, no man, we may be losing a lot'.⁵²

A related issue, which was present in several other unions was social distance between leading, mainly white, officials and other, often black, officials and workers. This has remained an unexplored aspect of the post-1973 unions and yet it is critical for understanding the dynamics of power and leadership within these unions. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this point.)

How and Why Did the Tradition Develop in the Way that it Did?

Bobby Marie joined MAWU in 1984 as a local organiser. He later rose through the ranks until he became a national organiser two years later. Before MAWU he had joined the African Food and Canning Workers' Union in 1982 as volunteer organiser following the expiry of his five-year banning order arising out of his activities as a youth and community activist in Durban in the 1970s. He remembers that when he joined MAWU worker control was very strong in the unions.

You don't, as an individual, go off and do your thing. It was very tight. Everything had to be discussed, and I was amazed, and I was impressed and I was influenced. When I got into the unions the only people who had freedom to do what they wanted to do was workers. When they decide to strike, they don't consult. They go and do it, you know. For a long time, and I think even up to today, that's where the union movement still has hope. No factory has to go to the local council and ask them permission to strike or to take action in there. No organiser can go to a factory and say, 'hey guys, because of this and this, you can't take action'. The guys will say, 'fuck you!'. So, while there is a strict kind of democracy and accountability within the union structures, I think that was manipulated all the time by the office-bearers, by the secretaries. The real freedom is where there was no structure!⁵³

In this section we argue that the democratic tradition in NUMSA and its predecessors did not emerge as a result of a single factor. Similar to the argument made in relation to SAMWU and CEPPWAWU, we argue here that this tradition was a product of several factors and processes. Below we identify and discuss these in more detail.

The labour process

In earlier chapters of this study we have argued that the manufacturing sector of the economy and the integrated labour process within manufacturing enterprises provides conditions which are conducive to the emergence of collective worker solidarity. These integrated manufacturing operations create conditions which enable a small number of workers to disrupt production.⁵⁴ These are the structural conditions which enable small groups of workers as well as the entire workforce to establish democratic structures. The gathering of large numbers of workers under one roof facilitates the creation of forms of direct democracy by union members, either in the form of departmental meetings or factory membership general meetings. The Fordist nature of production is also conducive for the creation of representative forms of union democracy where shop floor representatives or shop stewards are subject to constant pressure and monitoring by their membership. MAWU's emphasis on factory level bargaining was in recognition of the organisational advantages of the labour process in the metal industry.

Thus the labour process in the industry became the domain within which it was possible to build and nurture democratic unionism. This provides another example of the contradictory nature of the capitalist labour process under conditions of Fordism which, while it seeks to exploit, deskill and alienate the workforce, can also create conditions favourable to the emergence of collective solidarity and action. Democratic union structures do not emerge in a vacuum, but are constituted in the course of worker action against managerial prerogatives in the labour process. In a sense, democratic notions such as that described by Marie above, are similar to the 'cultures of

solidarity' discussed by Rick Fantasia in his important work on working class consciousness and action.

They are neither ideas of solidarity in the abstract nor bureaucratic trade union activity, but cultural formations that arise in conflict, creating and sustaining solidarity in opposition to the dominant structure. Forged in crisis, cultures of solidarity can represent, sometimes in germinal form, 'micro-societies in which the laws of macro-society are not only suspended but replaced by a new regime of direct action', as Henri Desroche has characterized the millenarian and revolutionary drama.⁵⁵

A critical ingredient, of course, is worker militancy which acts as a bonding agent which brings workers together in democratic structures and shapes the substance of the discourse of democracy. Thus, in this discussion we arrive at similar conclusions to those in section 2.1 of Chapter 4 regarding the emergence of democratic unionism in the economic sectors organised by CEPPWAWU.

The labour market

Up until the mid-1970s a significant proportion of MAWU's membership was located at the bottom end of the skills hierarchy. A survey conducted in 1975 among members of the NUTW, MAWU and the CWIU found that 47 per cent of MAWU were unskilled and 41 per cent were in the lower semi-skilled bracket. The study also found that 35 per cent of these workers had no formal education, that only 24 per cent had formal schooling beyond Standard 5 and that none of them had completed Form 2.⁵⁶ However, as noted in Chapter 4, the structure of the economy changed in later years resulting in fewer unskilled jobs in relative terms, and more semi-skilled jobs and skilled jobs. These changes resulted in new divisions within the black labour force but failed to remove divisions between black workers and their white counterparts. More importantly, they impacted on union organisation in the metal industry in several ways, chief among which was the fact that, increasingly, worker leadership was drawn from the "better educated and more skilled urban-based stratum of the working class".⁵⁷

Related to the above changes was the fact that an increasing number of workers in these sectors were urban residents, even though NUMSA had significant numbers of migrant workers from the rural areas. The changes coincided with the emergence of a layer of organic intellectuals who not only championed union democracy, but played a very important role in shaping the form that democracy took.

Access to intellectual resources

In the post-1973 union movement, NUMSA probably had access to the largest pool of intellectual resources. This does not necessarily mean all these resources were located inside the union. Indeed, most of these resources were located outside the union, in the form of academics operating from the white South African universities, research institutes and a variety of labour-supporting service organisations, journals and magazines which were sympathetic to or supportive of the union movement, labour journalists, progressive firms of attorneys, international lobby groups, labour solidarity networks and international academic circles. The union's ability to mobilise these resources derived from several factors. Firstly, some of the leading university-trained intellectuals in the post-1973 union movement were located in NUMSA and its predecessors and, they were able to project their union in a favourable light and win support inside and beyond this movement. Not only did they bring skills into the union, but they also brought with them vast networks and contacts which could be relied upon to mobilise or provide those resources the union could not provide internally. In addition, these intellectuals gave some intellectual respectability to the union and its struggles, something which most unions in the community or national democratic tradition of unions did not have.

A second critical factor in the union's ability to mobilise vast intellectual resources was the support this union received, probably more than any other in the emerging movement, from university-based intellectuals. Many of these intellectuals taught courses, conducted research and supervised student research projects, many of which served to promote or refine some of the principles and practices of the metal union. Academic departments and areas of scholarly work

which produced several generations of young supporters and sympathisers of metal unions and the FOSATU tradition of unionism were industrial sociology, labour law and labour history. Many of these young intellectuals later joined the union movement or made a contribution to the movement through their involvement in a variety of labour-supporting organisations, some of which are listed in Appendix 4.

Thirdly, the fact that the metal unions were leading affiliates of larger federations ensured them relatively easy access to intellectual resources and support of various kinds. This included access to funding and other forms of support for union media and education and training, and access to national and international networks. In this regard, the South African Co-ordinating Council of the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) played a particularly crucial role. All the metal and automobile unions were members of this council and benefited enormously from the support and interactions that it facilitated nationally and internationally.

Fourthly, NUMSA and other unions, particularly those in the FOSATU tradition, often received favourable coverage in the commercial media by a few progressive journalists working there. This exposure ranged from the coverage of campaigns, strikes and agreements to the coverage of 'innovations and breakthroughs' by these unions. More often than not these journalists moved in the same social and political circles as the leading intellectuals inside the union and were thus able to get information quickly and accurately.

Fifthly, the alternative media played a critical role in promoting sections of the union movement or certain political tendencies within these unions. Other sections of this media, such as the *South African Labour Bulletin*, actually provided a platform for intellectuals, mostly white, to debate issues, criticise certain strategies and to promote or highlight others.

Of course, NUMSA and its predecessors were not the only beneficiaries of these intellectual resources. Indeed, unions outside the FOSATU fold also benefited from some of these resources. However, the FOSATU unions were the biggest beneficiaries in a context where they were seen

by some of the intellectuals as alternatives to nationalism and populist politics. Some of these intellectual resources were devoted to building the 'romanticism' identified by some observers in order to hold these unions up as models of 'independent democratic unionism'.

Nevertheless, the role of intellectuals remained controversial and contested even within the union. In his address opening the 3rd National Congress of NUMSA in 1991, then President, Daniel Dube made specific remarks about intellectuals and their role within the research and development groups (RDGs) that the union had set up to do research and develop policy positions.

There are those who say that the union is not controlled by the president or GS - it is run by white intellectuals. We do not all have the skills in the short term to draw up a programme to respond to certain issues facing us. But they [white intellectuals] must be under the control of worker leadership. But we must realise that knowledge is power, but as long as we have got an organisation which is controlled by workers on the ground and leadership which is vigilant - then we don't need to fear. But don't be misled, open your eyes.⁵⁸

The industry or sector

The industries or sectors in which NUMSA organised were conducive to the emergence of democratic union structures and practices. Although the union organised hundreds of small operations with few workers, particularly in the motor and engineering sectors, the bulk of its membership came from large mass production plants, many of which were owned by multinational corporations. It was from these plants, and in industrial areas where there were large concentrations of them, that the organisational muscle and creativity came. Many of the large local or multinational corporations operated in competitive national and international markets, a factor which worked in the union's favour as these firms were highly sensitive to labour unrest and disruption of production. In addition, multinationals such as German auto

manufacturers Volkswagen and Mercedes Benz helped to forge solidarity between South African workers and those from the countries of origin of these corporations.

Large firms and multinational corporations all used Fordist production methods and this not only provided the new unions with organisational leverage in terms bringing large numbers of workers under one roof, it also created ideal conditions for the emergence of democratic structures and practices. The origins of these structures and practices were defensive in nature as it was important for the newly organised workers to avoid managerial victimisation and state repression and to construct the basis of a new kind of solidarity based on trust, accountability and participation by all. In addition, large firms and multinationals also employed significant numbers of semi-skilled black workers who brought into the new unions levels of education which were crucial for their ability to participate in the affairs of these organisations. In later years this ensured that NUMSA was in a much better position than many other unions to produce a larger pool of capable worker leaders.

Table 14: Size of Workforce in the Sectors Organised by NUMSA, 1994⁵⁹

<i>Industry/sector</i>	<i>Workforce</i>
Manufacture of rubber and plastic products	61 585
Manufacture of basic metals	100 520
Manufacture of fabricated metal products	102 403
Electricity, gas and water	43 479
Motor trade and repair services	135 697
TOTAL	443 684

Source: *Manpower Survey*, P0201, 29 August 1996. (http://www.statssa.gov.za/Statistical_releases/Statistical.htm).

History of the union

The history of NUMSA and its predecessors is a very rich one containing countless lessons, both negative and positive, about forms of organisation. We have already alluded to the early years of MAWU when officials and worker leaders focused on mass recruitment but failed to consolidate such membership. The result was that when employers and the state embarked on a counter-offensive in the mid-1970s, nearly all that membership was lost. The lesson the union learnt from this was the necessity of giving ownership of the union to the members themselves as this would make it much harder to crush the union if it was rooted among the members on the shopfloor.

The history of the other unions is equally important for understanding the democratic tradition in NUMSA. Above we have shown how the tradition took root in NUMARWOSA in the pre-1973 period and how this history contributed towards the strengthening of the democratic impulse once this union merged into NAAWU and eventually NAAWU merged with other unions to form NUMSA. The current president of NUMSA, Mthuthuzeli Tom, who works at Daimler-Chrysler (formerly Mercedes Benz South Africa) in East London joined a union for the first time in 1983 soon after he got a job there. The union was the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU). However, in 1984 he and the majority of SAAWU members crossed the floor to join NAAWU where he found that the tradition of worker control was strong.

I was in SAAWU and I moved over to NAAWU, and then in NAAWU I learnt other issues and then I saw why we were weak in SAAWU, you know. So, to be honest with you, this question of worker control and worker democracy was much more exercised in NAAWU than it was exercised in SAAWU. In SAAWU organisers were leaders there in the forefront and shop stewards were dependent entirely on organisers. And, in NAAWU we were so independent as workers, and we were so proud of this change of doing things, where we began to see that we are doing these things, you know, and we were building confidence in us, you know.⁶⁰

An important aspect of the history of NUMSA which reinforced the worker control tradition is that during the FOSATU years it was projected by many among them the intellectuals inside the

union as being an embodiment of union democracy and worker control. Many worker leaders and officials in the union came to believe that they had a duty to live up to that reputation and thus worked hard to maintain the tradition within the union. This underlines the importance of history in the invention of myths and traditions within institutions, movements, organisations, communities and societies.

Urban/rural divisions

The majority of NUMSA members are urban-based while the rest are based in small towns in semi-rural areas. However, there is another form in which the rural/urban cleavage manifests itself within NUMSA, namely, the division between migrant workers who live in hostels and urban township residents. However, none of this means that rural union members are less likely to join unions and participate in their activities and traditions. It simply means that the building of democratic practices and structures among rural workers is more time-consuming and requires a greater outlay of resources.

The literature provides numerous examples to show that the migrant labour system which brings rural workers into urban areas is functional to capital, particularly because it cheapens the costs of hiring labour and facilitates managerial control. However, a neglected consequence of this “herding together of large numbers of contract workers into hostels” is the fact that it facilitates communication among workers and promotes trade union organisation.⁶¹

As argued in Chapter 3, the presence of migrant workers and other workers based in the rural areas forced the new largely urban-based unions to incorporate terms, experiences and discourses of traditional African communities into the new discourse of democratic unionism. One way in which this was done was the use of African languages as mediums of communication and record in the conduct of union business. This ensured that African workers were able to embrace and extend the discourse of democratic unionism on their own terms, that is, independently of the professionally-trained intellectuals of the movement. The modes of communication also

borrowed heavily from traditional African idiom and other cultural forms and the *imbongi* (praise singer) is an example of this. Alfred Qabula, a Dunlop worker and MAWU member who left his job to become a cultural activist, says that when he started composing his *izibongo* (poems) he was not sure the workers would approve, presumably because this was a traditional art form performed in an urban union setting. The workers did approve and many others gained confidence to become *izimbongi* of the union movement.⁶²

These initial tentative steps by rural workers who were part of the new union movement were crucial for the emergence of organic intellectuals who were to become the intermediaries who, by virtue of their ability to reach out and communicate to the unionised workers in ways which the intellectuals could not, ensured the resilience of the new unions and the rootedness of the democratic tradition of unionism.

In conclusion, the variables which shaped the formation of the democratic tradition in NUMSA and its forerunners are summarised in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Factors Which Shaped the Democratic Tradition in NUMSA and its Predecessors

<i>Variable</i>	<i>NUMSA</i>
Nature of the labour process	Integrated and Fordist, large numbers of workers in single workplaces.
The labour market	Initially unskilled but became predominantly semi-skilled in the 1970s and 1980s.
Access to intellectual resources	Strong internal and external resources. Through FOSATU (later COSATU).
The nature of the sector	Private, many small operations but also many large firms, many of which were owned by multinational corporations
Union history	Pre-1973 registered and democratising unions and post-1973 militant.
Rural/urban divisions	Rural, rural-in-urban (migrant) and urban.

Full-time Officials and the Dilemma of Leadership: An Assessment

NUMSA and its forerunners always found it necessary to employ full-time officials to execute important tasks in the life of these unions. However, assessing the functions and role of full-time officials in the unions is made difficult by poor record keeping in the early years of these unions. The figures used in the discussion in this section was gleaned from various sources of the unions. It must be stressed, however, that providing a complete set of facts and figures about full-time officials is not the objective of this discussion. The figures which have been cited and used to construct tables are for illustrative purposes only and this study does not claim to present a complete set of facts and figures about full-time officials.

According to survey conducted by sociologists in Durban in 1975, MAWU had five full-time officials (and one part-time) but this number seems to have dropped because after 1977 the union had "1 or 2 paid officials".⁶³ The 1980 Annual Report of FOSATU gave a break-down of the number of officials by affiliate and the local where they were based. MAWU had eight organizers (2 in Benoni, 1 in Durban, 2 in Johannesburg, 2 in Pietermaritzburg and 1 in Pinetown) while the NAAWU unions (NUMARWOSA/UAW/WPMWU) had eight organisers (1 in Bellville, 1 in Isipingo near Durban, 3 in Port Elizabeth and 3 in Pretoria).⁶⁴ Following the rapid growth in union membership during the early 1980s, the number of full-time officials also increased dramatically. For example, by 1984 MAWU employed 23 organisers to service their membership of more than 20 000.

It would appear that in the early years the employment of full-time officials was not regulated by specific policies but rather evolved as the requirements of the union demanded and its resources permitted. Indeed, in the case of MAWU there was a time when the employment of officials was decided jointly with other bodies that it worked closely with, such as TUACC and FOSATU. One example of ambiguity was that of volunteer organisers and their remuneration. At a TUACC Secretariat meeting in 1977 MAWU raised a question about who, between TUACC, the union and the IIE, should pay volunteer organisers.⁶⁵ The matter was discussed in several

subsequent meetings of the secretariat without a solution until in October of that year the Secretariat had a detailed discussion on probation and volunteers where it was decided that “volunteers must volunteer themselves and not be asked or else we would end up with too many volunteers”. It was also decided that people should not be allowed to volunteer more than four months and that they should be encouraged to try to look for a job.⁶⁶

The other area where there is a paucity of information is that regarding remuneration of officials. However, available information suggests that once unions had achieved a degree of financial stability, union salaries grew consistently in line with current wage rates for workers in the respective industries. In November 1978 the TUACC NEC gave wage increases to its organisers which meant that from the beginning of 1979 organisers in TUACC unions earned a monthly salary of R200 plus R5 per child up to a maximum of three children. In addition, there would be an annual bonus of R70 or R5.83 per full month worked.⁶⁷ By 1984 this amount had gone up to R500 per month while NAAWU officials earned in the region of R800 per month.⁶⁸

Table 16: NUMSA Officials and Membership, 1996

	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Total members</i>
HEAD OFFICE	32	
REGIONS		
<i>Eastern Cape</i>	33	30 219
<i>Highveld</i>	18	10 073
<i>KwaZulu-Natal</i>	45	37 173
<i>Northern Cape</i>	11	4 095
<i>Northern Transvaal</i>	28	32 529
<i>Western Cape</i>	22	17 295
<i>Western Transvaal</i>	21	16 405
<i>Wits Central West</i>	34	50 170
<i>Wits East</i>	32	34 584
TOTAL	276	232 543

Source: Adapted from the *NUMSA General Secretary's Report, 1996*.

Table 16 above presents figures of union officials in 1996 in relation to the membership of the union. It should be pointed out that the total of 276 was lower than the 1993 total of 341 officials, a record figure for both NUMSA and any other single union within the entire union movement in South Africa. The implications of this growth in the number of full-time officials in the union are explored fully in the sections that follow. Suffice it to say that the Table 17 below highlights the budgetary implications of this growth for the union, a theme that is also discussed below.

Table 17: NUMSA Income and Expenditure Statements, 1996 - 2000
(Figures rounded off to the nearest thousand)

Particulars	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000 (up to May)
INCOME					
Subscriptions (gross)	42 016 000	49 043 000	59 500 000	58 798 000	24 428 000
Others	2 674 000	2 504 000	2 431 000	1 538 000	1 150 000
TOTAL	44 690 000	51 547 000	61 931 000	60 336 000	25 579 000
EXPENSES					
Death benefits	Nil	Nil	8 658 000	8 157 000	3 399 000
Legal expenses	1 964 000	2 526 000	4 384 000	6 532 000	1 966 000
Salaries and benefits	19 905 000	22 611 000	26 870 000	26 621 000	10 145 000
Others	20 696 000	23 614 000	27 953 000	23 441 000	9 761 000
TOTAL	42 565 000	48 751 000	67 865 000	64 751 000	25 271 000
Surplus (Deficit)	2 125 000	2 796 000	(5 933 000)	(4 415 000)	308 000

Source: NUMSA, 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*. NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng.

Organisational management

In the early years NUMSA and its predecessors were built on voluntary participation and sacrifice by workers and officials. Osborn Galeni, NUMSA's national organiser for the engineering sector, joined MAWU in 1980 and recalls that in the early years the union had very limited resources: "Because we had no resources then, if an organiser was not paid we would see to it that he gets paid. We collected money as shop stewards and paid the organiser."⁶⁹ He argues that the self-sacrificing culture was born of a determination to be free from hardship.

It was hardship and knowing that in order to succeed, and for the union to succeed and the organisation to grow and for us to be free, we had to sacrifice. People experienced hardships and exploitation. When you arrive at work in the morning you're told there is no work without any reason. As a solution to the problem we became so dedicated, and we realised that this is a problem that needs to be fought out of dedication and sacrifice. Everyone was determined to solve it and whoever was not interested in solving the problem would not have been there. So, whoever joined the union was prepared to sacrifice, whether members or officials. The issue of money came second.⁷⁰

However, the context then was completely different to what prevails today. At that time the union had only 14 000 members concentrated mainly in two regions, and employed not more than 15 full-time officials. The phenomenal increase in the number of full-time officials introduced new demands and imposed new obligations on the union, all of which had far-reaching implications for the way the union operated. Under the heading 'management of the union', the general secretary's report to the 1996 national congress of the union observed that "the decision making process, the implementation process, the management of staff and the administration are weak".⁷¹ Thus, one of the changes implied by the increase in the number of full-time officials was the requirement that the union should move from mere co-ordination of the work of full-time officials to managing it. In the course of these changes the role of the full-time official also changed from that of a movement activist with a strong political orientation to that of an employee whose orientation and demands on the union were not dissimilar to that of an employee in a conventional employer-employee relationship in industry. The report of

NUMSA's general secretary to the unions third national congress in 1991 acknowledged these changes and identified some of the challenges that they implied.

Because NUMSA is now so big, we can't work in the way we did when NUMSA was small. NUMSA secretaries have to learn to manage the organisation efficiently and effectively, but democratically - not like capitalist managers.⁷²

NUMSA's regional secretary in the Western Cape, Fred Petersen, believes that it is important for a regional secretary to go out and give assistance and direction to local organisers in the field and to "keep his ear to the ground". However, he acknowledges that his is "a job that keeps you tied up here [in the office]". He has to manage the activities of 21 full-time officials in the region and this boils down to "getting staff to do their work. If they don't, I must institute disciplinary action."⁷³ Several factors, such as the need to service members properly and to manage its resources efficiently, have put pressure on union leaders to put in place rigorous strategies to ensure that officials do their work. This has been accompanied by a shift away from the comradely approach to one which emphasises the employer-employee nature of the relationship. For example, the union's leadership believes that one of the ways to ensure financial viability is to ensure that "every employee of the union delivers a minimum of 8 hours of fruitful service to the union a day, to run the union at normal speed". They are also of the view that "conscientiousness and commitment" are needed to "turn around/salvage the union".⁷⁴

In earlier chapters we referred to a new area of union work which we termed organisational management and we observed that this management is performed at national as well as regional levels of the union. One of the things which organisational management implies is the emergence of a division of labour and the creation of hierarchical structures within the organisation. Within this new organisational division of labour, the role of the secretaries becomes pivotal as they perform roles equivalent to those of a regional manager (in the case of a regional secretary) and a chief executive officer (in the case of the general secretary).

The union has now set up a staff consultative committee whose function is to facilitate

consultation with officials on conditions of employment. Although there is concern that the structure should be “used constructively, minimising the employer employee attitude”,⁷⁵ indications are that, generally, the union has embraced the same paradigm of managing employer-employee relations as private sector companies and state institutions.

Organisational governance

NUMSA is one of the post-1973 unions which managed to build a strong approach to organisational governance based on the tradition of worker control. Osborn Galeni first joined a union, the South African Boilermakers’ Society, in 1977. However, he and his fellow workers soon became frustrated with the union because of its failure to alleviate the hardships of the workers. Then in 1980 the workers joined MAWU and Galeni was elected a shop steward. Soon thereafter he and his fellow shop stewards were taken for training on how the union works and how they should deal with workers’ problems. In that way he and his fellow workers became socialised into the tradition of worker control where they learnt that shop stewards are “senior to officials”.

They [officials] participated. We had this thing that we are all equal, the organisation is ours. But on other issues that needed strategic planning we put them aside. For instance, if there were disciplinary actions amongst shop stewards we would not want an official to participate because shop stewards are senior to officials. Even when we were to vote for something, officials would not participate. Officials linked with researchers and the whole world, lawyers, on how to run campaigns. Because of that when we came to those areas you can say they were powerful. But what was important is to look at the input, but we would decide for ourselves. Many officials were brought in like Duncan and other young boys, in that way they would manipulate the true direction of information, but it was not as blindly as today. One thing that was sure is, we say in meetings when it came to wage negotiations ‘the money we want is this and that’s it’. We had power and took decisions, unlike now. When you compare the time then and now, there is a vast difference. Ownership of union has shifted to office bearers led by union officials.⁷⁶

According to Bethuel Maserumule, a former NUMSA shop steward and regional secretary, the tradition of worker control was strongest among the so-called workerist unions, most of which

were in FOSATU. He argues that the value of worker control was in ensuring that union members identified closely with the organisation and its decisions and he saw vibrant shopfloor structures of the union as “future units of the workers’ self-rule”.

However, worker control has always been a contested issue inside NUMSA. According to Maserumule, there were times when some officials did not “work hard for their politics”, meaning that they opted for ‘cheap solutions’. He got this phrase from Bernie Fanaroff, a former national organiser of NUMSA, and it means “treating workers’ demands as if they are your own, in which case you cannot provide cheap solutions. You seek as much substantively vibrant, valid and progressive solutions to a problem that you yourself could feel comfortable with”.⁷⁸ Maserumule asserts that there have always been officials who are prepared to manipulate workers and thus subvert the principle of worker control.

Look, there has always been a thin spread of leaders who could stand their ground on philosophical, theoretical and policy political questions. On the basic components of politics we could argue. But the more we have to support them through and through, then the capacity to do so starts to decline. And I think that brings us back to the idea ‘how well entrenched was worker control’? I think you have one set of officials at head office, another set at provincial and local level, right. One must be careful not to generalise and to say only the head office-based ones were guilty of manipulation. I think officials at provincial and local level would always contest ideas and sometimes the ideas they contest and win, are not imbibed by workers to the extent that after such ideas are accepted the workers cannot live the whole process of defending them and monitoring their implementation and compliance all the way. So if the local level officials want something through the organisation’s structures and it goes up, more often the local level officials do not sit in the national structures. So the workers who go there are pitted against the head officials, the heavyweight officials, and can’t sustain debates with that layer of officials and intellectuals. So the positions would simply wither away.⁷⁹

He illustrates this point by using an example from the 1989 national congress of NUMSA. At that congress worker delegates from the Wits regions (East and West) who are known for their militant politics made proposals about the political direction of the union. Thereafter, the intellectuals in these delegations had to word the proposals into draft resolutions. The draft

conclude this section with an edited extract from the interview.

Tom: These new people [officials] have no patience with people who can't speak English. They want educated people because the uneducated ones make them go up and down and they get annoyed. An official just takes over and does things the way he or she feels. Even when they deal with issues they go to management first. Our tradition is to go to workers first, take shop stewards with you then go to management. Whatever is said will be said in their presence. The new officials these days go to management alone and workers complain that they just saw them coming out of management offices.

SB: Are you saying it is only new and young officials who do not have patience? Is there no such tendency among officials who have been around for long?

Tom: As I'm saying, these ones are well-educated. There is a difference between the educated and the uneducated ones. The educated know even if they can be dismissed they have ample opportunities. He is not even scared to tell them that he is not stuck where he is and that he can't be disciplined by uneducated people. Some of the workers are afraid to lose a person with such skill and they think who will speak for them if he goes. They think they have found somebody but not seeing that he is messing things up. You will find that that person runs the show in that company. He will be giving instructions to shop stewards on what to do.

SB: I'm sure you know many people who started more or less with you in the 1970s or 1980s. Are there still some left or is it mostly the younger generation?

Tom: The remaining ones are the younger generation. Those we started with, the majority have left.

SB: In your opinion what is worker control (since you started working in the union) and how have you been seeing it recently?

Tom: Workers are supposed to be in the forefront and we as officials are supposed to guide them. That is why in union structures as an official you can't be an office-bearer. Your duty is to guide and educate them. These days shop stewards are scared to face management. The union is in the firm not at the offices, the workers are the union themselves. They are supposed to fight their own issues themselves and not rely on an official that he will come to the firm and fight for them. That is how we worked. We only intervened when they had already started the work. We were advisors. Just like a boxer trainer. When the boxer gets in the ring you're not there. Everything is in the boxer's hands. As a trainer you now observe and look at the mistakes.

SB: That's a useful word, trainer, because one of the things I remember when I was in

the union is that some of the things an organiser is supposed to do is build, educate and train leadership even if you're not in the education department. Do you think that today officials are able to play the role of trainers in terms of building leadership?

Tom: No. In the past what was happening is that when we were organising a new company we called a general meeting in that company and explained to them about a union. Then the process of stop orders will start. Shop stewards in that company must be trained on what a union is, and know conflict between management and workers and know the interest of each. Although management can tell them we are one big happy family, they should know that there is no such a thing. Interests are not the same. That is what we educated workers about. Shop stewards were taught on being shop stewards. As an organiser you made shop stewards from a certain company come in and discussed with them one, two and three. There were no workshops for two to four days. No, we did that on our own in the office.

SB: *Maybe then a union was part of the struggle and this may not be the case today. Do you think today for many people working for a union is still part of the struggle?*

Tom: Working for union today is just part of being employed. It's not a struggle. That is why some are in the union to earn a living, that's all.

SB: *How many people, in your view, are in the union because of commitment to the struggle?*

Tom: They are very few.⁸⁴

Organisational culture

The collective organisational culture which we discussed in relation to SAMWU in Chapter 3 and CEPPWAWU in Chapter 4 also prevailed in NUMSA. Thus, in this section we do not aim to repeat the points of similarity with these other unions. The collective culture was always contested and there were countless instances where individuals displayed divisive, anti-democratic and individualistic tendencies which were in contrast to it. These tendencies existed side-by-side with the collective, self-sacrificing organisational culture even though in the past they never posed a threat of subverting this culture which was then entrenched in the union. However, in recent years some of these tendencies have become more pronounced and have, at times, threatened to undermine the collectivist organisational fabric of NUMSA.

The main feature which these tendencies have in common is individualism. Even though there may be cases where worker leaders are involved, the majority of those implicated in these individualistic tendencies are full-time officials. Firstly, there is the question of corruption which is a recurring theme in union reports and other official documents. In the days of TUACC in Durban corruption was limited to theft of petty cash from union offices. However, in recent years it has involved substantial amounts of money and other expensive items. NUMSA president, Mthuthuzeli Tom, cites a case in December 1998 when a NUMSA organiser was made a gift of a lawnmower by a lawnmower manufacturing company. The incident occurred on 'shut down' day when workers were having the customary end-of-the-year *braai*. The organiser phoned management and negotiated to get the lawnmower as a free gift. The boss agreed to give the lawnmower but explained that workers were at the *braai* because it was the last day of the year for production. Apparently the organiser was desperate because he wanted to use the machine during the Christmas holidays. The boss then got a group of workers together to go and assemble the machine quickly. When the workers inquired why it was so urgent to have the machine, the boss told them, "You are assembling it for your own organiser." The workers came back the following year and reported the matter to the union office. The organiser was dismissed!⁸⁵

Addressing the 1991 national congress of NUMSA, then president, Daniel Dube made reference to an internal conflict in the Northern Cape region and how the union had removed a corrupt regional official. He then issued an uncompromising statement asserting that "corruption will be corruption despite what the corrupt may do to destabilise the organisation".⁸⁶ This theme came up once again at the 2000 national congress when the Secretariat reported that officials in the Western Transvaal region had been charged for misappropriating workers' death benefit funds.⁸⁷ In addition, the report, in a general observation about staff, noted that "corruption and theft are a worrying factor".⁸⁸

Secondly, gender discrimination and sexism has always been a contentious issue in NUMSA. This theme is discussed in a separate section below.

Thirdly, racial conflict has been one of those issues that people in the union spoke to their friends and close comrades about. However, there were moments when it came to the fore and threatened to rock the organisational boat and to expose the fragility of the non-racialism of the union movement. Accusations of racism took two forms, namely black officials and some workers accusing white officials of racism and, white officials and some worker leaders accusing black officials and workers of being racist. In the former case, leading African officials and worker leaders formed a small lobby group known as the African Caucus (the AC) in the late 1980s because there was a strong perception that “our organisation is in the hands of whiteys” and the AC was aimed at “ensuring that the trade union is in the hands of its own people”.⁸⁹ In the latter case, from the late 1980s onwards some white officials often felt uncomfortable in their roles in the union. In 1994 former NUMSA national organiser, Geoff Schreiner, argued that if unions wanted to retain skilled and experienced officials they had to stem the “anti-intellectual currents which run in some parts of the movement (quite often merely thinly disguised racial antagonisms)” and make all officials feel valued and recognised.⁹⁰ This serves to illustrate that the tradition of non-racialism in the union movement never succeeded in eliminating these racial antagonisms. According to Moses Mayekiso the “black-white gap”, which often translated into an inequality of power relations between white officials on the one hand, and black officials and worker leaders on the other, has always been present in the trade union movement.⁹¹

Fourthly, individualism also manifests itself in the form of cliques which mobilise support for certain individuals. The history of NUMSA consist of many examples of such cliques or power bases. Of course a distinction should be made between informal networks, or political caucuses, and cliques formed for the purpose of defending or promoting individual interests. Both of these are present in NUMSA. There is a division of opinion regarding the desirability of political caucuses inside the union with some, such as Fred Petersen, holding the view that these kinds of caucuses are “not damaging” to the organisation and that even though they are “a little bit naughty or uncomradely” they are “fine”.⁹² The cliques which concern the union the most are those which officials, and even some workers, use “to protect themselves when they are not doing their jobs, or to push their own political line”. The reason for this concern is that these

cliques can lead to undemocratic practices , undermine union structures and protect corrupt practices and individuals.⁹³

Fifthly, the union has seen a lot of in-fighting in recent years and seems that some of the ‘smear campaigns and character assassinations’ cited in the 2000 Secretariat Report were also characterised by ethnic mobilisation by certain officials and worker leaders.

The extent to which the ethnic question in the organisation emerges mischievously around local, regional and national elections in a Union with a proud tradition devoid of ethnicity and discrimination, is an issue that Congress must not fail in its duty to preserve the character of the organisation and tackle this problem both organisationally and politically.⁹⁴

The union has experienced a very high turnover of general secretaries in the last decade and most of the ethnic mobilisation has been in relation to that position. The background to it is that NUMSA’s general secretaries have been drawn from activists who originate from the Eastern Cape, which implies that all of them have come from one ethnic group. The election of a successor to Enoch Godongwana, who vacated the position to take up a political appointment in his home region, the Eastern Cape, was characterised by considerable in-fighting but eventually Mbuyiselo Ngwenda, also from this region, was elected. Following the death of Ngwenda early in 1999 a succession stalemate ensued when it became impossible for the union to appoint someone else in his place. The then deputy general secretary, Peter Dantjie, who originates from another region, was once again a contender for the position. However, in a context characterised by “smear and character assassination by those who saw themselves fit to take the position” the union decided against electing a replacement and instead deployed union president Mthuthuzeli Tom to Head Office to work with Dantjie to run the union until the next national congress.⁹⁵ However, ten months later Dantjie, who had not been considered for the top position, resigned from the union and took up a managerial position at Samancor, a company organised by NUMSA.

Finally, a broader tendency which is part of the emerging individualism in NUMSA and other unions, is one which is driven by what one official termed “the race to riches”.

I always say to people, you know, in South Africa our people are in a race to riches. Everyone wants to see himself tomorrow, herself tomorrow, being a rich individual, you know. And I always say, you know, the pyramid is narrow on top, but it’s very broad at the bottom. So, why worry about going to the top of the pyramid. Why don’t you demand that the base should be the area where everything is taking place?⁹⁶

This ‘race to riches’ underscores the extent to which the collectivist organisational culture has eroded within NUMSA and other unions. It takes many different forms as unionists use the union to position themselves for upward mobility within and beyond the union movement. This theme will be revisited in the discussion in Chapter 7. However, we must qualify this by noting that the existence within these unions of countervailing tendencies which seek to reverse this erosion of the collectivist union culture. In particular, within NUMSA and COSATU as a whole the “assumption that the union ought to be controlled by workers” is still very strong and is often invoked by those who want to challenge the power of full-time officials.⁹⁷ In this regard Webster has argued that “norms of democratic practice have become deeply entrenched among rank and file activists who interact regularly with their officials”. In our case, the conflict at Volkswagen (VWSA or VW) which we discuss below, is an example of these countervailing tendencies which seek to slow down or reverse the erosion of the collectivist organisational culture of NUMSA.

Gender relations

The occupational differentiation which we identified in the other case studies in Chapters 3 and 4 is also present in NUMSA. For example, in 1991 only two of the union’s 110 administrative staff were male while only four of the its 150 non-administrative staff (organisers, regional and branch secretaries, field workers and key head office staff) were female.⁹⁸ This is a very dismal record for the union, considering that one of its forerunners, MAWU, had a woman general secretary as

far back as 1977 in the person of June-Rose Nala and again in 1984 when Thembi Nabe was elected into the position. This lack of progress can be attributed to a development in recent years which involved a “redefinition of the jobs of union officials”, particularly that of the secretary.

In earlier years a union secretary was viewed as a lowly job. The incumbent was seen as ‘only a secretary’, often appointed by the executive and responsible for taking minutes and dealing with correspondence. Over the years the situation has changed. The position is now seen as a political one, and politics is seen as the domain of men. General secretaries, regional secretaries and branch secretaries are now elected officials holding real power. With the change in job definition has come a change in the likelihood of finding a woman elected as secretary.⁹⁹

In the new union environment and organisational culture dominated by individualism and power struggles women are, more often than not, the losers. In 1993 COSATU held a National Women’s Meeting and Maggie Magubane, then a NUMSA gender co-ordinator, was one of her union’s delegates at the meeting. In the report she prepared for the office of the general secretary after the meeting she wrote that there was gender discrimination in the unions and that this translated into “parallel tracks for women (administrators) and men (organisers)”.¹⁰⁰ Ruth Mhlongo is a NUMSA member who served the union for many years as a shop steward before being elected as a local government councillor for Alexandra in Johannesburg in 1995. She says that if she were to lose her seat in the council she would apply for a job in government rather than the union because the union does not employ female unionists as organisers. They only employ them in administrative jobs. Mhlongo argues that there is “nepotism within the union which acts against women”.¹⁰¹

The national leadership of the union have openly acknowledged that there is a problem. The 2000 Secretariat Report argued that the real problem facing the union was “the stereotypes that limit women’s access to certain positions in the workplace and their organisations”.¹⁰² The report also observed that there had been “a reversal of the progress made in the past of electing women to leadership positions”. It reported that only one of the union’s nine regions had elected a woman as a regional chairperson and only five of the 60 central committee delegates were

women, and urged delegates to ensure that “women/gender comrades” are “considered for jobs in the unions that are currently dominated by male comrades, e.g. organising, education, etc.”¹⁰³

The social and political environment

In the last two chapters we discussed the nature of the changes in the social and political environment in which unions operate and how this affects the role of full-time officials. In Chapter 4 we went further and delineated three types of full-time officials which have emerged in the changing environment, namely, the nostalgic ideological unionist, the career trade unionist and the entrepreneurial unionist. We also showed how these divisions articulate with generational differences among full-time officials. These cleavages are also present in NUMSA and, due to the large number of full-time officials which it employs, the scale on which the problems occur tends to be larger. Below we use the concept of generation as well as the framework of the three ideal types to show how the new social and political environment has impacted upon the unions.

Full-time officials in NUMSA are drawn from two generations of activists, which in this thesis we have referred to simply as the old generation and the new generation. The old generation includes all those who joined the unions in the 1970s and the greater part of the 1980s. Although a cut-off point in the form of a year can be simplistic and misleading, 1990 can be regarded as such a cut-off point, which means that the new generation emerged after 1990. The key distinguishing factor between the generations is their social and political experience which shaped their activism and orientation towards the union. The old generation joined the union as part of the struggle at a time when unions were either not recognised or when they were facing employer and state hostility and repression. Union activism thus demanded sacrifice and commitment from officials and loyalty to the organisational principles and traditions. Many of these officials are still in the union, even though their outlook and orientation may have undergone some changes. Indeed, many of these old generation officials have now embraced the outlook and orientation commonly found among new officials. Vuyisile Makhuphula, a new

generation official who has embraced the old traditions of the union, argues that some of these officials are developing new class interests.

They are all developing class interests because they are all saying, 'we didn't have an opportunity to study and all what not. These youngsters are coming and they are getting positions. So if we continue with the whole thing, we might not get these positions. Affirmative action may pass us. We may not be recipients if we continue with the old ways. So now they are trying to develop themselves. Some are studying, busy studying, doing everything, you know, so as to make it a point they have the basic education for them to get recognition in terms of the necessary positions.'¹⁰⁴

The new generation of officials, on the other hand, are those who joined the union movement since 1990 and their experience of politics and unionism was shaped by a different configuration of political and social circumstances. In particular, they did not experience the repression of the state and the intransigence of employers which was characteristic of the early years and their activism occurred under conditions of legality and access to resources which were unthinkable before. In addition, activism in a union carried the potential of status and recognition which could lead to enormous material rewards for the individual and thus union work became increasingly competitive and individualistic. There are many of these officials in NUMSA, some of whom come with university qualifications. In 1997 Mbuyiselo Ngwenda, then still the deputy general secretary, noted that the union was getting a lot of these "competent/qualified applicants, mostly black" and predicted that they would "project a different kind of unionism in the future if they rise to influential positions".¹⁰⁵ Although it is true that they project a different kind of unionism, this unionism represents a departure from the established traditions which have been the hallmark of NUMSA. According to an official in the Eastern Cape some of these officials come with the arrogant attitude which makes them ask workers, "why, who are you? I mean, how can you want me to report to you?".¹⁰⁶

As argued elsewhere in this thesis the situation is not simply that of different generations. Cross-cutting generational differences are the three types of union officials we referred to above. The nostalgic ideological unionist would like to restore NUMSA to its former strength and militancy.

For these officials the struggle for socialism has not been lost, it has only suffered some temporary setbacks. As noted in Chapter 4, these officials are drawn from the few remaining old generation unionists as well as from younger idealists in the new generation who have heard and read about the 'golden era' of militant unionism in NUMSA. The difficulty that these officials are facing at the moment is that their ranks are diminishing as a result of the fact that some in their ranks have shifted towards the position held by the other types of officials or have left the union movement for politics and business.

Despite the fact that many union officials continue to voice the same rhetoric as the ideological unionists, the reality is that many of them have now taken a conscious decision to become career trade unionists. These are unionists who have made a career of unionism and are carving niches for themselves as technocrats in different areas of unionism such as labour law, union international relations or collective bargaining. Once again, these officials come from the ranks of both the old and new generations. Many of them have come to realise the virtue of personal development and are thus doing a variety of part-time courses to equip themselves for the changing trade union labour market. NUMSA has been able to retain many of the officials in this group because its salaries are among the highest in COSATU.¹⁰⁷ If an oligarchy emerges within NUMSA it will come from the ranks of officials in this group.

The third type of official, the entrepreneurial unionist, is drawn largely from the ranks of the new generation of officials. These officials are unashamedly individualistic and ambitious and thus come with a very instrumental orientation into the unions. They are aware that a *curriculum vitae* which indicates that one has worked for NUMSA, a leading COSATU affiliate, means a lot in the labour market. NUMSA president, Mthuthuzeli Tom, says these officials usually come with tertiary educational qualifications, work in the union for anything between two and five years and then use that experience as leverage to get lucrative jobs in big corporations or non-governmental organisations.¹⁰⁸ Of course, there are also some old generation officials who have realised that ambition and individualism can earn one good rewards. What all these officials share in common is the belief that the end justifies the means and will thus not let sentiment or

principle stand in the way of their ambitions.

The political and career agendas of the types of union officials manifest themselves in different spheres of the day-to-day life of the union and often officials make and break alliances with like-minded groups to achieve their ends. Hence in the last ten years NUMSA leadership have been lamenting the fact that the union is always beset by a lack of commitment, a lack of discipline, in-fighting, corruption and violent threats. At the 6th national congress the Secretariat reported that among the “common characteristics” of NUMSA’s regions were a “lack of will/commitment from staff and leadership to serve the organisation and members selflessly” and that there is “internal conflict that does not serve the needs of members”.¹⁰⁹ Over the last ten years or so the union held scores of disciplinary enquiries and disciplined and dismissed many officials.

According to one long-standing official of the union, the individualism and ‘careerism’ which are present in the union are not limited to low-level officials. Using the COSATU/ANC/SACP alliance to illustrate his point, he argues that the federation has been too soft on the ANC government, particularly on job losses, because “people are scared”.

It’s careerism, you see. You need to be smart so that you can be able to get into the same system. If you’re destructive you may be closing the chances of getting on board. People who lead that [anti-job losses] strike are not prominent members of COSATU. COSATU leadership is closer to government and cannot assist workers to fight even the unemployment that is taking place in the private sector. The workers are not lazy. It’s the leadership that is selling out to be in Parliament. It’s like people in a queue for positions. Leadership is closer to the window and it cannot do anything to endanger their positions by going to the back of line. That is the problem, not the workers.¹¹⁰

The trends identified above and the organisational difficulties they entail for NUMSA are likely to accelerate as the staff of the union continues to reflect a diminishing proportion of old generation officials and a growing number of new generation officials. Other implications of this changing composition of union staff are discussed in section 4 below.

The global economic and political environment

In the last two chapters we have already identified the implications of the changing global economic and political environment for union employment in the unions which are the focus of this study. Although NUMSA has a political policy which is socialist, the ideological unionists are too disorganised to ensure that the organisational modernisation model that the union adopts is one that is oriented towards this long-term goal. Instead, the career unionists and the entrepreneurs are able to use the same socialist rhetoric to lend legitimacy to their versions of organisational modernisation. The modernisation projects of the latter groups do not seek to challenge global capitalist hegemony but seek to reconcile the union to these global capitalist imperatives.

Organisational Modernisation in NUMSA

In Chapters 3 and 4 we discussed organisational modernisation and noted that it is an inexorable process of organisational change whose goal is to ensure efficient organisational management in response to a growth in membership and all that it entails. One of the ways in which NUMSA has sought to do this is the development of a division of labour which finds expression in a hierarchical grading structure (see Table 18 below). There seems to be consensus in the union that a hierarchical structure is the best way of ensuring efficient execution of tasks by its officials. None have raised the issue of inequality of power relations which this structure implies for the union.

Table 18: NUMSA Grading Structure and Minimum Salaries, 1998

Grade	Position	Minimum salary
Grade 6	General secretary Deputy general secretary	R 6 338.00
Grade 5	Sector co-ordinators National legal officers Regional secretaries Bookkeepers Computer analyst	R5 282.00
Grade 4	Regional organisers Regional legal officers Regional education officers Regional motor organisers Regional administrators	R4 437.00
Grade 3	Local organisers	R4 065.00
Grade 2	Administrators	R3 225.00
Grade 1	Cleaners/messengers	R2 034.00

Source: NUMSA. 1998. *Staff Conditions of Employment as at 5 March 1998 as approved by the NUMSA Central Committee and the National Executive Committee.*

Experience in NUMSA has shown that hierarchy alone is not sufficient for resolving the inefficiencies of its structures and administration. At the union's 5th national congress in 1996 the general secretary recommended a radical transformation of the union so that it could manage to implement "the new and more complex program that is demanded in the new context". He argued that there was no room for half-measures and used a metaphor close to the everyday experiences of some of the unions' membership: "These problems cannot be overcome in a piecemeal and half hearted way. Our organisation needs not new tyres or repainting, but a new engine."¹¹ The report then proposed several measures which we highlight below.

- ❑ The union must select a “specialist and highly trained core of organisers” in each region.
- ❑ The role of the administrator must be transformed so that he/she can provide direct service to shop stewards.
- ❑ The union must restructure staff salaries so that officials can be “remunerated for skills acquired”. The report also recommended that staff should be given incentives to improve their qualifications. “At the higher levels, we should accommodate higher rates of pay so that we can attract professionally qualified staff such as accountants, economists, researchers, educators, journalists, etc.”
- ❑ The union should recruit staff who can advise the union on “policy and technical issues” such as training and grading and macroeconomic policy.
- ❑ The union must redesign its administration to make it efficient.
- ❑ The union become more efficient and systematic in the way it plans its work and makes decisions.

The report then went on to criticise the notion of worker control as being a “simplistic rule” which has come to mean that “everybody is responsible for everything and in practice nobody is responsible”. The report favoured an approach which empowered the secretaries at all the levels and the national office-bearers to “act decisively without lengthy discussions in locals, RECs, CCs, etc”. Furthermore, it made a specific proposal to the effect that issues to do with staff discipline and budgets should be delegated to the general secretary, section heads at head office (budgets only) and regional secretaries. The report ended by admitting that some of the proposals were controversial but asserted that they were the only serious way to reposition the union, and appealed to delegates to “grit our teeth and make these changes”.¹¹²

These were bold proposals indeed, and at one level it is understandable that the general secretary felt that such radical moves were necessary. The organisation had grown enormously since the days when the participatory approach first emerged. The proposals represented a bold approach to organisational modernisation which implied a shift away from worker control as many workers and shop stewards had come to know it in NUMSA. However, they did not amount to a

jettisoning of worker control. It would seem that these ideas were not entirely new among the leaders of NUMSA. We have already made reference to the then NUMSA national organiser, Bobby Marie's assertion, back in 1992, that worker control had become "cumbersome if not impractical". Among the many proposals that Marie made was one which suggested that office-bearers and elected officials should be "given clear executive powers" to avoid the practice of "discussing every issue in every structure".¹¹³

In 1994 Geoff Schreiner, another former NUMSA national organiser, also made proposals for restructuring the union movement after apartheid. His proposals echo some of the ideas suggested by Marie and those contained in the 1996 report of the union's general secretary. Firstly, he argued that since the collapse of communism there was "a greater awareness of the complexities of modern-day economics, of the value of markets as mechanisms of exchange and even of the usefulness of private enterprise as the vehicle for economic growth". Secondly, he proposed the employment of personnel officers and human resource managers within the unions. Thirdly he suggested that unions should pay market-related salaries in order to retain skilled staff. Fourthly, he appealed to unionists to accept that "as issues become more complex substantial decision making will end up in the hands of individuals rather than structures of any kind". He therefore proposed that union staff, office-bearers and appointed experts and consultants should be given "broad-based mandates to work on behalf of the organisation in a range of different spheres". Finally, Schreiner proposed that 'union management' should be more systematic.¹¹⁴

What all these debates and proposals have in common is the fact that they are attempts to grapple with perceived administrative problems within the union movement, specifically NUMSA. In this sense many of them are proposals for organisational modernisation in the unions which are partially modelled on the elitist model of organisational management and modernisation to be found in existing institutions in society. Thus, some of these proposals represent a particular project of organisational modernisation and yet are presented as if they are part of a single, universal and benign, project of modernisation. Yet the underlying principles behind many of

the proposals are those which form the basis of conventional institutions in the rest of society at the core of which there is inequality of power relations between top leadership and the rank-and-file. Although these documents suggest a 'balance' between participation and efficiency, it does not seem as though any thought has been given to the practical and political implications of this balance.

More fundamentally, the proposals cited above have the potential of intensifying what we have termed the *dilemma of leadership* within NUMSA. This would occur as a result of a contradiction between a project of organisational modernisation which seeks to strengthen the hand of full-time union officials and office-bearers in a quest for administrative efficiency on the one hand, and the tradition of worker control which seeks to diminish that power on the other. Earlier in this thesis we have argued that the elitist notion of leadership which is implied by this particular project of organisational modernisation would eventually accord union leadership the same status that executives and managers are accorded in business and government, including all the trappings of power such as expensive cars, astronomical salary packages and new lifestyles and tastes which have no relation to those of the working class which they claim to represent. The conflict within the union at VW in Uitenhage illustrates the dilemma of leadership and this discussion now turns to a consideration of the organisational implications of that conflict.

Organisational Implications of the VW Conflict

The conflict between NUMSA and some of its members at the Uitenhage plant of Volkswagen South Africa early in 2000 highlights some of the issues to do with organisational management and modernisation which we have discussed above. More specifically, it points to the dilemma of leadership to which we have alluded. Of course the VW conflict contains a multiplicity of factors and causes, overlaid one on top of the others in a complex and often contradictory manner. The full story of the conflict is too complex to try to unravel within the limited space that we have here.¹¹⁵ Below we provide a summary of the events and offer some explanations.

Workers at VW first joined a union, the UAW (discussed earlier in this chapter), in the 1970s. With about 4 000 organised workers, the factory was the largest NUMSA organised factory in the entire Eastern Cape region. COSATU's former president, John Gomomo, was a worker at VW until he went to Parliament in 1999.

On 20 January 2000 about 1 300 NUMSA members at VW went on strike protesting against what they perceived to be a lack of worker control in the union. According to the treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee which represented the striking workers, the workers were unhappy about the violation of key union principles: "In the first place, NUMSA violated worker control. Secondly, it became clear that they work hand-in-glove with management".¹¹⁶ The strike lasted for about three weeks and when workers failed to heed management's ultimatum to return to work, they were dismissed.

Various interested parties and observers have tried to explain the VW crisis in different ways. The case even attracted the attention of President Thabo Mbeki on the occasion of the opening of Parliament on 4 February 2000.

In this context we must warn very strongly that illegal and unjustified strikes such as the one recently experienced at Volkswagen in Uitenhage cannot be tolerated. Jobs, a better life for our people in the context of a growing economy and our standing in the eyes of the investor community cannot be held hostage by elements pursuing selfish and anti-social purposes. Accordingly, the Government has worked with the management at Volkswagen as well as NUMSA to ensure that the problem created by some irresponsible elements at this plant is resolved. The Government will not waver from this position.¹¹⁷

From the point of view of NUMSA's regional and national leadership, the conflict was "an example of a counter-revolution waged from within."¹¹⁸ Silumko Nondwangu, the then Eastern Cape regional secretary who is now the general secretary, also attributed the conflict to the work of old union and community activists who were disgruntled because they had been overlooked for positions inside the COSATU/ANC/SACP alliance at local, provincial and national levels.¹¹⁹

Another view which had currency within the leadership structures of the union was that the conflict was part of a wider conspiracy which was not targeted just at NUMSA, but at the ANC and its alliance partners in general.

This thing is not just against NUMSA. It is targeted against the broader alliance, the ANC as a whole. But there is no point in targeting small unions, you know. There is no point in targeting weak unions. You go for the strongest union, and then you destabilise them. It is obviously the case that COSATU will feel the pressure if you destabilise NUMSA and then thereafter you have a freeway to enter the ANC and break it up into pieces. And so you come up with the UDM, because I'm saying that the UDM is taking the forefront in this particular matter presently.¹²⁰

However, it would seem that the conflict was much more complex than the conspiracy theories of the State President and the union leadership allowed for. A more plausible explanation is one which traces the roots of the conflict to the union membership at VW and the changing character of the union itself. At a broader level the economic and political environment of Uitenhage and the larger Eastern Cape region have to be taken into account. VW has had a very low turnover of staff and thus many of the workers there had participated in many militant union campaigns to fight for new rights and to defend their gains. Their organisational orientation was founded on the central tenets of the worker control tradition of NUMSA.

Thus, it seems that at the heart of the conflict was a complex combination of four factors which together triggered the events that led to the dismissal of the 1 300 workers. Firstly, the conflict was a clash between a narrow version of worker control, on the one hand, and an organisational modernisation project which increasingly took power away from the old generation of largely unskilled and long-serving members of the union and put it into the hands of younger, better-educated and politically pragmatic shop stewards and full-time officials. The perception among many of the old generation workers was that these shop stewards were violating the principle of worker control, something which would result in the workers losing control of the union. This was one of the underlying tensions in the conflict regarding the signing of the Golf A4 agreement by the shop stewards committee.

Firstly, there were old [senior] shop stewards and then due to *latest developments in the union which required that young educated people should become shop stewards*, all the *istokhwe esidala* [literally: 'old stock', to refer to older shop stewards] had to step down. So after the *istokhwe esidala* had stepped down, the *ulutsha* [youth] took over. Now, those are the shop stewards who created problems by not obtaining mandates.¹²¹ [emphasis added]

Thus, what was a conflict between two approaches to running the union also expressed itself in generational terms. The *istokhwe esidala* then constituted itself into the *indlu yeengwevu* [house of elders] to try to rein in the younger shop stewards who were perceived to be unaccountable. A former shop steward who was himself part of the *indlu yeengwevu* explained how the structure operated.

Indlu yeengwevu is a shopfloor committee that a shop steward has to deal with. Now, it is not possible for a shop steward to know all the workers. Now a committee is then elected so that the shop steward can consult with this committee in his department or area. Now this house of elders is made up of all these small committees based in all the departments. There are maybe about two guys or three guys in each department. The young and educated shop stewards did not consult the *iingwevu*.¹²²

In the context of the perceived threats to worker control and the economic squeeze that they faced in the region, these workers wanted to reassert their power to control many aspects of the union and its interactions with management. For example, when the union officials informed them that they could not liquidate their provident fund and withdraw their money, they argued that worker control didn't work that way. If they wanted to withdraw their money, no official had a right to stop them.

All the above occurred in a context where the union had neglected the educational dimension of organisation at VW. Before Mbuyiselo Ngwenda came to work for the union full time, he was an education officer based at the company and paid by VW. However, he was never replaced, a factor which contributed to the widening of the rift between the old stock and the modernisers as represented by the younger shop stewards and full-time officials. Plaatjie also argues that for

more than four years the union had failed to call general meetings to debate issues and politicise its members, and thus failed to take its members “on board”.

Secondly, Uitenhage is a small town in an economically depressed region of the country. For the workers of VW this translated into a financial squeeze which saw many of them sink deeper into debt. This indebtedness often induced levels of desperation which resulted in the workers wanting to take steps which the leadership and officials regarded as being unreasonable, such as the proposal by the workers to withdraw their monies from the provident fund. Failure by the officials to appreciate or sympathise with the desperation was understood as an unwillingness to respect the wishes of the workers.

Thirdly, the above was compounded by fear of the destabilising effect of restructuring and new forms of work reorganisation which were part of the Golf A4 agreement signed by union officials and some of the shop stewards. The workers feared that the provisions of the agreement, such as the reduction of the number of tea breaks and restructuring of annual leave in a way which effectively did away with the customary Christmas closure, would result in an erosion of their hard-won gains.

Finally, some of the workers felt that they had been overlooked by their organisations (NUMSA, COSATU, the ANC and the SACP) for political positions and that instead, younger workers had been rewarded. At a general meeting of the dismissed VW workers on 14 May 2000, several of these “veterans” such as Vuyo Kwinana, were given special seats on the stage and were presented as the authentic leadership who had resisted the temptation to ‘sell the workers out’. None of the above is adequate, on its own, to explain the VW conflict. In the thick of the conflict these factors articulated with one another in very complex ways which call into question simplistic explanations based on conspiracy theories.

As we have suggested above, the VW situation is another manifestation of the dilemma of leadership which occurs as a result of a contradiction between a project of organisational

modernisation which seeks to strengthen the hand of full-time union officials and office-bearers in a quest for administrative efficiency on the one hand, and the tradition of worker control which seeks to diminish that power on the other. In the acrimony that characterised the conflict, many seemingly 'irrational' actions were taken by both sides in the conflict (workers and union). However, a closer examination shows that the conflict was between workers who hark back to the days of worker control on the one hand, and some shop stewards, office-bearers and full-time officials who have embraced an elitist project of organisational modernisation as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the last of our three union case studies with a view to exploring the changing nature of the democratic tradition in the post-1973 unions in South Africa. We have shown that not only was NUMSA a model of the worker control tradition of unionism, but it was also a pioneering union in several respects. However, the project of organisational modernisation which seems to be taking root in the union today suggests that the tradition of democratic unionism has been eroded. However, as the VW conflict has shown, organisational modernisation in a trade union with a deep tradition of worker control results in a dilemma of leadership within the union's structures.

Our case studies have enabled us to identify four union traditions which merged to constitute the post-1973 tradition of democratic unionism. In this section we also examined why and how this tradition developed in the way that it did in the different unions which we studied. We then examined changes within the unions and in the national and global economic and political environments and examined how these have impacted on worker control in the post-1973 unions. In this way we explored processes of organisational modernisation and how they result in a change in the role of union officials. Finally, we examined the different forms that the dilemma of leadership takes in different union settings and identified the transformation of the trade union

official into three types, namely - the ideological unionist, the career unionist and the 'entrepreneur'.

The discussion in this section has highlighted the contradiction between union democracy (worker control) on the one hand, and organisational modernisation and administrative efficiency on the other. In Part III we examine whether or not it is possible for these contradictory imperatives to be reconciled in an organisation such as a trade union.

Notes:

1. Luckhardt, K. and Wall, B. 1980. *Organise... or Starve! The history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 182.
2. For details of union organisation in the metal and allied industries see Luckhardt and Wall, *ibid*; and Lambert, R. V. 1988. Political Unionism in South Africa: The South Africa Congress of Trade Unions, 1955 - 1965, unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
3. Bonnin, D. 1987. Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940 - 1987: The case of the B.T.R. Sarmcol workers, unpublished Master of Social Science dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, p. 171.
4. FOSATU. 1980. (AH1999/C1.9.1) *FOSATU Annual Report*, 1980, p. 3.
5. Lowry, D. 1999. *20 Years in the Labour Movement: The Urban Training Project and change in South Africa, 1971 - 1991*. Johannesburg: Wadmore, p. 119.
6. FOSATU. 1980. (AH1999/C1.9.1) *FOSATU Annual Report*, 1980, p. 2
7. Adler, G. M. 1994. 'The Factory Belongs to All Who Work in It': Race, class and collective action in the South African motor industry, 1967 - 1986, Unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, p. 220.
8. *ibid.*, p. 219.
9. Maree, J. 1992. Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy: The Rebirth of African Trade unions in South Africa in the 1970s. Unpublished manuscript., p. 217.
10. Webster, E. 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 132.
11. For a full discussion of this period of MAWU's history see Maree, J. 1992., *op. cit.*, pp. 218 - 252.
12. MAWU. 1975. (AH1999/B4.4) *MAWU Report to the 4th TUACC Council Meeting, 24 August 1975*.
13. MAWU. 1975. (AH1999/B4.4) *MAWU Report to the 4th TUACC Council Meeting, 24 August 1975*.
14. Maree, J. 1992. *op. cit.*, p. 164.
15. TUACC. 1975. (AH1999/B5.1.2) *Minutes of TUACC Secretariat Meeting, 01 December 1975*).

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16. TUACC. 1979. *(AH1999/B3) Minutes of TUACC NEC Meeting, 24 - 25 March 1979*, Wilgespruit.
 17. See Friedman, S. 1987. *Building Tomorrow Today: African workers in trade unions, 1970 - 1984*. Johannesburg: Ravan, p. 107; and Lowry, D. 1999. *op. cit.*, p. 69 and p. 119.
 18. *ibid.*, p. 69.
 19. Information regarding UAW structures is from Maree, J. 1992., *op. cit.*, pp. 636 - 640.
 20. *ibid.*, p. 639.
 21. See Webster, E. 1985. *op. cit.*, p. 184; and FOSATU. 1979. *(AH1999/CI.9.2.9) Donors Report on the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU)* by Alec Erwin, General Secretary, August 1979, p. 4.
 22. Kettledas, L. 1992. "Les Kettledas, NUMSA's National Secretary for Collective Bargaining, talks to Snuki Zikalala", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 6.
 23. FOSATU. 1984. *(AH1999/CI.9.1) FOSATU Report 1984*, p. 10. For an informative discussion of a different mode of operation and decision-making in TUCSA's parallel unions and their 'parent' unions see Hendler, P. 1980. "The Organization of Parallel Unions", in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 5, 6 & 7.
 24. Maree, J. 1982. "Democracy and Oligarchy in Trade Unions: The Independent Trade unions in the Transvaal and the Western Province General Workers' Union in the 1970s", in *Social Dynamics*, 8 (1), p. 51.
 25. Maree, J. 1984. "The Institute for Industrial Education and Worker Education", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 9, 8.
 26. Webster, E. 1985. *op. cit.*, pp. 249 - 50.
 27. *ibid.*, p. 253.
 28. For a detailed account of the split see Swilling, M. 1984. "Workers Divided: A critical assessment of the split in MAWU on the East Rand", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 10, 1.
 29. The unionists were David Sebabi, general secretary of MAWU, Sam Ntuli and Enoch Godongwana, both MAWU organisers, and Andrew Zulu, a MAWU shop steward who was vice-president of both MAWU and FOSATU.
 30. FOSATU. 1984. *(AH1999/CI.9.1) FOSATU Report 1984*, p. 4.
 31. Swilling, M. 1984., *op. cit.*, p118.

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32. An unnamed East Rand worker cited in Swilling, *ibid.*, p. 118.
 33. Kubheka, S. 1994. " 'The Struggle to be Reborn': 20 years of the labour movement (Sipho Kubheka speaks to Luli Callinicos)", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 5., p. 30.
 34. Swilling, M. 1984., *op. cit.*, pp. 116 - 117.
 35. Kubheka, S. 1994., *op. cit.*, p. 30.
 36. Swilling, M. 1984. *op. cit.*, pp. 115 -16.
 37. Author interview with leading NUMSA unionist, August 1999. This unionist specifically requested not to be named on this particular issue.
 38. NUMSA. 1989. **(AH2555/4.1.1.2)** *Minutes of the Launching Congress*, 22 - 24 May 1987.
 39. Other observers have also criticised the procedure followed in the union's decision to register on the basis that it was an example of "decisions that go beyond the immediate concerns of the shop floor [that] are made at leadership level with limited participation outside of this group" (Webster, E. 1985., *op. cit.*, p. 250). This criticism was made as part of a critique of worker control which pointed to a tendency to 'romanticise' what was, in reality, an 'imperfect' tradition. The reality was that non-working class intellectuals dominated union decision-making, and the registration issue illustrated this.
 40. Webster, E. 1983. "MAWU and the Industrial Council - A comment", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 8, 5, p. 14.
 41. *ibid.*, p. 18.
 42. LACOM. 1989. *Comrade Moss*. Johannesburg: Learn and Teach Publications, p. 71.
 43. Von Holdt, K. 1993a. "New Plan for NUMSA", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 17, 2, pp. 7 - 8. However, Von Holdt's PhD thesis on the trade unionism struggles in the workplace in Witbank argues that this strategy has failed and grassroots leaders of the union have moved into local government. For a detailed discussion see Von Holdt, K. 2000. *From Resistance to Reconstruction: A case study of trade unionism in the workplace and the community, 1980 - 1996*), unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
 44. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4a: Collective Bargaining)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, pp. 3 - 7.
 45. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 2: Political Orientation)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 6.
 46. NUMSA. 1996. *Constitution of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)* as amended at NUMSA's 5th National Congress, September 1996, p. 7.

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47. Webster, E. 1985., *op. cit.*, p. 250.
 48. Author interview with Moses Mayekiso, former NUMSA general secretary who is now the chief executive officer of Sanco Investment Holdings, Johannesburg, 11 August 1999.
 49. *ibid.*
 50. Tom, P. 1985. *My Life Struggle: The Story of Petrus Tom*. Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 61 - 62.
 51. A recent study of the contribution of the UTP tradition has argued that this neglect of the contribution of other political and ideological currents is not accidental. The author argues that there has been a deliberate attempt by the neo-Marxist political current which was dominant in FOSATU and COSATU to downplay the role of other activists. See Lowry, D. 1999. *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 52. Author interview with Moses Mayekiso, former NUMSA general secretary who is now the chief executive officer of Sanco Investment Holdings, Johannesburg, 11 August 1999.
 53. Author interview with Bobby Marie, former national organiser of NUMSA and program co-ordinator of DITSELA, Johannesburg, 26 October 1999. (Note: Marie left DITSELA at the end of 1999).
 54. Webster, E. 1985. *op. cit.*, p. 253.
 55. Fantasia, R. 1988. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, action and contemporary American workers*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.: University of California Press, pp. 19 - 20.
 56. Webster, E. 1979. "A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 8, pp. 48 - 49.
 57. Webster, E. 1995. "Taking Labour Seriously: Sociology: Sociology and labour in South Africa", in Van der Merwe, A. (ed.) *Industrial Sociology: A South African perspective*. Johannesburg: Lexicon Publishers, p. 15.
 58. Dube, D. 1991. **(AH2555/4.1.1.3)** *Opening Address by NUMSA President, Daniel Dube*, 3rd National Congress of NUMSA, 21 - 23 June 1991, p. 3.
 59. These figures do not include all the sectors organised by NUMSA. It is unclear whether sectors such as auto manufacturing are included under fabricated metals, etc. Some figures such as those in the category "Electricity, gas and water" include sectors outside the scope of NUMSA. No recent figures are available, but once again, given the large-scale loss of jobs in these sectors in recent years up-to-date figures would probably be much lower than suggested in this table.
 60. Author interview with Mthuthuzeli Tom, shop steward at Daimler-Chrysler, East London, and NUMSA president, Johannesburg, 23 August 1999.

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61. Webster, E. 1985. *op. cit.*, p. 209. For a full discussion of the contradictory nature of the migrant labour system see pages 206 - 212 of this source.
 62. Qabula, A. T. 1989. *A Working Life: Cruel beyond belief*. Durban: NUMSA, p. 98.
 63. Webster, E. 1979., "A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 8, p. 46. These figures should be treated with caution as they included officials shared with other unions, TUACC and those who were seconded to unions by the IIE to conduct education and training.
 64. FOSATU. 1980. **(AH1999/C1.9.1)** *FOSATU Annual Report, 1980*
 65. TUACC. 1977. **(AH1999/B5.1.4)** *TUACC Secretariat Minutes, 1 August 1977.*
 66. TUACC. 1977. **(AH1999/B5.1.4)** *TUACC Secretariat Minutes, 24 October 1977.*
 67. TUACC. 1978. **(AH1999/B3)** *Minutes of TUACC NEC Meeting, 18 - 19 November 1978.*
 68. MacShane, D., Plaut, M. and Ward, D. 1984. *Power! Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa*. Nottingham: Spokesman, p. 68.
 69. Author interview with Osborn Galeni, NUMSA national organiser for the engineering sector, Johannesburg, 10 August 1999.
 70. *ibid.*
 71. NUMSA. 1996. **(AH2555/4.1.1.5)** *General Secretary's Report to NUMSA 5th National Congress*, 25 - 29 September 1996, p. 241.
 72. NUMSA. 1991. **(AH2555/4.1.1.3)** *The General Secretary's Report to NUMSA Third National Congress*, June 1991, p. 38.
 73. Author interview with Fred Petersen, NUMSA Western Cape regional secretary, Cape Town, 9 May 2000.
 74. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 11.
 75. *ibid.*, p. 7.
 76. Author interview with Osborn Galeni, NUMSA national organiser for the engineering sector, Johannesburg, 10 August 1999.
 77. Author interview with Bethuel Maserumule, former shop steward, organiser and regional secretary of NUMSA, 30 July 1999.

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78. *ibid.*
 79. *ibid.*
 80. *ibid.*
 81. Author interview with Moses Mayekiso, former NUMSA general secretary who is now the chief executive officer of Sanco Investment Holdings, Johannesburg, 11 August 1999.
 82. Author interview with Vuyisile Ishmael Makhuphula, NUMSA organiser, East London, 18 May 2000.
 83. Tom, P. 1985., *op. cit.*, p. 68.
 84. Author interview with Petrus Tom, NUMSA local organiser, Vereeniging, 21 February 2000.
 85. Author interview with Mthuthuzeli Tom, shop steward at Daimler-Chrysler, East London, and NUMSA president, Johannesburg, 23 August 1999.
 86. Dube, D. 1991. *Opening Address by NUMSA President, Daniel Dube*, 3rd National Congress of NUMSA, 21 - 23 June 1991, p. 3.
 87. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 6.
 88. *ibid.*, p. 7.
 89. Author interview with NUMSA unionist. The interviewee asked for anonymity on this issue.
 90. Schreiner, G. 1994. "Restructuring the Labour Movement After Apartheid", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 3, p. 46.
 91. Author interview with Moses Mayekiso, former NUMSA general secretary who is now the chief executive officer of Sanco Investment Holdings, Johannesburg, 11 August 1999.
 92. Author interview with Fred Petersen, NUMSA Western Cape regional secretary, Cape Town, 9 May 2000.
 93. NUMSA. 1991. **(AH2555/4.1.1.3)** *The General Secretary's Report to NUMSA Third National Congress*, June 1991, p. 38.
 94. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 2: Political Orientation)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 8.
 95. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 4. Note Well: In most of the COSATU and NACTU unions

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- the president is a shop steward who is based at his or her workplace and only visits the union head office for meetings and other engagements. Thus Tom is based in East London and goes to work like all other shop stewards at his factory, Daimler-Chrysler South Africa, and is paid by the company. The only exception in COSATU is the president of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who is a full-time president and is based at the union's head office and is paid by the union.
96. Author interview with Vuyisile Ishmael Makhuphula, NUMSA organiser, East London, 18 May 2000.
 97. The notion of countervailing tendencies is discussed by Hyman, R. 1971. *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 29 - 33; and Webster, E. 1985. *op.cit.*, pp. 251 - 252.
 98. Baskin, J. 1991. *op. cit.*, p. 373.
 99. *ibid.*, p. 374.
 100. Magubane, M. 1993. **(AH2555/4.1.1.4)** *Report on COSATU National Women's Meeting* held on 3 - 5 September 1993, by M. Magubane, Gender Co-ordinator of NUMSA, 9 September 1993.
 101. Author interview with Ruth Mhlongo, NUMSA member and former shop steward at Hydrax an Konplast, Johannesburg, 19 February 1999.
 102. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 12.
 103. *ibid.* p. 13.
 104. Author interview with Vuyisile Ishmael Makhuphula, NUMSA organiser, East London, 18 May 2000.
 105. Interview with Jenny Grice, media officer, and Mbuyiselo Ngwenda, deputy general secretary, NUMSA, Johannesburg, 03 March 1997.
 106. Author interview with Babini Goni, NUMSA organiser, local co-ordinator and educator, East London, 18 May 2000.
 107. Interview with Jenny Grice, media officer, and Mbuyiselo Ngwenda, deputy general secretary, NUMSA, Johannesburg, 03 March 1997.
 108. Author interview with Mthuthuzeli Tom, shop steward at Daimler-Chrysler, East London, and NUMSA president, Johannesburg, 23 August 1999.
 109. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 4.

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110. Author interview with Osborn Galeni, NUMSA national organiser for the engineering sector, Johannesburg, 10 August 1999.
111. NUMSA. 1996. **(AH2555/4.1.1.5)** *General Secretary's Report to NUMSA 5th National Congress*, 25 - 29 September 1996, p. 241.
112. These proposals are in NUMSA. 1996. **(AH2555/4.1.1.5)** *General Secretary's Report to NUMSA 5th National Congress*, 25 - 29 September 1996, pp. 241 - 244.
113. Marie, B. 1992. "COSATU Faces Crisis: 'Quick Fix' methods and organizational contradictions", in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 5, p. 25.
114. These specific proposals are contained in Schreiner, G. 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 45 - 49.
115. A detailed account of the conflict appears in Forrest, K. 2000. "What Happened at VW?", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 24, 2.
116. Author interview with the Treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee, Uitenhage, 1 May 2000. This worker who is a former shop steward had been dismissed with the rest of the 1 300 . He did not want to reveal his identity. For convenience, in this discussion we refer to him as "the treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee".
117. Mbeki, T. 2000. "State of the Nation Address at the Opening of Parliament", 4 February 2000.
118. NUMSA. 2000. *Secretariat Report (Book 4b: Organizational)*, NUMSA 6th National Congress, 20 - 24 August 2000, Mafikeng, p. 5.
119. Author interview with Silumko Nondwangu, Eastern Cape regional secretary of NUMSA, Port Elizabeth, 15 and 16 May 2000.
120. Author interview with Nceba Plaatjie, a BTR shop steward who serves as NUMSA Uitenhage local chairperson and COSATU local chairperson, Uitenhage, 12 May 2000.
121. Author interview with the Treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee, Uitenhage, 1 May 2000.
122. *ibid.*

PART III

CONTESTING THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION: THE DILEMMA RESOLVED

In Part II we identified seven factors which shaped the democratic tradition which emerged in the post-1973 unions. Table 19 below presents a schematic summary of these factors as they applied to the different sectors organised by SAMWU, CEPPWAWU and NUMSA.

Table 19: Factors Which Shaped the Democratic Tradition in SAMWU, CEPPWAWU and NUMSA and Their Predecessors

<i>Variable</i>	<i>SAMWU</i>	<i>CEPPWAWU</i>	<i>NUMSA</i>
<i>Nature of the labour process</i>	Fragmented. Oriented towards providing public services.	Integrated and Fordist. Large numbers of workers under one roof.	Integrated and Fordist, large numbers of workers in single workplaces.
<i>The labour market</i>	Predominantly unskilled with smaller component of semi-skilled workers and artisans.	Initially unskilled but became predominantly semi-skilled in the 1970s and 1980s.	Initially unskilled but became predominantly semi-skilled in the 1970s and 1980s.
<i>Access to intellectual resources</i>	Weak. Unions produced organic intellectuals but they had no supportive networks.	Strong through UTP, FOSATU, COSATU. Unions also employed traditional intellectuals.	Strong internal and external resources. Through FOSATU, COSATU). Union also employed traditional intellectuals.
<i>The nature of the sector</i>	Public sector. An extension of the state. Not exposed to competition. Different legislative regime of regulation.	Private with presence of multi-national corporations. Key firms and sectors operating in competitive markets.	Private, many small operations but also many large firms, many of which were owned by multinational corporations.
<i>Union history</i>	"Deep roots" - pre-1973 registered and democratising and post-1973 militant and democratic unions.	Some pre-1973 influence but predominantly post-1973, militant.	Pre-1973 registered and democratising unions and post-1973 militant.
<i>Rural-urban divisions</i>	Predominantly rural-in-urban (migrant), but also urban.	Rural, rural-in-urban (migrant) and urban.	Rural, rural-in-urban (migrant) and urban.

We also showed that over the last decade or so the union movement has experienced unprecedented decomposition which has resulted in a change in the role of full-time officials and the emergence of new cleavages among these officials. These changes owe their origins to processes which are internal to the unions as well as to those which are external. We have used the notion of organisational modernisation to conceptualise the complex processes which have triggered these changes within individual unions and the labour movement as a whole. Before we deal in depth with these new cleavages we need to deepen our understanding of full-time officials.

We have argued that the South African unions which emerged in the aftermath of the 1973 strikes sought to prevent a concentration of power in the hands of officials by building a tradition of worker control and the accountability of leadership to their members, particularly through a system of mandated decision-making and regular report-backs. These unions de-emphasised the role of the union official and instead encouraged a tradition in which workers and worker leaders played a more prominent role in decision-making within the unions. The rationale for this was to build a culture of democratic participation of the rank-and-file and to discourage any tendencies towards bureaucratisation of the movement.

We discussed the building of this tradition in three case studies in *Part II* of this thesis. In many of these unions the principle of worker control permeated every aspect of their organisation and functioning, and entailed the following:

- ❑ the emphasis on shopfloor structures led by shop stewards,
- ❑ the creation of representative structures in which worker delegates were the majority,
- ❑ the practice of mandated decision-making and regular report-backs to members,
- ❑ factory level bargaining which allowed workers and shop stewards to maintain control of the bargaining agenda and the conclusion of agreements,
- ❑ the subordination of full-time officials to control by worker-dominated structures,
- ❑ the involvement of workers, at all levels, in the employment of full-time officials.

The principle of worker control was built into the founding constitution of COSATU to prevent officials from dominating structures of the federation and its affiliates. So successful were these unions in entrenching this tradition that today many unionised black workers have managed to appropriate the discourse of worker control and have often used it to turn power relations inside the unions in their favour. However, as the last five chapters have shown, the processes of organisational modernisation which are unfolding inside these unions have contributed to the erosion of this tradition, thereby placing full-time officials in an increasingly powerful position in the unions. Who are these officials?

We begin *Part III* by presenting a profile of full-time officials in COSATU and its affiliates in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 then discusses new cleavages among full-time officials and how they articulate with different approaches to organisational modernisation. Chapter 8 is our final chapter which suggests a resolution to the dilemma which we have identified in this thesis.

CHAPTER 6: A CONTEMPORARY PROFILE OF UNION OFFICIALS IN COSATU

Introduction

In 1997 COSATU and its 18 affiliates employed a total of 1 681 full-time staff, from general secretaries and their deputies at the top, to cleaners and messengers at the bottom. This chapter presents a general profile of full-time officials in the federation and its affiliates. These findings are based on responses by 587 full-time officials, approximately one-third of the total, to a survey conducted in 1996/97.¹ The survey covered such issues as the number of officials, their service, salaries and conditions of employment, education and training, their assessment of their jobs and their attitudes to unions and politics.

The figure of 587 represents a very high response rate for a postal survey and it allows us to identify very clear patterns regarding the staffing situation in the unions. The survey population was identified as all those individuals who are in the full-time employ of COSATU and its unions, in other words, all those who are on the unions' payroll.

The objective of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to present basic statistical information which has not existed before and, in this regard, a number of tables have been included. Secondly, the chapter analyses the statistical data in order to identify the main trends and patterns among full-time officials.

Demographic Profile

Staffing in the unions

The situation of full-time union officials today is a far cry from what prevailed ten or fifteen years ago. The first significant point is that COSATU and its affiliates are now employers in their own right. Although this point is an obvious one, its implications are not always so obvious. Table 20 shows that at the end of 1996 there were 1 681 full-time officials in the federation. In general, there was a relationship between the size of a union's membership and the number of full-time officials it employed. In other words, smaller unions employed fewer officials while big unions employed more. COSATU's smallest affiliate, the Institute for Public Servants (IPS) had the smallest number of staff, with 18 officials, while the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), one of the federation's largest affiliates, employed the largest number, 208 officials.²

Union membership has grown dramatically in the past 10 to 15 years with the result that the number of people employed in these unions to service their members has increased proportionally. The numbers of full-time staff have forced unions to modernise their staffing policies, including improving the salaries and conditions, as well as providing benefits and developing appropriate procedures. Table 20 gives a breakdown of the figures of officials by union and also shows staff membership ratios for each union.

Table 20: COSATU Full-time Officials (by Union), 1996

Union	Full-time Staff [1]	% of Total Staff Total	Membership (1996) [2]	Staff/Membership Ratio
CAWU	59	3.5	41 509	1:704
COSATU	52	3.09	----	----
CWIU	77	4.58	48 703	1:633
CWU	34	2.2	41 000	1:1 206
FAWU	108	6.4	145 124	1:1 344
IPS	18	1.07	16 676	1:926
NEHAWU	115	6.84	131 938	1:1 147
NUM	187	11.1	357 198	1:1 910
NUMSA	208	12.37	263 893	1:1 269
POPCRU	38	2.26	43 520	1:1 145
PPWAWU	62	3.68	53 900	1:869
SAAPAWU	24	1.42	35 000	1:1 458
SACCAWU	182	10.8	134 626	1:740
SACTWU	120	7.1	160 000	1:1 333
SADTU	60	3.5	114 962	1:1 916
SAMWU	127	7.5	112 059	1:882
SARHWU	52	3	40 421	1:777
SASBO	78	4.6	73 094	1:937
TGWU	80	4.7	67 288	1:841
TOTAL	1 681	----	1 880 911	1:1 119

Sources: Staffing information supplied by unions to S. Buhlungu for the full-time officials' survey. Membership information from Filita, T. 1997. "COSATU: Marching Forward". *South African Labour Bulletin*, 21, 1.

The modernisation of staffing policies implies that the salaries and conditions on which these officials are employed have to be regularised and that staff development strategies, career paths, proper procedures for recruitment, grievances, discipline, and performance appraisal have to be developed. Many unions have gone a long way in doing precisely this and assume that this modernisation implies that staffing has to be managed in ways more or less similar to the way it is managed in government and the private sector. The result is that a real tension has emerged for unions in finding a balance between modernisation of staffing policies, conditions and procedures while still maintaining the movement and democratic character of these organisations.

Gender relations

There is a fair representation of women among union staff. Of the 584 staff who supplied information 342 (59 per cent) were men and 242 (41 per cent) were women. However, when these figures are disaggregated in terms of positions, most women tended to occupy administrative and other junior positions while most men occupied more high profile and therefore politically powerful leadership positions. Table 21 below shows the distribution of both men and women according to positions in the unions.

Table 21: Gender and Occupational Positions of Union Officials

<i>Current Position</i>	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Local Administrator	2	32	34
Branch Administrator	1	24	25
Regional Administrator	3	48	51
Head Office Administrator	5	53	58
Local Organiser	79	7	86
Branch Organiser	33	8	41
Regional Organiser	46	6	52
National Organiser	24	3	27
Branch Secretary	17	4	21
Regional Secretary	23	1	24
General Secretary	10	0	10
Research Officer	6	3	9
Legal Officer (Regional)	14	3	17
Legal Officer (National)	2	3	5
Education Officer (Branch)	4	0	4
Education officer (Regional)	12	0	12
Education Officer (National)	11	3	14
Media Officer	5	0	5
Other	43	40	83
TOTAL	340	238	578

This finding confirms Nyman's conclusion that women often "come up against a glass ceiling which prevents them from rising to positions of power in the trade unions".³ The 'glass ceiling' for women exists not only in relation to elected positions as Nyman found in her study, but it applies to full-time positions, too. This means that not only do women lack influence and power in their jobs, but they also earn less. Only 56 women trade unionists earned more than R5 000, compared to 166 male unionists. As discussed in Chapters 3 to 5, this disparity in power and earnings is not accidental.

Age distribution

The age distribution of union officials ranged from 17 to 65 years. However, the overwhelming majority of them (90 per cent) were in the 24 to 45 years age bracket. This put the average at around 35 years. Of course the brain drain of the last decade has had a lot to do with this distribution as many of the officials who left the union movement were older than 35 at the time they left. Thus the relative youth of the union official is a function of the high turnover and the fact that in many instances they are replaced with younger officials in their early twenties.

However, it is worth noting that the post-1973 unions have produced their first batch of retirees as quite a few of them were nearly 65 years of age at the time of the survey. The fact that most officials were between 30 and 65 years old can be both a stabilising and destabilising factor for the unions. It can be stabilising as most people at that age tend to be more stable and committed to their jobs. However, the same factor may be destabilising as many of these people are approaching middle age and may tend to demand benefits which will see them through in their retirement. Thus, if they find offers of better paying jobs outside they may be tempted to leave the unions to take up such offers. Unions with better remuneration packages (including housing and car allowances) may find that they are better able to retain staff of this age group than those which cannot afford such packages.

Race and union work

Race has always been a sensitive issue in the unions and many unionists are uneasy about categorising themselves in racial terms. However, a surprisingly large number of union staff provided information about their race. In the 1970s and the 1980s the racial composition of union staff was a sensitive issue and debates at the time reflected this. At the centre of these debates was the role of white officials (or 'white intellectuals' as some called them) who joined unions and often occupied influential positions in the union hierarchy. Today the role of white officials is no longer a contentious issue in the unions as there has been a wider diffusion of skills and experience throughout the movement. For example, there was a marked increase in the number of African, coloured and Indian officials with tertiary (post-matric) educational qualifications. Of the officials who stated both their race and formal education qualifications, 188 (32 per cent) had technikon or university certificates, university degrees and post-graduate qualifications, and of this figure only 33 were white, the rest being African, coloured and Indian.

It would also appear that the number of white union officials has declined significantly in recent years. Table 22 below gives a breakdown of union staff by race.

Table 22: Union Officials by Race

<i>Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
African	476	83.1
Coloured	28	4.9
Indian	17	3
White	49	8.6
Other ⁴	3	0.6
TOTAL	573	100

It will be noted from these figures that a large number of union staff were black. However, a more interesting finding is that although white staff constituted 9 per cent of the total, this figure is misleading because 37 of the 49 white officials came from one union which had joined COSATU in the mid-1990s.⁵ If we subtract this figure from the total the number of white officials was 12. Clearly this figure has either remained stagnant or has declined, particularly if it is taken as a proportion of all staff members in the unions.

Family

In 1993 a young male union official (about 30 years old) who subsequently left his union for a better job elsewhere was interviewed for a study that the author was conducting. His experience revealed some of the pressures some unionists face within their families. He stated that he was “struggling to make ends meet with his union salary of R1 900 per month before tax. He had to provide for his unemployed parents, his younger brothers and sisters, look after himself and was planning to get married. He said that he was under a lot of pressure from his family to look for another job”.⁶

A study of the ‘brain drain’ from unions showed that family pressures and responsibilities are among the reasons which lead certain union staff members to look for better paid jobs elsewhere. The study concluded that,

Part of the reason why salaries and conditions have become more important in the unions is the fact that union officials are increasingly settling down to family life by getting married, buying houses and putting more emphasis on providing for the needs of their families. The family man or woman of the 1970s and 1980s now has to prove to the family that the sacrifices that they have made over the years in the name of the struggle were worthwhile. On the other hand, the young single union activist of the 1980s has suddenly become a married man or woman with greater material needs.⁷

Table 23 below presents the marital status of union officials.

Table 23: Marital Status of Union officials

Marital Status	Number	%
Single	223	38.2
Married	315	53.9
Divorced	32	5.5
Widowed	9	1.5
Other	5	0.9
Total	584	100

The above figures help explain a number of issues about union staff. The first is that 54 per cent of the staff were married and therefore had direct family commitments. For this category of officials, spouses often play a very important role in influencing their partner to either stay or leave the union movement, particularly when the official is being made more attractive offers elsewhere. The second point is that when a single organiser decides to get married, he/she often comes under pressure to make more demands on the union or leave, like the organiser cited above.

An analysis of the gender and marital status figures showed that married women constituted only 38 per cent of women staff, with the rest (63 per cent) being unmarried (single, divorced, widowed and other). It would appear that it is easier for unmarried women to work for unions, probably because their single status allows them freedom to choose where to work and the flexibility of time that they need to cope with the demands of union work, for example, to attend meetings.⁸ On the other hand, 65 per cent of male staff were married, a figure which seems to suggest that marriage allows men to cope better with the demands of union work. This finding is consistent with what Lawrence found in her study of women shop stewards and full-time officials in Britain:

(If women were in traditional relationships with men there might be less tolerance for their union activism by their partners than their male colleagues might receive from their partners.⁹

Although marital status is an indicator of a person's family commitments, it is by no means the only one. An additional factor in this instance is that the majority of union staff (80 per cent) had children of their own which they had to support, and the average number was two per official. Additionally, there may have been a number of officials who had responsibilities to support people other than their spouses and children.

Most union officials did not have accommodation or housing of their own. They rented houses, flats and rooms, or lived with relatives or owned shacks. More significant is the fact that 39 per cent of union officials had bought their own houses and/or flats. This may be an indicator of improvements in earnings as well as availability of housing finance to union officials. If it is, then it may go some way towards stabilising the situation as housing has always been one of the most pressing issues for union officials.

Union officials in their communities

Notwithstanding their heavy workloads in the unions, many officials also found time to belong to and often to participate actively in other organisations in their communities. The most popular organisations (or combinations of organisations) are listed in Table 24 below:

Table 24: Membership of Community Organisations

<i>Organisation/s</i>	<i>Number of Officials</i>
Political only	181
Civic only	13
Political and civic	59
Religious only	61
Religious and political	38
Political, civic and religious	17
Sports only	14
Sports and political	20

COSATU has always encouraged its shop stewards and officials to play a leading role in their communities by joining community organisations. This table shows that many union officials did play an important leadership role in their communities. Most of those who belonged to these and other organisations indicated that they were active members in these structures. It must be pointed out, though, that in a society where unions have the largest pool of leadership this often creates an avenue for those officials who want to opt out of the union movement and go into electoral politics at local, provincial and national levels. In 1994 and 1995 COSATU lost a number of its leaders, including experienced officials, to national, provincial and local government.¹⁰

Education, Training and Skills

Formal education

Education, training and skills are becoming increasingly important for union officials and their unions as union work becomes more complex and as unions continue to emphasise organisational efficiency and to expect improved performance from their officials. This is a significant change from the past when formal education qualifications were less important, or not important at all, as criteria for recruitment, selection, and evaluation for advancement within the unions. In particular, the staffing of specialised departments and support positions, such as legal departments, accounts and research, has come to rely on highly qualified officials who can deal with technical issues.

From the side of union officials, too, education, training and the acquisition of skills are becoming important for a variety of reasons. The most important of these are job security, upgrading skills to deal with technical issues and improving qualifications so as to take advantage of advancement opportunities within and outside the union.

Two key findings regarding education, training and skills among union officials deserve attention here. Firstly, levels of formal education were high in the unions, with the overall average qualification being matric. Put differently, only 24 per cent of union officials did not have matric and around 75 per cent had matric and above as their formal education qualification. Also revealing is the figure of full-time officials with tertiary qualifications. The total of officials with technikon or university certificates, university degrees and post-graduate qualifications was 197. This contradicts Baskin's conclusion that few officials with tertiary education remain in the union movement.¹¹ If the number of officials who were doing private studies is anything to go by, then the number of officials with tertiary education is going to increase rather than decline. Table 25 shows a breakdown of formal education levels among union officials.

Table 25: Formal Education Levels Among Union Officials

Formal Education Level	No. of Officials	Percent (%)
None	1	0.2
Up to Standard 2	2	0.3
Standards 3 - 5	9	1.5
Standards 6 - 7	18	3.1
Standards 8 - 9	113	19.3
<i>Matric (Standard 10)</i>	235	40
Technikon Certificate	84	14.3
University Certificate	34	5.8
University Degree	44	7.5
Post-graduate Qualification	35	6
Other	9	1.5
TOTAL	584	100

A second finding related to education, which will be referred to again later, is the fact that almost half (263 or 46 per cent) of the union officials who responded were doing private studies of one sort or another at various institutions. Most of these officials were doing special certificate courses (e.g. at Damelin College) (103), a university degree or certificate (61), a technikon diploma or certificate (42) and matric (26). Officials who were enrolled for private studies were to be found in COSATU and all its affiliates.

The choice of courses and degrees which officials were doing did not always appear relevant to the needs of the unions. Instead, it appeared that some officials were improving their qualifications so that they could be more marketable inside and outside the unions.

The growing importance of formal education qualifications is going putting pressure on unions to create career paths for people who improve their education and to reward these qualifications accordingly. Failure to do this is leading some officials to look elsewhere where they believe their qualifications will be rewarded in financial terms.

Union training

As has been argued above, unions, like the public and private sectors, are realising that they have to make staff development one of their priorities so that union officials can do their jobs better and more efficiently. Officials were asked whether they had been provided with any training by their unions. Table 26 gives figures of responses by union.

Table 26: Has the Union Provided you with Education and Training?

<i>Union</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Total</i>
PPWAWU	39	12	51
CWIU	45	3	48
NUM	59	30	89
SASBO	40	15	55
IPS	4	7	11
SARHWU	11	10	21
CAWU	16	4	20
TGWU	21	10	31
SAAPAWU	6	3	9
POPCRU	4	28	32
FAWU	5	5	10
SACTWU	3	2	5
CWU	2	6	8
SACCAWU	42	28	70
NUMSA	63	24	87
COSATU	9	6	15
SADTU	0	4	4
SAMWU	5	6	11
TOTAL	374	203	577

The table shows that 35 per cent had not been provided with education by the unions, a figure which appears high. In the case of those who said they had received union education and training, the most common courses or combination of courses which officials had attended were a basic organisers' course, a 'foundation course', a legal course, organiser training and legal course, office administration and "other courses" which included business training, shop stewards training, rock mechanics, adult basic education and training, the Labour relations Act and a media course. It was difficult to evaluate the impact of these courses as the content varies from union to union. However, from comments officials gave about training they would like to receive, it would appear that union education and training is generally *ad hoc* and fragmented in that few of the courses form part of a coherent programme of training. Hence many officials were taking the initiative to enrol privately for courses which they believed were more coherent and had more value both in their jobs and in the market.

In addition, it would appear that few of the courses currently available to officials in their unions equip them with skills to deal with some of the pressing issues unions and workers face, such as economics, work restructuring and globalisation. We did not evaluate the impact of the recently established union education and training institute, the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education of Labour (DITSELA)¹² in this regard. DITSELA is part of the union movement's programme to "rebuild its capacity to respond to the major changes underway in the country, and particularly within industry".¹³ The institute's objectives are to:

- ❑ design and deliver trade union education programmes,
- ❑ support the development of organisational capacity,
- ❑ build a systematic education programme which seeks to link efforts by unions, federations and independent union education organisations, and
- ❑ develop innovative approaches to union education policy, programmes and methods.¹⁴

Administrative infrastructure and support for officials

The above section highlighted a number of issues related to the education, training and skills of officials . However, it should be pointed out that the problems do not arise simply because of lack of education and skills among union officials. Indeed, as we have shown above, officials do take the initiative to upgrade their skills. Thus, it would appear that most of the problems officials experienced in their jobs were due to a combination of factors such as lack of support by the organisation, poor communication, lack of resources and poor planning, and often lack of skills on the part of some officials. When asked to identify problems they experienced in their jobs officials highlighted a number of issues in the following order:

- ❑ Poor administrative systems in the union.
- ❑ Lack of information/knowledge by the official.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems and lack of information.
- ❑ The officials' lack of administrative/managerial skill.
- ❑ Lack of administrative/managerial skill, lack of information and poor administrative systems in the union.
- ❑ Lack of transport.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems in union and official's lack of administrative and managerial skill.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems in union and lack of transport.
- ❑ Poor planning by the official himself/herself.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems, lack of skills, lack of transport.
- ❑ Poor planning by the official, poor administrative systems.
- ❑ Lack of administrative/managerial skill.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems, lack of information, lack of transport.
- ❑ Poor administrative systems, lack of administrative/managerial skills, lack of information, lack of transport.

This suggests the lack of skills among some officials should not be seen in isolation from broader organisational development challenges facing unions. A skilled official will often find himself or herself hampered by poor administrative systems, resulting in inefficiency in that official's area of operation. On the other hand, an organisation which has achieved relatively high levels of administrative efficiency is more likely to create the right atmosphere for average officials to improve their skills and to be more effective in their jobs.

Salary, Benefits and Conditions

Salary

Salaries and conditions for union staff have become critical issues today, and a union's ability to retain its staff has increasingly come to depend on that union's ability to offer a competitive remuneration package. Again, this is far cry from the old days when officials joined the movement to serve and sacrifice rather than to make a living. Today, not only do officials get improved salaries, they receive a number of other benefits, too.

Changes to union officials' salaries and conditions resulted from attempts by unions to deal with a high turnover of staff, particularly in the early 1990s. In the 1970s and early 1980s a number of unions could not afford to pay salaries at all and their organisers often worked as volunteers who were only provided with money for travel and lunch. Most of those unions who could afford to pay regular salaries had flat salary structures, meaning that every official from the general secretary down earned the same salary. By the mid-1980s most unions were paying their officials a regular salary every month. Officials in financially stable unions could also expect to get an annual bonus and to take a month's leave every year. Many unions had a tradition of not paying their officials more than the highest paid worker in their industry. But by and large union officials were driven by their commitment to the workers' struggle rather than by a need to make a living.

Today union salaries are graded and most unions have benefits like housing allowances, car allowances and medical and provident funds. Table 27 gives salary ranges from the lowest to the highest in COSATU and its affiliates.

Table 27: Staff Salaries in COSATU and its Affiliates

Salary Range	Officials	Percentage
R1 - 1 000	2	0.4
R1 001 - 2 000	31	5.8
R2 001 - 3 000	167	31.3
R3 001 - 4 000	223	41.8
R4 001 - 5 000	57	10.7
R5 001 - 6 000	27	5
R6 001 - 7 000	10	1.9
R7 001 - 8 000	9	1.7
R8 001 - 9 000	3	0.6
R9 001 - 13 000	2	0.4
R13 001 - Upwards	2	0.4
TOTAL	533	100

It will be noted from the above table that most officials (79 per cent) were in the R1 - 4 000 salary bracket, with 73 per cent of them earning between R2 001 and R4 000. Looked at differently, the figures show that 90 per cent earned between R1 and 5 000. The average salary in COSATU and its affiliates was R3 564.

If we look at these figures in relation to where they were thirteen years ago, it becomes obvious that unions have made tremendous progress in addressing the material concerns of full-time

officials, particularly if one looks at them in conjunction with other benefits which unions provide. However, union officials live in a society where there is a severe shortage of the sort of leadership skills they possess and therefore there are a number of other organisations and institutions which will always try to entice union officials by offering at least double what they earn currently. A comparative study by Collins in 1994 found that union salaries lagged behind those in non-governmental organisations, government and the private sector. This led her to conclude that there was a need to reassess union salaries.¹⁵ Some of the more financially stable unions have done precisely this. Big unions such as NUMSA and the NUM have been able to retain staff because their salaries and benefits are relatively competitive. Some unions have also found that the only way to retain certain skilled officials is to negotiate their remuneration packages individually.

In the short term, attempts by unions to retain staff by offering competitive packages are only one part of the solution to the problem of staff turnover. In the long run, unions are going to have to decide whether they can compete with government and the private sector for skills and still maintain their movement and democratic character. Collins has argued that the terms on which union salaries and conditions are reassessed are going to be crucial, particularly in a context where “amongst certain sections of our society, which were formerly part of the progressive movement, a significant shift in values is taking place”. She further argues that there are indications that the value system which saw union work as “an act of struggle” is rapidly being replaced by one where many comrades are “demanding that their services be valued in terms of entirely different criteria”.¹⁶

Benefits

Union officials received a range of other benefits on top of the monthly salary. Although the benefits differed from union to union, it is possible to paint a general picture of benefits enjoyed by union officials across unions. Most union staff had access to a provident or pension fund and a 13th cheque. In addition, about 50 per cent had a medical aid fund. The number of those with

paid study leave, car scheme and maternity leave was much lower but still significant, given where unions were about thirteen years ago. These were major improvements to what prevailed in the 1980s when the salary and the 13th cheque were the only forms of benefits for those union officials fortunate enough to receive them. The widespread availability of these benefits is an indication that unions have gone a long way towards improving conditions for union officials. However, as this chapter will show later, many union officials still believe that their salaries and conditions need to be improved.

Hours of work

In the past union work was known for its long working hours. The task of organising workers in a very hostile climate meant that union officials had to spend many hours in meetings, in the office, or travelling to and from meetings and workplaces. This often took up most of their time in the evening and on weekends as most meetings with workers could only be held during workers' free time.

Union officials were asked to specify the average amount of time they spent at work in a day. Although the information received generally appeared reliable and useful, there were a number of responses which yielded unreliable information. For example, 67 officials said they worked an average of between 11 and 20 hours per day, which seemed unusually long. The rest of the staff (86 per cent) worked an average of between 5 and 10 hours a day. The overall average number of hours spent by a union official at work was 9.5 hours

Weekend work was still the norm for many unionists. A total of 80 per cent said they worked between one and ten hours on average on a weekend.¹⁷

It is difficult to make a comparison with the past as there is no information available on working hours for union officials. However, the above figures suggest that many unionists work longer hours than the workers they service. This makes union work extremely demanding, with the

result that many officials often feel “burnt out” after a few years. A number of those who leave the union movement have cited exhaustion as a reason and have argued that they need a change of scene where they can take a break and “recharge” themselves.

Many unions have been trying to address this issue in several ways. Annual leave is now a norm in all the unions. In addition, most unions allow their officials to take a day off every now and again, although a third of the officials say they find it difficult to make use of this opportunity because of the demands of their jobs (for example, meetings, strikes, and other appointments). An even more creative way of alleviating the problem of long hours of work and burn-out is the granting of a study leave or sabbatical to an official after serving a specified number of years in the union. Only a few unions offered this benefit.

The Jobs of Full-time Officials

Work history

Most union officials had work experience before they joined their current union. Only 6 per cent of officials said the union job was their first work experience. All those who responded to the question about their work history had worked for one form of organisation/institution or another. Most had worked in more than one organisation and were either retrenched, dismissed or resigned from their last job, or the union recruited them while they were still employed by their previous employer. The most common types of organisations officials had worked for were:

☐ Companies	=	236
☐ Companies/another union	=	51
☐ Another union	=	49
☐ Other	=	44
☐ Government	=	21

❑ Company/other	=	20
❑ Companies/Government	=	19

It will be noted that most officials had worked for companies before they were recruited by the union. Most of these had been shopfloor workers who had joined the union, with a number of them subsequently becoming shop stewards. The most significant point about the above figures is the fact that most union officials had themselves been workers before they joined the unions as officials. This reflects the emphasis COSATU and its unions have been putting on recruiting people who have work experience. It is not clear whether this trend will continue. Meanwhile, unions remain committed to ensuring that union officials are people who have work experience, particularly in the same industries that they are organising.

Length of service

Over the last few years a lot has been said and written about the so-called brain drain from the union movement, particularly the loss of some key full-time union officials. The departure of large numbers of union officials should be seen in the context of the new democratic dispensation which presents opportunities for many people with organisational experience. The reasons for this exodus have been summarised elsewhere as a combination of the following:

- ❑ greener pastures in the form of attractive packages and other benefits in NGOs, government and the private sector,
- ❑ family pressures and responsibilities,
- ❑ poaching by management,
- ❑ loss of vision and direction.¹⁸

However, little effort has been made to quantify this loss. This section examines the staff situation in the unions and attempts to understand the causes and consequences of the turnover of staff. Table 28 presents figures on the length of service of union officials.

Table 28: Length of Service

<i>Year Employed by Union</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Per cent (%)</i>
1973 - 77	2	0.4
1978 - 82	8	1.4
1983 - 87	59	10.8
1988 - 92	166	30.3
1993 - 96	313	57.1
TOTAL	548	100

A number of conclusions can be made about the figures in the above table. Firstly, the majority of officials (57 per cent) had not completed four years in the unions at the time they were surveyed. This figure is made up of 9 per cent who were employed in 1993, 15 per cent who joined the unions in 1994, 16 per cent who joined in 1995 and 17 per cent who were employed in 1996. Secondly, looked at from a different angle, the table shows that only 24 per cent of officials from the 1970s and 1980s remained in the unions. The 43 longest serving officials (those with more than 10 years' service or who were already there by 1986) were in PPWAWU (2), CWIU (7), NUM (4), SASBO (4), SARHWU (2), CAWU (1), SAAPAWU (1), POPCRU (1), FAWU (1), SACCAWU (4), and NUMSA (16).

Thirdly, these figures serve to confirm the notion of a high staff turnover in the unions which results in a brain drain. All levels of staffing, from general administrative staff to organisers and regional officials right up to general secretaries and other officials at union head offices, have been affected by this phenomenon. One of the implications of this turnover is the fact that old traditions are being rapidly eroded and new officials are likely to bring new practices and value systems with them which could supersede traditional practices and norms in the unions.

Finally, the high turnover has meant that the staffing situation remains very fluid, with people coming and going all the time. This 'revolving door' syndrome is so serious, such that although the survey was conducted at the end of 1996, a number of officials have left their unions since they were surveyed.

What jobs do union officials do?

There is a multiplicity of roles and positions in the unions. Full-time officials are employed in these positions to ensure the smooth running of the unions' machinery, including administration, organising and other support functions. Table 29 presents the categories of positions in the unions as well the number of officials in each position.

Table 29: Occupational Positions or Job Categories in the Unions

<i>Position</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Local Administrator	34	5.9
Branch Administrator	25	4.3
Regional Administrator	52	9
Head Office Administrator	58	10
Local Organiser	86	14.8
Branch Organiser	41	7.1
Regional Organiser	52	9
National Organiser/Co-ordinator	28	4.8
Branch Secretary	21	3.6
Regional Secretary	24	4.1
General Secretary	10	1.7
Research Officer	9	1.5
Legal Officer (Regional)	17	2.9
Legal Officer (National)	5	0.9
Education Officer (Branch)	4	0.7
Education Officer (Regional)	12	2.1
Education Officer (National)	14	2.4
Media Officer	5	0.9
Other	84	14.5
TOTAL	581	100

The above table shows that most people employed in the unions did organising work (particularly at local and regional levels) and administration. A total of 54 per cent of all union staff were based at local, branch and regional levels of these organisations. These are union functionaries who are in direct contact with membership and who are able to respond promptly to membership demands and concerns about servicing. This suggests that COSATU unions have maintained a healthy balance between attending to membership interests, on the one hand, and national co-ordination, on the other. In other words, unions have kept to the tradition of giving priority to servicing workers and ensuring that the organisations' affairs are properly managed. The union movement's ability to sustain internal democracy and proper servicing of workers will continue to depend, among other factors, on the maintenance of this balance between the local and the national levels.

However, with the increase in specialisation and the creation of support positions at the national level (such as researchers, legal officials and specialist negotiators), there is a danger that top-heavy structures may emerge, thereby accelerating a tendency towards bureaucratisation of the unions. Some of the unions are trying to counter this by locating some of these specialised positions at their branch and regional offices.

However, unions may have to go further than this to ensure that skills are not the monopoly of a few. It may be necessary to pass some of these skills to shop stewards and organisers so that their jobs can be more meaningful and challenging. At the moment, most local organisers' time is spent in wage negotiations, disciplinary and grievance cases, recruitment and workers' general meetings. Some of these can be taken over by shop stewards, thus relieving organisers to take up other issues.

The category "other" in the above table includes all those functions which were difficult to include under the standard categories given in the table and includes positions such as caretaker, spokesperson, executive officer, finance officer accountant, computer programmer, manager and international officer, all of which are relatively new in the unions.

Support positions in the unions

All the unions employed officials from the position of administrator (local, branch, head office) up to the position of general secretary. The majority of these positions can be categorised as administration and organising functions. However, there were other officials who performed what could be termed 'support functions', such as education officers, legal officers, research officers, health and safety officers, media officers and industrial restructuring co-ordinators. These officials were involved in union work which relates to building the capacity of the unions in these fields. Table 30 gives a breakdown of support functions by union. These figures were gleaned from lists of officials supplied by each union. It will be noted that there are some gaps in the information contained in this table. These are cases where no lists were supplied or where the lists supplied did not specify the positions of officials.

Table 30: Support Positions in Unions

Union	Number of support positions
PPWAWU	4 (education, legal, media)
CWIU	11 (research, industrial restructuring, legal education, media, ABET, benefits)
NUM	31 (human resources, education, health and safety, media, legal, housing, research, fraternal)
SASBO	No figures
IPS	No support positions
SARHWU	No figures
CAWU	No figures
TGWU	2 (education, human resources)
SAAPAWU	1 (education)
POPCRU	2 (legal, media)
FAWU	7 (education, legal, benefits)
SACTWU	No figures
CWU	No figures
SACCAWU	No figures
NUMSA	11 (education, legal)
COSATU	No figures
SADTU	No figures
SAMWU	10 (education, legal)

Although the figures in Table 30 are incomplete, they do give an indication of the capacity, or lack thereof, in unions. Although capacity cannot be measured simply in terms of personnel, the figures do give an indication that some unions are preparing themselves to face a number of new issues. It can be presumed that those unions which employ people in the above positions will be better prepared to respond to and deal with new complex issues which confront their members and the union in general than those who do not employ them.

The downside, though, is that these developments could introduce some technicist tendencies which put more emphasis on experts and less on political approaches to the issues unions are facing today. It would also lead to a narrow compartmentalisation of certain aspects of union work which fails to establish links between these support functions and organisation. This danger is a very real one where departments expand into bureaucracies in their own right which are increasingly becoming distanced from organisation and the concerns of rank-and-file membership.

Resources and support for union officials

Administrative and other logistical infrastructure to back up union officials is of critical importance in the unions. Union officials had access to a wide range of resources, including standard ones such as an office, a telephone, a fax and a typewriter. In addition, a small but significant number had access to a photocopy machine, computer, e-mail, a cell phone, a car and a resource centre.

About half the total number had access to a car while the other half did not. Of those with access to a car, 172 had their own, 103 had access to a union car while 7 had their own car and had access to a union car. These figures can be attributed to efforts by unions to arrange car schemes and to improvements in salaries which allow some officials to buy their own cars. This situation is a great improvement compared to the situation in the 1970s and 1980s. Access to a car makes the life of a union official much easier, particularly with regard to attendance of meetings and

travel to distant areas. It can also create flexibility with regard to an official's use of time. Table 31 presents figures on union officials' access to cars in their job.

Table 31: Access to a Car

UNION (Total responses)	Own Car	Union Car	Union + Own car	No car
CAWU (20)	3	5	-	11
COSATU (15)	8	1	-	6
CWIU (48)	34	-	-	13
CWU (8)	-	3	-	5
FAWU (11)	2	5	-	4
IPS (11)	2	2	-	7
NUM (91)	20	29	1	39
NUMSA (88)	47	1	2	33
POPCRU (32)	4	5	2	19
PPWAWU (52)	5	23	-	23
SAAPAWU (9)	2	3	-	4
SACCAWU (74)	5	2	-	59
SACTWU (5)	2	-	-	3
SADTU (4)	-	1	-	3
SAMWU (11)	4	1	-	5
SARHWU (21)	4	3	1	13
SASBO (55)	23	12	1	17
TGWU (32)	7	7	-	16
TOTAL (587)	172	103	7	280

These overall figures conceal the fact that most of these cars were owned or used by male officials. In other words, 227 male officials had access to cars, compared to only 54 women. Put differently, only 13 administrative officials (which is where most women are) had access to cars. The significance of these findings becomes clearer when read with the section on gender relations elsewhere in this and other chapters.

In addition to investigating the availability of resources for officials, we sought to establish formal and informal support for officials who experienced problems in the course of their work. Table 32 lists the most frequently mentioned combinations of sources from which officials got help or advice when they experienced problems.

Table 32: Where do you Go When you have Problems in your Job?

Source of Advice/Help	No.
Colleagues in the same office	88
Colleagues, branch/regional secretary, head office	51
Colleagues, branch/regional secretary, regional office	38
Colleagues, head office	27
Colleagues, branch/regional secretary	28
Colleagues, branch/regional secretary, comrades in other unions	31
Colleagues, head office, comrades in other unions	23
Branch/regional secretary	21
Colleagues, regional office, head office	13
Colleagues, head office, lawyers	12
Colleagues, head office, service organisations	12
Colleagues, branch/regional secretary, lawyers	10
Colleagues, comrades in other unions	10
Colleagues, other	10
Other	10

The above table shows a strong reliance on collegial advice and help and on other structures within the union. Indeed this sharing of knowledge, skill and information has always been one of the strengths of the post-1973 union movement as it makes up for lack of training for certain officials. A strong official in a branch or region is a resource not only to the union members he/she services but to all officials in that branch or region and to all affiliates of the federation. Another significant result is the fact that lawyers and service organisations played a minimal role as advisors to union officials.

However, it is not possible to say for how long these practices will last in the union movement. Some officials in some unions did raise the fact that there is a growing selfishness among some of their colleagues as union work becomes increasingly competitive. Their argument was that those who hoarded knowledge and information did so in the belief that such monopoly made them indispensable to the union and that it improved their prospects of upward mobility.

Career paths and upward mobility

Until recently, many unions have offered very limited prospects for career paths and upward mobility for their officials. This is because of a particularly flat structure which essentially had two or three levels, namely branch officials, regional officials and national officials. Linked to this was the fact that there was no real incentive for officials to move up as the pay structure was uniform and even those officials at the top did not really have much authority as this was exercised by worker leaders. To assess how this had changed, we asked union officials to state the position or positions they had held in their union before the current one. In this instance the categories of shop steward and office-bearer were included to establish how many people had moved up from the shopfloor to full-time positions in their unions.

The results showed that some union officials have moved up the union hierarchy. A number of officials had moved upwards and then downwards or sideways, for example, from local organiser to general secretary and then to regional organiser. However, with the move by most unions

towards differentiated salaries and other reward systems, and as top positions begin to carry more political power and influence for the incumbents, officials are going to be interested only in upward mobility and career paths. Another implication of this is that officials are going to be less inclined to move downwards and once they reach the top they will move out of the movement rather than move downwards as was the case in the past.

Table 33 shows the most common positions officials held before their current ones. It also includes a figure for those who had not moved since they were employed by the union.

Table 33: Position/s Held Before the Current One

Previous Position/s	Number
Shop Steward	80
Local Administrator	17
Branch Administrator	18
Regional Administrator	14
Head Office Administrator	10
Local Organiser	14
Shop Steward/Local Organiser	14
Branch Organiser	20
Regional Organiser	12
Other	24
Not moved since employed by union	184

Job Satisfaction

It has been noted in this chapter that the turnover of staff was high and certain contributory factors were highlighted. It was also pointed out that some officials were upgrading their skills and formal educational qualifications to make themselves marketable in the open labour market. We tested this proposition further by asking officials some direct questions about their work in the unions. Table 34 presents the responses to a question which asked officials about job satisfaction.

Table 34: How Satisfied Are You in Your Job?

	No.	Percent (%)
Very Satisfied	65	11.2
Satisfied	171	29.4
Hardly Satisfied	229	39.3
Dissatisfied	78	13.4
Extremely Dissatisfied	39	6.7
TOTAL	582	100

A number of observations can be made from the above table. Firstly, it shows that 117 union officials (about 20 per cent) were either dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied in their jobs. This makes these officials very unpredictable, which means that given an alternative, they would leave their union jobs. Secondly, most officials gave “hardly satisfied” as a response to the question. This suggests that although they liked the job, there were certain issues which made them dissatisfied. This was shown by the fact that although only “dissatisfied” and “extremely dissatisfied” officials were asked to state reasons for being so, all the “hardly satisfied” officials also volunteered reasons which made them unhappy about their jobs in the union. Thus it would

appear that this response is closer to those who were dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied than to those who were satisfied or very satisfied. Most of the unions tended to show a mixture of officials who were satisfied and dissatisfied. However, the situation which was rather extreme was that found in unions such as SACCAWU and POPCRU, where the vast majority of officials were either hardly satisfied, dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied.

The seriousness of the figures in Table 34 becomes apparent if we examine the reasons cited for the unhappiness of many officials. The 343 officials who gave reasons cited a variety of reasons for their dissatisfaction, but the most frequently-cited reasons (or combination of reasons) were:

- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary and benefits,
- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary, benefits and lack of training,
- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary, benefits and no career path,
- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary, lack of training and no career path,
- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary, conditions and no recognition for work done,
- ☐ An unsatisfactory salary, no career path and no recognition for work done.

Commitment to the unions

The above issues were further investigated by asking officials further questions about their work in the unions. In response to the question, "How many years do you think you will be working for the union?" 549 officials responded as follows:

Table 35: How Many Years Do You Think You Will be Working for the Union?

<i>Years to Stay in Union</i>	<i>No. of Officials</i>	<i>%</i>
1 - 2 years	153	27.9
2 - 5 years	194	35.3
5 - 10 years	86	15.7
10 years and above	116	21.1
TOTAL	549	100

Although the above figures should not be read literally, at the same time they should be taken as a serious indicator of the thinking among union officials regarding union work. The figures seem to suggest that union officials did not take union work as a life-time commitment, but were prepared to make a commitment for as long as they got something in return, namely, financial rewards.

In a climate where opportunities have opened up in government and the private sector, particularly those which require the sort of leadership and other skills union officials possess, the above results should be taken to mean that a number of officials would be looking for better opportunities elsewhere. This point was made in Chapters 3 to 5 and earlier in this chapter in relation to the private studies many officials were doing and how these would help them improve their marketability inside and outside of the unions.

The picture painted by the above table suggests that many more officials are going to leave the unions over the following two to five years. This, together with another trend where officials tend to stay for about two years and then leave, will ensure that the “revolving door” situation continues for a number of years in the unions.

Why do officials work for unions?

Unhappiness about salaries and conditions in the unions showed that officials were not there just for the workers' struggle, but that they were also there to earn a living. Thus union work was no longer judged purely on whether or not it advanced the workers' struggle. It was also assessed on whether or not it met the officials' material needs. Few officials would admit this openly. When asked why they worked for a union most officials gave the following reasons:

☐ To serve the interests of the workers	= 347
☐ Because of past experience as worker	= 41
☐ Past experience as worker and to serve workers	= 39
☐ To build socialism and serve workers' interests	= 38
☐ To make a living	= 34
☐ To build socialism	= 13

These figures show that most officials still saw their role as being to serve the interests of workers. This is like stating the obvious as union work is, by definition, about serving the interests of workers. It is important, therefore, that when we look at these figures we should note that 'serving the interests of workers' is not synonymous with commitment to the movement. What is important, then, is not what this figure tells us at face value, but what it does not.

The other responses reveal more about why union officials work for unions. The most interesting figure is the number of officials who were prepared to state openly that they were in the union "to make a living"! This was a major change in outlook which seemed to reflect a new approach to unionism by some officials. Overall, it can be argued that union officials' perception of their role in the unions has changed and that unions can no longer take the commitment of officials to the union movement for granted. Unions now have to work harder not only to make the jobs of union officials exciting and challenging, but they must also find creative ways of addressing the financial concerns of officials.

Attitudes Towards Unions

By virtue of their position as leaders and employees of the union, officials are in a position to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their organisation. Also, many workers look up to union officials for guidance and assistance on a number of issues pertaining to the workplace, the union and the socio-economic situation in general. This section, therefore, reflects on responses by union officials to a number of questions regarding their union.

As would be expected, the majority of officials said that their union had clear goals and a common vision to unite all in the union (see Table 36).

Table 36: The Union has Clear Goals and a Common Vision?

	Number	Percent
Agree	298	53.6
Not sure	193	34.7
Disagree	65	11.7
TOTAL	556	100

Although it would come as a comforting revelation to the federation and its affiliates that there is a sense of unity of purpose and vision among its officials, unions should be concerned that a significant number of officials were not sure whether their union had clear goals and vision or not. Equally disturbing is the fact that some did not think that their union had clear goals or a common vision. This confusion and uncertainty came up in all the responses to questions about attitudes to the union and its functioning.

The same situation noted above also applied to the question of whether the union had workable or practical strategies to achieve its goals. Almost half said that their union had practical

strategies while just over a third were not sure. The rest said their union did not have workable or practical strategies to achieve its goals.

The officials' assessment of national office-bearers (the majority of whom are workers) also revealed potential for misunderstanding and tensions between these two layers of union leadership. In response to the statement "national office-bearers are out of touch with union members and staff", 36 per cent agreed with the statement while 28 per cent were not sure. Only a third of the officials agreed that their union's national office-bearers knew what was happening to their members and staff. These findings suggest a growing trend for office-bearers to become distanced from the day-to-day happenings in their unions. If this is indeed the case, it could be because national leadership is too preoccupied with national policy issues and that this leaves them little time to keep in touch with more mundane aspects of union organisation. Again, this observation was made in COSATU and all the affiliates.

Less than a third of the officials felt that their union used its resources and staff effectively (see Table 37). The rest felt their union either used its resources and staff ineffectively or were not sure.

Table 37: The Union Uses its Resources and Staff Effectively?

	Number	Percent
Agree	165	29.7
Not sure	210	37.8
Disagree	181	32.6
TOTAL	556	100

It is difficult to assess all the implications of the responses reflected in this table. What is certain is that as the number of officials grows in a union many of them tend to feel that they have no

say in the direction of the organisation and therefore identify less with the direction and specific decisions taken by policy-making structures.

Union officials constitute an important link between the union's shopfloor structures and the rest of the organisation. This enables them to have a much clearer understanding of the union's strengths and weaknesses at that level. In particular, those officials who are in regular contact with shop stewards, for example in union/management meetings, have a better understanding of the capability of shopfloor leadership on a number of issues. Officials were asked to respond to three related statements, namely, "My union has strong shop stewards' committees", "Most of our members are happy with the service they get from the union", and "The structures of the union are functioning properly". Tables 38 to 40 present their responses. In the case of Tables 39 and 40, these have been broken down by union.

Table 38: My Union Has Strong Shop Stewards' Committees?

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Agree	189	34.2
Not sure	172	31.2
Disagree	191	34.6
TOTAL	552	100

Table 39: Most of Our Members Are Happy with the Service they Get from the Union?

<i>Union</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
PPWAWU	16	18	16
CWIU	22	16	9
NUM	44	33	13
SASBO	31	14	10
IPS	1	4	5
SARHWU	4	9	7
CAWU	5	8	7
TGWU	8	11	13
SAAPAWU	2	5	2
POPCRU	6	11	12
FAWU	1	6	3
SACTWU	2	1	-
CWU	3	1	3
SACCAWU	13	17	42
NUMSA	26	28	25
COSATU	4	8	2
SADTU	1	2	1
SAMWU	6	3	2
TOTAL	195 (34.7%)	195 (34.7%)	172 (30.6%)

Table 40: The Structures of the Union are Functioning Properly?

Union	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
PPWAWU	5	23	22
CWIU	21	11	15
NUM	37	37	16
SASBO	20	22	13
IPS	1	2	7
SARHWU	7	4	9
CAWU	10	3	7
TGWU	5	7	19
SAAPAWU	2	4	3
POPCRU	6	11	13
FAWU	-	4	7
SACTWU	3	-	-
CWU	1	3	4
SACCAWU	15	19	37
NUMSA	27	29	23
COSATU	3	8	4
SADTU	1	3	-
SAMWU	2	6	3
TOTAL	166	196	202

What the three tables above reveal is the fact that many union officials did not believe that their members were happy with the service they were getting. They also suggest that the view that

union structures were not functioning properly was held by a large number of people within the unions themselves.

Notwithstanding some of the above findings about officials' assessment of their own unions, most of them (66 per cent) maintained that employers respected their unions.

A rather puzzling finding is the 'not sure' response which seemed to be shared by an unusually large number of people. This lack of clarity about vision and goals affected all unions regardless of size. It was probably due to a breakdown of an organisational consensus as to what constitutes strong shop stewards committees, functioning structures, good service to members and clear organisational goals. This breakdown of consensus is symptomatic of the changing nature and role of the union movement under the democratic political dispensation.

When the number of officials who are 'not sure' was analysed, it was found that in all these tables, these officials did not come from any particular group (gender, age, position, length of service, etc). Officials who gave this response were drawn from all the above, including regional secretaries, national organisers and general secretaries. This point will be illustrated by means of one table based on responses to a question on union goals.

Table 41: My Union has Clear Goals and a Common Vision? (by Position)

Position	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Local Administrator	15	14	0
Branch Administrator	12	8	2
Regional Administrator	22	18	3
Head Office Administrator	24	23	5
Local Organiser	45	29	11
Branch Organiser	25	12	4
Regional Organiser	32	18	2
National Organiser	18	8	2
Branch Secretary	9	10	2
Regional Secretary	13	5	5
General Secretary	4	4	2
Research Officer	2	3	4
Legal Officer (Regional)	7	9	1
Legal Officer (National)	2	2	1
Education Officer (Branch)	2	1	0
Education Officer (Regional)	7	4	1
Education Officer (National)	7	2	5
Media Officer	1	1	2
Other	48	19	13
Total	295	190	65

This table reveals that it was not just office-based and junior officials who were not sure about the direction of the unions. A number of top officials were equally unsure about the direction of

their own unions. In this case it can be noted that even some national organisers and general secretaries were not sure about the vision and goals of their own unions! Another example is the question about whether the union had strong shop stewards or not. Responses to this question showed that a larger percentage of local administrators (79 per cent) had more firm views ('yes' or 'no') than a percentage of national organisers (67 per cent). Similarly, the number of officials who were not sure whether their union had strong structures or not included people who joined unions in the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s.

Of course, leadership in any organisation will always disagree among themselves about whether or not the organisation is strong. However, the almost equal division of views between those who agree, disagree or are just not sure points to a certain degree of confusion among union officials. In part, this can be attributed to the lack of a clear strategic vision and end goal for the union movement as a whole. The crisis of the socialist movement internationally, the pervasiveness of the neo-liberal ideology and the transition to democracy have left many within the union movement without a sense of direction for themselves and the movement. In a context such as this one, many union leaders find it tempting to opt for solutions which emphasise the imperatives of efficient administration and other leadership-driven solutions at the expense of popular participation and democracy. We shall return to this theme in Chapter 7 when we discuss organisational modernisation and new cleavages among full-time officials.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a contemporary profile of full-time officials in COSATU and its affiliates. This profile expands on some of the issues discussed in the union case studies in Chapters 3 to 5 and sheds light on key aspects of our argument regarding the dilemma of leadership which results from a tension between worker control and organisational modernisation. The discussion in this chapter has also highlighted the changing role of the union

official as well as new cleavages within this layer of union leadership. Thus, together with the discussion in Chapters 3 to 5, this discussion in this chapter provides a basis for the synthesis in Chapter 7.

Notes:

1. For a discussion of the rationale of conducting the survey and other methodological issues see Appendix 1.
2. The number of officials in NUMSA has declined significantly since the early 1990s. At the end of November 1993 the union employed 341 full-time officials.
3. Nyman, R. 1996. "The Glass Ceiling: The Representation of Women in COSATU", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 20, 5, p. 30.
4. This category includes people who classified themselves differently, e.g. Mexican-American.
5. The union is the South African Society of Bank Officials (SASBO) which was originally a staff association for white bank employees. It still retains some features of this history, including a high number of white members and full-time officials.
6. Buhlungu, S. 1994b., *op cit.* p. 27)
7. *ibid.*, p. 27.
8. A similar conclusion was reached by Baskin, J. 1991. *Striking Back: A history of COSATU*. Johannesburg: Ravan, pp. 374 - 75. However, Baskin's assertion that "Almost without exception women centrally involved in union work are single, separated, divorced or widowed" was too sweeping and vague, particularly because it was not clear what he meant by "women centrally involved in union work". Nor did he attempt to quantify his assertion.
9. Lawrence, E. 1994. *Gender and Trade Unions*. London: Taylor & Francis, p. 116.
10. See Buhlungu, S. 1994a. "COSATU and the Elections", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 18, 2; Buhlungu, S. 1994b. *op. cit.*; Baskin, J. (ed.) 1994. *op. cit.*, and Baskin, J. 1996a. "The Social Partnership Challenge: Union Trends and Industrial Relations Trends", in Baskin, J. (ed.) *Against the Current: Labour and economic policy in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
11. This conclusion is made in Baskin, J. 1996a. *op. cit.*
12. DITSELA is a labour education and training institute which was set up by COSATU and FEDUSA in December 1996. Most of its funding comes from the Department of Labour's Civil Society Programme.
13. *Pathways*, 1997. p.1.
14. *ibid.*, p. 1.

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15. Collins, D. 1994a., *op. cit.*
 16. *ibid.*, pp. 22 - 23.
 17. It would seem that this has been changing in recent years. Visits to union offices in the regions and in-depth interviews with officials in the final stages of the research during 2000 showed that weekend work is no longer the norm in the unions. Most administrative officials no longer work on Saturdays. Some organizers do Saturday work on a rotational basis while others no longer work on weekends.
 18. Buhlungu, S. 1994b. *op. cit.* pp. 27 - 28.

CHAPTER 7: COMRADES, ENTREPRENEURS AND CAREER UNIONISTS: ORGANISATIONAL MODERNISATION AND NEW CLEAVAGES AMONG UNION OFFICIALS

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it explores the implications of the changes within the post-1973 unions for the role of full-time union officials employed by these unions. In particular, we discuss cleavages within union employment and how these are bound up with competing notions of organisational modernisation within the union movement. Secondly, it examines broader contextual processes - national and global - and how they contribute to, and accelerate, these changes within the post-1973 union movement.

New Cleavages Among Officials

The last decade witnessed many dramatic changes within the union movement, one of which is growing segmentation within the ranks of full-time union officials. This segmentation has also resulted in the widening of the gap between some officials and the bulk of the unionised workforce, a divide which manifests itself in class terms. We have already made reference to different forms of cleavage such as race, gender, education and occupational position within the unions. In this chapter we examine new cleavages within the ranks of union officials which induce, and are in turn induced by, processes of organisational modernisation in a context of political transition and integration of South Africa into the global economy. Thus, we elaborate on a central theme of our argument, namely, that the changing role of the union official is manifested by the disappearance of the activist organiser and the emergence of new types of

union officials. This change coincides with a process of generational change within the ranks of these officials.

The 'activist organiser' embodied two roles, that of a political activist as well as that of a full-time official of the union. The liberation struggle created a context within which it was possible to fuse these roles. As a consequence, working for the union was regarded by many as being part of a commitment to the goals of national liberation and economic emancipation. Thus, in spite of their severely limited material resources and the risks involved in working for 'struggle organisations', unions were able to attract hundreds of highly politicised and energetic young people, many of whom were prepared to work for little or no financial reward. Union employment was thus non-hierarchical, collectivist and driven by altruism. In addition, it relied on self-supervision and political co-ordination rather than management in the corporate sense of the word. The disappearance of the activist organiser occurred because of the dissolution of the link between the role of political activist on the one hand, and full-time union official on the other. In the course of the dissolution of this link, the latter role has been emphasised by unions and officials themselves with the result that for many officials today it has become, to all intents and purposes, a form of employment like any other conventional job in the labour market.

Understanding the changing role of the union official helps us identify the cleavages and distinctions which have emerged within the ranks of these officials today. The first distinction among officials is generational, and in this thesis we have referred to the old generation and the new generation. We have referred to those officials who were involved in unions during the era of the activist organiser and the prevailing organisational culture as the old generation. This generation joined and was active in the unions in the 1970s and the 1980s when this organisational culture was strong. Few of these officials remain in the unions today and, as we will show below, many of those that remain have changed in outlook and orientation towards trade unionism.

The new generation, on the other hand, are those officials who joined unions when both the

assumptions and practices associated with the activist organiser were changing within the unions.

In other words, the assumption that an official had to be a political activist was being replaced by the view that political activism was not an essential requirement and that the priority was to have skilled officials who could provide quality service to workers. This new emphasis and reprioritisation of the requirements for a union official accelerated the unravelling of the organisational culture associated with the old generation of full-time officials. For example, the emphasis on skills implied that educational qualifications would become an important consideration when appointing officials, which in turn implied the introduction of differential systems of remuneration.

The diminishing emphasis on the political activist dimension of the role of full-time officials together with political and economic changes discussed below brought about a change in the orientation of the new generation towards trade unions and trade unionism. Many officials began to show a disregard for the traditions and organisational culture which had emerged during the time of the old generation. Even those who were in agreement with the basic tenets of the culture of militant unionism, which is part of a broad working class offensive against capitalism, often rebelled against the specific aspects of the worker control tradition. Thus, as one official who is part of the new generation observes, this is a generation which “comes into the labour movement at a particular time when there is a decline in social movements, in activism, and so on”.¹

The generational change in union employment has had a profound impact on the traditions and practices of the union movement in general. In other words, the change has resulted in a change in the organisational culture and approaches to organisational management and modernisation in the union movement. However, this generational change should be understood as a process which is unfolding simultaneously with other changes and forms of segmentation in unions. Thus, the second distinction we make relates to union officials’ political and ideological orientation towards the unions. Here we identify three types of officials, namely, the ideological unionist, the ‘entrepreneur’ and the career unionist.

These three types of officials are ideal-types and have been identified in the preceding chapters. Suffice it to note here that these distinctions intersect with the generational distinctions noted above. Table 42 below provides a schematic summary of the key features of each of these categories, the generation and gender they are drawn from, their orientation to trade unionism and the project of organisational modernisation that they pursue within the union movement. Discussion of the first and last categories is implicit in debates on the sociology of trade unionism, particularly in relation to notions of union democracy on the one hand, and bureaucracy and oligarchy on the other hand. In this regard, ideological unionists would represent a diminishing layer of strong defenders of worker control. An example of this is an passionate plea made by one unionist maintaining worker control.

If we give more decision-making power to our leadership now, we will be accepting what the bosses desperately need - a close relationship with union leadership. They need to use the authority of union leaders to reduce rank and file militancy and sabotage working class power.²

However, ideological unionists remain ambivalent about organisational modernisation as they often find it necessary to achieve efficiency in the way unions are run. Career unionists, on the other hand, are technocrats who are committed to building an efficient union movement. Some of them could even be union bureaucrats in the making, breaking the path for the emergence of a fully-fledged union bureaucracy. Of course, the role of full-time officials in the unions under discussion is still too fluid to allow us to characterise these tendencies in definitive terms. The usefulness of these categories is that it suggests important changes within the unions and shifts which are going to have a considerable impact on power relations between union officials and rank-and-file members. This theme will be explored further in Chapter 8.

The third type of union official, the entrepreneur, deserves some examination here as it does not feature in conventional debates on full-time officials. Indeed, it would seem that the emergence of this category may be a function of the accelerated processes of class formation spawned by the deracialisation of South African society and related notions of black economic empowerment as

Table 42: Ideal-types of Full-time Officials in the Post-1973 Unions

	Features	Generation	Gender	Approach to Unionism	Organisational Modernisation Project
The ideological unionist	Collectivist. Seeks to restore militant tradition and worker control. Wants to achieve socialism.	Predominantly old generation officials.	Male	Political. Unions part of class struggle against capitalist class.	Minimalist. Ambivalent. They seek to strengthen worker control. But they also want specialisation and some professionalism to achieve efficiency.
The entrepreneur	Individualistic and manipulative 'empire builder'. Union is a stepping stone to help mobility up the social scale.	Predominantly new generation.	Male	Opportunistic and instrumental. Driven by personal career interests.	Maximalist. They seek to abolish worker control and see unions as business organisations. Create avenues for upward mobility and other entrepreneurial activities such as investment companies.
The career trade unionist	Wants to make unionism a life-time career. Focused on becoming expert on specific aspects of union work. Pragmatic.	Old and new generations.	Male and female	Apolitical, economic and technocratic. Unions to improve wages and conditions, not to destroy but reform capitalism.	Moderate. Technocratic and bureaucratic. Seek specialisation and professionalism. Decisions by experts and top leaders. Unions are not exactly the same as other institutions. Seek to curtail, but not necessarily to abolish, worker control.

well as economic liberalisation which has created vast opportunities for a few entrepreneurial individuals. The fact that some of these entrepreneurs find themselves in the unions is simply incidental as they are present in all other social institutions as the trailblazers of the predominantly black new middle class. In his poem *It Has Been Such A Long Road*, Alfred Temba Qabula, a former MAWU shop steward at Dunlop in Durban and a cultural activist who has since become unemployed and lives in a rural village in Pondoland, has noted how workers are “movable ladders that take people up towards the skies” which are then “left out in the open for the rain”. In the meantime, former activists “show us their backs, and they avoid eye-contact, pretending they never saw us”.³ While it is not accurate to characterise all former unionists in this way because there are thousands who continue to work for the betterment of the subordinate classes, the characterisation which Qabula provides aptly describes the entrepreneurial official we identify in this thesis.

What distinguishes this type of union official from the others is their instrumental and opportunistic approach to trade unionism. Unions, like other social institutions, are viewed as stepping stones to facilitate the individual’s upward mobility. Similarly, the collective culture of the unions is seen as useful only insofar as it assists the individual to achieve his or her personal ambitions. In a nutshell, this type of official exhibits an extreme form of individualism which is capable of operating under the guise of the collective culture of union politics. In reality, entrepreneurial officials, who have their counterparts within the ranks of shop stewards and office-bearers of the unions, are at the centre of most leadership battles and are continually seeking opportunities for personal aggrandisement inside and outside the unions. One of the manifestations of the activities of entrepreneurial officials is the formation of cliques which are then used as power bases to further the interests of an official. The observations of a long-serving CEPPWAWU shop steward and former regional office-bearer in Pietermaritzburg suggest that these officials are everywhere.

Ja, it is not something that was there before and it is now everywhere. It is also appearing even among old officials and it will end up splitting the unions. Yes, [at the centre of

every clique] there is an official. You see, the interest behind an empire is that they can undermine worker control, undermine it completely. Ja. because you hardly ever get an official like that working with those people who are serious about worker control, you see. Just for instance, there is no more FAWU here in Maritzburg. It's just the name because of the thing of cliques. They were trying to control and manage the situation in the union, and they disciplined a comrade, an official, and eventually he was fired. But he came back and went into many of the workplaces campaigning. He opened an office and started as some kind of consultant and from there he opened a union.⁴

These officials remain in the unions for as long as their interests are served by these organisations. However, often they work to ensure that unions modernise in a way which favours their personal ambitions and interests. Thus they work hard to ensure that worker control is weakened and that full-time officials have more power in decision-making. They also thrive in an environment characterised by high-level engagement with other institutions such as employer organisations and the state and in meetings of the ANC-COSATU-SACP alliance, as it is in these interactions that they get exposure and access to avenues for mobility. Indeed, the entrepreneurial union official feels more at home in these meetings and forms of engagement than in general meetings with workers. According to a NUMSA official, many have realised that 'acting smart' can be rewarded handsomely in the form of lucrative positions in the civil service, Parliament, provincial and local government structures.⁵

There is a convergence between the interests of these officials and the emerging trend of 'business unionism' in the form of union investment companies. Business unionism creates entrepreneurial opportunities and avenues for upward mobility for some union officials. Well-known examples are those of Marcel Golding, former assistant general secretary of the NUM, and Johnny Copelyn, former general secretary of the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU), both of whom have become wealthy businessmen through their leading roles in the investment companies of their former unions. More recent examples include Tony Kgobe, a former national organiser of NUMSA who is now the chief executive officer of NUMSA's investment company, and Paul Nkuna, a former national treasurer of the NUM who is a senior executive in NUM's investment company.

Many of these officials support moves to modernise unions, but, as we argue below, the modernisation project that they favour is one that exacerbates the erosion of the democratic character of the post-1973 unions and engenders a culture of individualism. In this way, they are in the forefront of moves to erode the tradition of worker control as it constitutes an obstacle to their personal ambitions and entrepreneurial designs. However, they do not necessarily have a long-term interest in trade unionism nor do they have the stamina to remain in the unions until the conditions are conducive for officials to take full control. In the absence of countervailing struggles by union members, the real beneficiaries of the erosion of worker control will be the career unionists, a layer of full-time officials who have a long-term interest in the unions and are currently investing in their own intellectual and technical development.

What About the Gender Agenda?

We have argued that there is an inequality of power relations between men and women full-time officials in the union movement. In particular, we illustrated this by highlighting what we have termed occupational differentiation which relegates women officials to office-bound, clerical and other low-status positions. We showed how women have been dislodged from those positions of union employment which have been redefined into politically powerful jobs such as organiser and general secretary. The purpose of this discussion is to link this marginality of women full-time officials with the discussion of new cleavages among officials.

Women officials have participated in the post-1973 unions from the outset, and they have served in virtually all areas of union work, from cleaners and 'tea-girls' to legal officers, researchers and general secretaries. Thus women were part of the old generation of union officials and they are also part of the new generation as discussed in this thesis. However, apart from the occupational segmentation there are other respects in which the role and position of women officials differ from those of male officials. Compared to their male counterparts, both old and new generation

female officials have extremely limited access to opportunities and avenues for upward mobility within and outside the unions. Whereas male officials have been moving up inside the unions and in politics, business, the civil service, NGOs, management, union investment companies and consultancy work, the only area wherein female officials are represented is politics.⁶ Their presence in the political arena is partly an outcome of quota systems which operate within the different political parties, principally the ANC. As a result, it is now possible to identify several former women unionists in local, provincial and national politics - as municipal councillors, members of provincial legislatures, members of Parliament and even two deputy ministers.⁷ Within the union movement, none of the unions in South African, including those which are not the focus of this study, has a female general secretary or national organiser at present.

The role and position of women officials and their male counterparts differ with regard to the typology of union officials in contemporary unions which we discussed above. While male officials are represented in the ranks of all three types of officials, namely, ideological unionists, entrepreneurs and career unionists, female officials are predominantly present within the ranks of career unionists. For many, this is not out of choice but is imposed by the structural conditions of power configurations in a patriarchal society and an organisational culture which has a male bias. Thus, it is only within the ranks of career unionists that women officials can have a guarantee of long-term survival in their union jobs. Even here, they remain in subordinate low-status jobs which, when stripped of their activist dimensions, are purely clerical functions.

All the above has implications for the future of women officials regardless of which of the three types of union official emerges victorious in terms of its particular project of organisational modernisation. Women officials are, and it appears that they will remain, losers as a result of the changing role and position of full-time officials. The appearance and the essence of equality with their male counterparts which they enjoyed in the days of the activist union official have been eroded beyond recognition in the last decade. The irony of the changing role of the union official is that as the power of these officials *vis-a-vis* rank-and-file union members seems to be increasing, the power of female union officials *vis-a-vis* their male counterparts has been

diminishing. If indeed the increasing power of full-time officials results in the emergence of a union oligarchy, such an oligarchy will be a pre-eminently male one. This means that in terms of full-time union employment, the gender equality agenda is best served by a democratic union environment rather than a bureaucratic one.

The National and Global Context

The second aim of this chapter is to examine the broader national and global context and processes of change therein, how they contributed to and accelerated changes within the post-1973 unions, and how they exacerbated the cleavages we discussed above. This discussion is of cardinal importance for this thesis as a whole since changes within organisations can never be divorced from broader changes within the environment within which unions are operating. In other words, movements, organisations and all other social institutions are not self-contained entities which are insulated from their social, economic and political milieu. Indeed, changes within organisations are often triggered by, or can be traced back to, changes within the broader environment within which they organise. This is not to emphasise structure over agency, but rather to show the dialectical relationship between the two as changes within social institutions can also have repercussions for the entire social structure. Below we highlight some economic and political changes in the national and global context which triggered, or are related to, the changes inside the union movement as discussed above.

Union recognition and the advent of liberal, non-racial democracy

In the 27 years of the post-1973 unions' existence (that is, 1973 to 2000) two changes occurred which had an unprecedented effect on the functioning of unions, including the role of full-time officials within these unions. The first one was the granting of official recognition to these unions in 1979. This recognition paved the way for spectacular growth and consolidation of the unions in the decade of the 1980s. More importantly, union recognition by the state and

employers laid the foundation for growing institutionalisation of trade unionism for black workers. In this thesis we have used the concept of organisational modernisation to refer to the internal union dimension of such processes of institutionalisation of trade unionism. With recognition came some rights for unions, such as the right to stop order facilities, the right to negotiate on behalf of workers and sign binding agreements with employers, the right for union officials to gain access to the employer's premises and the right to elect shopfloor representatives or shop stewards.

All these rights had a tremendously positive impact on the unions' capacity to represent, and to win tangible gains for, their members. Two of these deserve specific mention. Firstly, the right to stop order facilities resolved what was a perennial problem for black unions in South Africa, namely their lack of a sustainable resource base. This meant that unions could employ full-time officials and be able to guarantee them a monthly salary and, in some cases, a few basic benefits. This meant that the hand-to-mouth existence of the early days was to become a thing of the past and union officials came to expect to be paid as a matter of right. Thus, some of the changes we have discussed, such as the change from an activist organiser to different types of officials have their roots in these early developments in the broader environment.

Secondly, the right of unions to negotiate on behalf of their members served to entrench the position of the official as the full-time functionary employed to service the members. The roots of what we have referred to as the dilemma of leadership are to be found in the granting of this right as the generally held assumption among employers, state officials and, indeed, many workers, that the full-time official was the representative of the workers and thus had the power to negotiate and conclude agreements on their behalf. Even during the heyday of the worker control tradition, the full-time official was expected by unions to be present at all important negotiations and act as the chief signatory to the agreements concluded.

However, the granting of union recognition by employers and the state failed to result in the bureaucratic tendencies sociological studies of trade unionism warn us about. In other words, the

labour relations reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s failed to produce conventional trends and tendencies among South African unions because for black workers the struggle was not over until they had achieved political freedom from minority rule. Industrial citizenship was deemed as important as political citizenship, and the granting of the former merely acted to spur workers on to fight for political liberation. The militancy of unionised workers in the 1980s was an expression of their impatience with the old order and the way it continued to shape their lives, including workplace relations.

Thus, the fact that liberalisation of labour relations legislation was not accompanied by political liberalisation meant that the 'normalisation' of labour relations was delayed. In the conventional literature it is assumed that union recognition necessarily results in the narrowing of the social distance and the blurring of class distinctions between management and union officials. However, in apartheid South Africa this remained unthinkable not only because the class divide had been wide but also because under apartheid the chasm was simultaneously a black/white one, and black/white relations were extremely adversarial. The dominant view among activists, including unionists, was that of an 'unfinished struggle'. Those few officials who were suspected of fraternising with management and accepting bribes from management or who accepted junior managerial positions were ostracised by both workers and other officials.⁸

The other major change that impacted on the functioning of the union movement was the advent of liberal, non-racial democracy. Formally, this occurred following the first democratic elections in 1994, but effectively it started after the unbanning of liberation movements and the release of political prisoners in 1990. The end of apartheid represented the liberalisation of politics and the granting of political citizenship to black South Africans, a process which appeared to many as the logical conclusion of the struggle for liberation. It impacted on the unions' internal functioning in several ways.⁹ Firstly, the deracialisation of society which the demise of apartheid implied resulted in enormous opportunities for upward mobility for black people in general and union officials in particular. COSATU's decision in 1993 to send 20 senior officials and worker leaders to Parliament on an ANC ticket opened the floodgates for other union officials and leaders. Since

then hundreds of experienced full-time officials have left the union movement for political office in local, provincial and national government, while many others have been the beneficiaries of affirmative action and black economic empowerment policies of the new government in various spheres. The availability of employment and political and business opportunities in the broader society compelled unions to improve their employment practices in order to retain experienced officials, thus setting in motion many of the modernisation processes to which we have made reference.

Secondly, the opening up or deracialisation of society triggered class formation on a scale that has no precedent in black South African history. Activists of the struggle period were catapulted into new positions of power and high remuneration without the stigma that was associated with those positions in the days of apartheid. These processes of class formation were part of the context within which unions were operating and they shaped developments within the union movement. The 'race to riches' in the society shaped the behaviour of full-time officials and forced unions to take note of market forces when determining the conditions of these officials.

Thirdly, the advent of liberal and non-racial democracy was also accompanied by the erosion of notions of altruism and collective solidarity which had been the hallmark of the struggle era, and the emergence of a new value system based on individualism. Comradely relations among activists were replaced by competition for positions and power. Inside the unions this meant that top positions such as regional secretary and general secretary into which officials were previously elected unopposed became arenas for fierce competition. The new value system was accompanied by the emergence of new cleavages among union officials with the consequence that the activist official of the struggle period gave way to the three types of officials that we have discussed in this chapter.

Fourthly, the democratic dispensation also resulted in the creation of legitimate centralised institutions for negotiation and consultation between labour, the state and employers. This centralisation engendered a new style of conducting consultation and bargaining which was at

variance with the painstaking processes of mandating and reporting back which had become established practice within the union movement. The new style was often unaccountable, elitist and secretive, but many unionists and political leaders found it attractive because it enabled them to express themselves as individual leaders and, in the process, to raise their profile and prospects for getting lucrative job and business opportunities. Of course we must point out that these trends are also a consequence of the union membership growth which makes it extremely difficult to practice worker control, particularly with regard to processes of mandating and reporting back.

Fifthly, during the years of apartheid unions and other liberation movements were seen by many black people as the legitimate institutions which represented their political aspirations. Since they had the resources to employ people, unions were among the few social institutions where activists could get employment which was directly related to the liberation struggle. Most jobs in society were under the auspices and control of the apartheid state and employers who practised apartheid in their own workplaces. The other legal or semi-legal liberation forces did not have the same amount of resources as the unions to employ large numbers of people. However, with the unbanning of political movements, unions lost their monopoly of legitimacy as new 'struggle job opportunities' appeared in the ANC, the SACP and other organisations. During this time some full-time officials left the unions to work for these organisations because the salaries they paid were often higher than those paid by the unions. State institutions also acquired legitimacy after the ANC came to power in 1994. These institutions paid much higher salaries and benefits than the unions. This resulted in large numbers of union officials joining the civil service as policy specialists or to work in other bureaucratic positions.

This change also occurred in relation to managerial jobs which were previously regarded with deep suspicion by unionists. A new discourse on going into management to influence a culture change from within encouraged many union officials and shop stewards to take up positions in management.

Finally, the dawn of democracy introduced new pressures on unions to operate like other social

institutions. Over time unions began to adopt practices which were the norm in many other social institutions. These ranged from abandoning township church venues for meetings in favour of up-market hotels and international convention centres in city centres and entertainment resorts, to the introduction of grades and differential remuneration based on market trends and the professionalisation of union activities in general. The changes also include changes in dress code, changes in the cars officials drive and the social circles they move in. In all their engagements, unionists face unrelenting pressures to project a reasonable, moderate and professional image of themselves and some of this is beginning to show in the way unions conduct their internal affairs.

In short, the political democratisation of South Africa marked the deepening of the process of institutionalisation of the union movement which had begun with the granting of recognition at the end of the 1970s. Unions have now become part of the mainstream of social institutions in terms of the way they conduct their affairs. Many trade union education courses on 'organisational development', which are standard menu on labour supporting organisations' and internal union education programmes, borrow concepts and principles contained in standard business management textbooks. In addition, mainstream economics and industrial relations theories find their way into the unions via union officials and shop stewards who enrol for custom-made courses at local universities and technikons many of which run courses jointly with foreign, principally British and Australian, universities.

Meanwhile, sociology, the discipline that was most intimately associated with the birth and development of the post-1973 unions, is increasingly finding itself without a role in the rapidly changing union movement. During the formative years of the new unions, the discipline's Marxist orientation and focus on collective action provided a generation of activists with intellectual skills to support the labour movement. It also created the space for intellectuals and activists to engage critically with the goals and practices of this movement. However, in recent years both the theoretical framework and the substantive issues have shifted away from social movements towards human resource management. In addition, some of the intellectual capacity which sociologists provided is now available within the union movement. But most importantly,

other academic institutions and disciplines have succeeded in repositioning and marketing themselves to the unions better than sociology. For example, technikons and management faculties at universities have been developing courses and services which respond to the instrumental notions of knowledge in a movement which is under pressure to find solutions to complex problems.

Technikon Natal in Durban is an example of an institution which has seized the opportunity by providing tailor-made trade union courses to train union leadership and, in the process, reconcile them to the imperatives of business. The Labour Development Unit (LDU) which operates under the auspices of the Business Studies Unit of the Technikon specialises in trade union education. Incidentally, the Technikon has no historical ties with the progressive movement, but was enterprising enough to see the gap and create the unit in the mid-1990s. Their programme is co-ordinated and run by former union officials from COSATU affiliated unions, Mhlaba Mkhize (ex-PPWAWU regional secretary), Important Mkhize (ex-SACCAWU regional secretary) and Dudu Mohlomi (ex-Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) administrator and wife of former COSATU regional secretary, Thami Mohlomi). Its popularity has grown by leaps and bounds since its inception. The Technikon's programme is underpinned by a different ideology. The brochure of their "Labour Leadership and Development Programme" notes that the programme is to create a foundation for a "far less volatile relationship". One of its objectives states:

The shopfloor leader will be provided with an understanding of his/her role in the continued, participative growth of business. This in turn will foster the recognition of the joint responsibility of organised labour and management in ensuring the survival of the organisation to the benefit of all stakeholders.¹⁰

The Technikon's labour education programme is an example of current efforts to domesticate the post-1973 union movement by deepening its institutionalisation. Mhlaba Mkhize is a former regional secretary of PPWAWU in KwaZulu-Natal who now lectures and is also the overall manager of the academic programme. He says the programme has provided training to hundreds of shop stewards from many COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU affiliates. The unit usually

approaches management directly and asks them to sponsor the training of shop stewards at the Technikon. Mkhize says that management usually pays about R10 000 per person for a full, six-module programme. Alternatively, the union may approach the Unit to develop a special programme for its officials and office-bearers. In 2000 FAWU and the NUM were the two unions which had finalised details for leadership training involving all their full-time officials and national office-bearers.¹¹

Some activists in labour-supporting organisations are critical of the Technikon and point out that its real motives are to reconcile the unions to the agenda of management. Kessie Moodley, the director of the Durban Workers' College, believes that the Technikon had to engage in extensive 'manoeuvring' such as getting well-known past and current unionists to support the programme so that they could then sell it to management. The attitude of the college then was "to suss the whole of the thing out".

Firstly, the institution itself has been management oriented. Technikons have been that, that is the route. We are not denouncing it. Secondly, that you have got a few trade unionists there doesn't then automatically convert it. We need to know how they are doing it, what's their level, *et cetera*. And thirdly, that they are designing the course to suit management. Don't think that management is going to be paying for the course, you are going to be teaching them in the course things that are contrary to what management wants. It's going to be the management agenda, you know, whether you like it or not.¹²

As discussed in earlier chapters, changes such as the ones discussed here have had an immensely powerful impact on the unions and their traditions. This discussion now turns to an examination of the impact that economic liberalisation and globalisation have had on the post-1973 unions.

Economic liberalisation and South Africa's integration into global capitalism

Changes within the environment in which unions operate are not occasioned only by national political and labour relations factors and processes such as those discussed above. They are also induced by economic processes such as the growing interdependence of different national

economies, economic liberalisation and the internationalisation of capital which gives rise to intense competition between economies and firms. Historically the South African economy benefited from protectionism and the import substitution strategy of successive national governments and thus seemed to be coping despite the negative effects of recession and unfavourable changes in prices of international commodities such as oil. However, the vulnerability of the South African economy was exposed by the isolation of the country because of its apartheid policies. It lagged behind in a number of respects, particularly technology and human development. Thus, from the mid-1980s many individual corporations and some state institutions started searching for new strategies to adjust in anticipation of South Africa's reinsertion into the global economy. Out of these processes of adjustment two economic strategies emerged which had a profound impact on the trade union movement, namely, economic liberalisation in the form of deregulation and privatisation and workplace restructuring driven by 'world class manufacturing' techniques. The deleterious effect of these strategies on trade unions was exacerbated by the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the emergence of a unipolar capitalist world.

Economic liberalisation undermined unions, particularly because it was premised on the notion that the state must withdraw from the economy and remove various forms of regulation, many of which could be used to promote the interests of workers. The result was privatisation of parastatal corporations with the result that many workers lost their jobs, and the emergence of an unregulated informal sector which undercut workers in the formal sector. From the early 1990s these economic strategies formed part of a neo-liberal crusade which sought to counter the ANC's and the union movement's then policy of nationalisation. The unions' lack of capacity became apparent in the course of their search for answers to this crusade and to changes at the workplace. Many of the organisational modernisation strategies which the unions adopted emerged as responses to this changing balance of power between management and labour.

Emerging at the same time as these macro-economic changes in state and corporate policies were attempts to restructure production along the lines of so-called world class manufacturing

techniques to enable firms to adjust to pressures of international competition. This restructuring entailed, among others, a reduction of the size of the workforce, reorganisation of work, the introduction of new technology and the attempts to introduce co-operative relations between workers and management. The latter strategy often involved by-passing the union to deal directly with the workers and using union shop stewards to win support for managerial plans. PG Bison and Nampak were among the first companies to introduce these strategies, to which the union found it extremely difficult to respond coherently. The two companies went further and recruited shop stewards and union officials into supervisory and junior managerial positions.¹³

The effect of all these strategies was to shift the balance of power decisively in favour of capital and to put the union movement on the defensive. In addition, these strategies had a profound impact on the internal functioning of the unions. Here we highlight only a few examples to illustrate the point. Firstly, they undermined the trusted union strategy of militant abstentionism and created cracks within the ranks of the union movement. While some die-hard union officials, shop stewards and members continued to hold the view that management was a class enemy intent on self-preservation, a growing number of members, shop stewards and even officials argued for a more pragmatic approach. A former PG Bison shop steward who has since been promoted to an industrial relations manager, felt that some people in the union did not understand that the times were changing and that therefore there was a need for accommodation between workers and management.

The attitude of this company [PG Bison] towards the union is different from other companies. Like me, I can tell you, since 1991 I have never worked. I am getting paid to be a shop steward and talking, sitting in meetings and solving problems. There was a time when comrades used to say we are co-opted. The perception in the past was that if management fights for your good then you are sleeping in the same bed with them. In 1988 when PG Bison came back from Harare to meet with the [banned] ANC, they came back and gave in to the demands of the union without us going to them. They said, 'you say you want a living wage now? We are giving you a living wage'.¹⁴

Secondly, unions found it increasingly more difficult to defend themselves from the negative

effects of economic deregulation and liberalisation because they did not have the capacity to do so and they were also unable to develop alternatives to market capitalism. More importantly for our discussion here, these changes resulted in the emergence of cleavages within the ranks of full-time officials. Unions began to put emphasis on skills which came with formal education qualifications, and officials who possessed these became indispensable while those with little or no formal education qualifications were increasingly viewed as 'dead wood' which did not contribute to the capacity of the unions to deal with these 'complex issues'. This differentiation also manifested itself in new grading systems which put a premium on formal education qualifications and technical skills and thus placed those who possessed them at the top end of the scale. In some unions there was a growth of this expert layer of officials as researchers, economists, legal specialists and others were employed to increase union capacity. Some of these professionals, as one official called them, brought a different style of doing things which was perceived to be about taking 'short-cuts' as opposed to the traditional participatory style of the union which often took a long time.

Some are coming with their experience as professionals and they respond to things professionally, by being proactive and running with things, 'this is what I'm suggesting and this is what is being proposed'. Which is good for trade unions. There are other people who like to take things through the processes and brainstorm the issues with a number of people, develop a paper, circulate it. Instead of saying 'this is what I think should be done', you want to take a long process. By the time the issue is supposed to be policy we are still discussing the paper. The people who are professionals want to see things done and they get responses from management. They get answers on issues. Ja, you call them short-cuts because tradition has been that you develop things from your local, you discuss and go back to your factory and discuss and take that to your branch then make a position from there to your NEC. Then it becomes your national or union position.¹⁵

As the above extract notes, the short-cut approach of the professionals is a direct response to issues raised by management and processes of restructuring in the workplace, and it seems to work as it elicits responses from management before the union is overtaken by events. Part of the explanation for the union's obsession with professionalisation comes from the frustration they feel when they are unable to get responses from management and are thus unable to defend their

members against workplace restructuring, deregulation of the economy and retrenchment of union members. As the pressure mounts, many officials adopt the professional approach to union work and avoid the long process of calling workers' general meetings to seek mandates or to report back on developments. Among full-time officials and other union leaders the traditional approach of seeking mandates and reporting back is increasingly being interpreted as a sign of being out of one's depth.

We are now responding to the shop steward and go to management having just informed the shop stewards. Pressure does not only come from employers but shop stewards also come to you because they get pressure. You, as an organiser, respond because you don't want to be seen as not being up to the issues.¹⁶

Thirdly, the changed balance of power and the assertiveness of capital have resulted in the union movement losing the moral high ground it used to occupy. As we noted above, this has engendered a pragmatic style and this, in turn, gives rise to an eagerness to cultivate an image of 'reasonable and professional' unionism which many have come to believe can achieve the same results as the militant approach which characterised the union activist of the past. This new image of unionism can be observed among many union officials today, particularly the entrepreneurs and some career unionists. Examples include the adoption of a more formal or professional dress code, changing consumer tastes, changes in location and furnishing and decoration of union offices, and enrolment for business and economics degrees and diplomas at local and international business schools to help officials master the language of business.

Finally, the insecurity which workers experience as a result of the liberalisation of the economy and global competition has made it extremely difficult for unionised workers to resort to militant actions to block restructuring in its various guises. As a result, a large number of workers and shop stewards have come to put their faith in the expertise of the full-time official. This has resulted in a subtle shift of the balance of power from workers and shop stewards into the hands of full-time officials, particularly those with specialised expertise. Coupled with this are expectations, and even pressures, in the broader society that full-time officials and other top

union leaders should engage in deal-making which benefits union members in the long run. One ex-unionist argues that worker control was a good thing, but that it needs to be transformed and modified in certain ways. One suggestion he offers is that union leaders should be allowed to make deals.

I think that a good union leader in today's environment should be making deals. In a society where you have a role in influencing and making decisions then you have to switch from direct democracy to indirect democracy. Deal-making depends on the long view, and you can only have the long view if you have stability of leadership. In my view the [public sector] unions [in 1999 and a few years before that] should not have focused on labour issues; they should have accepted greater labour market flexibility, greater fiscal discipline, in exchange for a national health system and proper housing policy and social security. They should have focused on things that would give them support in society and make them part of a bigger movement.¹⁷

This view finds greater support among full-time officials and some worker leaders today than at any other time in the history of the post-1973 unions. In a movement that is on the defensive as a result of national and global economic and political developments, the notion that full-time officials should play the role of deal-makers is likely to have far-reaching negative consequences for the tradition of worker control and exacerbate the dilemma of leadership which we have referred to in this thesis.

“Let's Amend Our Ways of Working”: Organisational Modernisation Projects in Unions

Efforts to modernise union organisation have been a recurring theme in the post-1973 unions throughout the 1990s. Addressing the 7th national congress of PPWAWU in June 1997, the union's general secretary devoted some of his introductory remarks to this theme.

All of us gathered here are called upon to outline practical programmes to improve and to modernise our Union.... The challenge of modernising Unions remains the key one. We should avoid becoming prisoners of Past traditions, regardless of the New Conditions. We need to amend our way of working.¹⁸

Although other unions had been debating the same issues for a number of years, PPWAWU was the first union to use the term 'modernise' to refer to efforts to change the way it operated. As noted in Chapter 4, before the union's 7th congress, its national office-bearers had adopted a policy document entitled 'Modernising PPWAWU'. In Chapters 3 to 5 we saw how organisational modernisation is a consequence of factors and processes internal to the union movement itself such as membership growth, the need to achieve administrative efficiency and changes in the role and character of full-time officials of unions. In addition to those internal factors and processes, there are external factors which exert an equally powerful influence on the internal functioning of trade unions. In other words, organisational modernisation also occurs within, and is shaped by, a national and global context.

In reality it is hard to separate the internal from the external processes which induce organisational modernisation. In the rough-and-tumble world of union organisation the discourse and practice of organisational modernisation which is often expressed in terms such as professionalism, efficiency, skilled officials and market related employment conditions reveals itself as the logical next step and a universal panacea to the problems of a growing organisation facing internal and external pressures to undergo changes. Among some union officials and leaders organisational modernisation in all its different manifestations is presented as a virtue while 'primitive operation',¹⁹ its opposite, is regarded as a problem. Union leaders also fail to examine the implications of modernisation efforts for modes of organisational governance and other traditions of the unions. The NUM is one the unions which prides itself for having professionalised its approach to staffing.

One of the changes in the union is that staffing matters are now being run professionally. The union accepts that the activist culture of the 1980s is gone and officials need to be paid competitive packages and managed professionally. The role of union officials is not static. There is nothing wrong with change in dress and lifestyle among officials. You can't expect officials to act as if they are still in the situation of apartheid in the 1980s. I do not believe in the approach of white officials of the past that union activists should show their commitment by dressing shabbily. The union has to create conditions to retain

officials, otherwise people will leave. The union must pay them competitive salaries, and when this happens lifestyles change.²⁰

Although the discourse of modernisation presents itself as a neutral universal language shared by all in the union movement, our argument is that assertions such as the above conceal the real intentions and interests of different groups within the ranks of full-time union officials. We have argued that the activist organiser has been replaced by three types of union officials, all of them pursuing different interests. Thus each of these groups has a different notion of what modernisation should be about. While the ideological organiser would like to professionalise the role of the full-time union official, he would also like to maintain worker control and union democracy. On the other extreme, the entrepreneurial organiser sees modernisation as a substitute for worker control which is seen as an obstacle to achieving his ends. In a national and global context where professionalism is associated with notions of global competitiveness and world-class standards of corporate performance, for some the language of modernisation also serves to reconcile the union movement to a corporate style of conducting its internal affairs.

Thus, a closer examination of the discourse and practice of organisational modernisation reveals that there is not one, but three, broad approaches to modernisation which correspond to the three types of union official we have discussed above. We refer to these ideal-typical approaches to organisational rejuvenation as organisational modernisation projects. They compete with one another in a context where the union movement is facing internal and external pressures to amend the way it operates. All of them acknowledge that membership growth and changes in the national and global political economy impose new challenges on unions and thus there is a need to modernise union operations. Implicit in each modernisation project are the interests and political ideology of the type of union officials who champion it. Thus each modernisation project embodies a set of propositions about the way power relations between rank-and-file members and full-time officials and among the various strata of union leadership should be reconfigured.

The first project, which we call the *minimalist modernisation project*, is espoused by the ideological unionist and it maintains that changes in the way unions operate should not necessarily result in conceding power to full-time officials. Rather, worker leaders such as shop stewards and worker office-bearers, working through constitutional structures of the union, should undertake such functions and, where it is not possible for them to do so, they should oversee the work of full-time officials. Unionists who hold this view argue that the capacity of worker leadership to run unions can be augmented by means of education and training and other measures such as an arrangement to have full-time shop stewards.²¹

Although the objectives of this modernisation project are laudable, it has some obvious limitations. One of them is the fact that worker leaders who are part-time shop stewards do not have sufficient time for attending to union business. Those who become full-time shop stewards often become distanced from the rank-and-file and begin to function just as full-time officials. Another problem is that the turnover of full-time shop stewards is high because of the contestation and competition for such positions. In a nutshell, the danger of this approach is that it could result in organisational stagnation and paralysis in the face of the internal and external challenges we have highlighted.

The second project, the *maximalist project of modernisation*, is a conservative approach which holds that union officials should take all decisions and should not be required to account to the membership at all. The entrepreneur official who champions this position believes that a critical aspect of leadership is the freedom of a leader to make deals on behalf of union members without being encumbered by mandates and other consultative processes. The arguments of the plaintiff's legal counsel and the expert witness in the case of *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs. SAMWU* discussed in the Preface are examples of this extreme form of modernisation where the union official is the 'boss'. In a nutshell, the maximalist project is the harbinger of business unionism, a model of unionism where full-time officials are powerful business agents providing services to passive union members in return for monthly membership subscriptions.

A key limitation of this project is that the membership of the post-1973 unions is still relatively politicised and the discourse of worker control is too deep-seated for this membership to countenance such an extreme erosion of worker control. Thus the discontinuity which this project implies would result in instability and fragmentation of the union movement. In addition, in South Africa there is still a widely shared expectation that unions should operate democratically.

The third approach is the *moderate project of modernisation*, a position espoused by the career unionist, which acknowledges the limitations of the above projects and seeks to find a balance between democracy and organisational modernisation. According to this view officials should assume a much greater role in the functioning of the union. This means that they should be granted more powers to take some decisions and make some 'deals' without the stringent consultative processes associated with worker control, but that in the final analysis they should still be required to account to union structures. The underlying assumption behind this view is that full-time officials have specialist knowledge which workers and their leaders cannot be expected to have and thus, the practice of worker control should take this into account. Over the last decade this view has gained popularity within the post-1973 unions.

The moderate project of organisational modernisation which seeks to reconcile the imperatives of democracy and administrative efficiency represents the best possible solution to the democracy-efficiency conundrum. However, this solution does not eliminate the contradiction implicit in this conundrum. Thus, a built-in aspect of this resolution is the dilemma of leadership, a tension which is a necessary condition for maintaining the balance. The moderate modernisation project succeeds in maintaining continuity with the worker control tradition while at the same time making the necessary adjustments to ensure that unions have the necessary capacity to grapple with complexities resulting from membership growth and changes in the national and global contexts. It represents a progressive project of modernisation which leaves unionised worker with power to act as the final arbiters in decision-making on all issues. This is particularly important in a union movement with a majority of members who still subscribe to the notion that a union ought to operate democratically.

One of the ironies of organisational modernisation is that it tends to favour the 'professionals' rather than the people whom it is to benefit, namely, the rank-and-file union membership. Firstly, it concentrates power in the hands of these experts and specialists and makes it possible for them to hide information so that their indispensability within the union is reinforced. Secondly, it engenders an individualistic style of work and removes the incentive for officials to work in a collective way since it is the individual, not the group, that takes credit for work done. Thirdly, it makes it more difficult for worker leadership and union structures to control professionals because of the way they are accustomed to do their work. Besides, the power of these professionals lies in their ability to generate ideas as individuals and to see these through without reference to another person or group within the organisation. Finally, modernisation implies a preparedness to benchmark one's organisation against what is considered the norm within the environment in which the organisation operates worldwide. Thus, salaries will be benchmarked against market rates in the same way that employment conditions and other benefits are. This results in the removal from the hands of workers of the power to determine these and other matters and leaves it in the hands of the market.

The best way to overcome these problems is to seek to maintain and sharpen the dilemma by building a strong and combative rank-and-file and worker leadership who are able to act as a countervailing force to such tendencies. We develop this point further in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

Our discussion in this chapter has dealt with cleavages among full-time union officials as well as the changing national and global environment within which the union movement is operating. We also noted that these new cleavages among officials manifest themselves as competing organisational modernisation projects. One of these projects, the moderate project, offers opportunities for resolving the dilemma of organisational imperatives (between democracy *versus* efficiency), provided that the dilemma of leadership (between the need to have a

democratically elected and accountable leadership on the one hand, and the desire to have a skilled and efficient leadership on the other) is maintained and sharpened. Chapter 8 explores ways in which this can be achieved.

Notes:

1. Author interview with Mojalefa Musi, national educator of SATAWU, Johannesburg, 30 April 1999.
2. Rees, R. 1992. "More Workers' Control Needed", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 7, p. 57.
3. Qabula, Alfred Temba. 1995. "It Has Been Such a Long Time", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 19, 6, pp. 13 - 14.
4. Author interview with Themba Mbokazi, CEPPWAWU shop steward at Interpak, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2000.
5. Author interview with Osborn Galeni, NUMSA's national organiser for Engineering, Johannesburg, 10 August 1999.
6. The few high-profile exceptions are Irene Charnley (ex-NUM), now a senior Johnnic executive; Adrienne Bird (ex-NUMSA), now a chief director in the Department of Labour, and Lisa Seftel (ex-COSATU), also a chief director in the Department of Labour. The first one is black while the other two are white.
7. The two deputy ministers are Susan Shabangu (ex-TGWU), Deputy Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs and Rejoice Mabudafhasi (ex-NEHAWU), Deputy Minister of the Environment and Tourism.
8. There were several cases of officials who asked for or were offered bribes by management in the 1980s and early 1990s. In one case an official was offered a lounge suite in return for discouraging workers from striking. Management later informed union leadership about this and the official was summarily dismissed. Several officials also accepted offers of positions as personnel officers or human resources officers. In the majority of cases workers and union structures refused to work with these people with the result that many of them lost their jobs because they were deemed ineffective.
9. The September Commission also identified similar changes which had occurred since the end of apartheid. These were: a weakening vision and shared ideology within the unions; engagement with many complex issues; a shift from mass militancy to national negotiations; loss of experienced staff and worker leaders; massive growth of unions; growth of a black middle class and a culture of self-enrichment which undermines the culture of solidarity in unions; and negative organisational trends such as lack of service to members, lack of skills, lack of discipline and lack of commitment (September Commission. 1997. *September Commission Report*. Johannesburg: COSATU, p. 168).
10. "Labour Leadership and Development Programme", A brochure of the Labour Development Unit - Business Studies Unit, Technikon Natal, Durban, 2000, p. 3

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11. Author interview with Mhlaba Mkhize, lecture and programme manager of the Labour Studies Unit, Business Studies Unit, Technikon Natal, Durban, 22 March 2000.
 12. Author interview with Kessie Moodley, Director of the Workers' College, Durban, 23 March 2000.
 13. For a detailed discussion of these managerial strategies at workplace level see a study of Nampak and PG Bison by Buhlungu, S. 1996. *Trade Union Responses to Participatory Management: A Case Study*, M.A. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
 14. Author Interview with Joseph Mthembu, CEPPWAWU shop steward at PG Bison (Germiston) and former national vice-president of PPWAWU, Germiston, 11 March 1999.
 15. Author interview with Linda Mngadi, national education officer of CEPPWAWU, Johannesburg, 11 March 2000.
 16. *ibid.*
 17. Author interview with Jeremy Baskin, former general secretary of PPWAWU, Johannesburg, 24 February 2000.
 18. PPWAWU. 1997. *Report to Bi-Annual National Conference held on 26 - 29 June 1997*, p. 1.
 19. The term 'primitive operations' is from an article by Skulu, B. 1993. "How Many Officials does Our Union Need?", *SACCAWU News*, Volume 4, Number 2, p. 5. Skulu was then assistant general secretary of SACCAWU and is now the general secretary of the union.
 20. Author interview with Gwede Mantashe, general secretary of NUM, Johannesburg, 07 February 2000.
 21. Many unions agree with this approach in principle. Almost all COSATU unions have agreements with many employers giving unions the right to have full-time shop stewards. Full-time shop stewards perform many functions which are normally performed by officials, such as organising, administration and negotiating with employers. The September Commission also suggested that all of COSATU's national office-bearers should become full-time shop stewards so that they could have time to perform their duties.

CHAPTER 8: THE REVITALISATION OF THE UNION MOVEMENT: TOWARDS A RESOLUTION OF THE DILEMMA OF LEADERSHIP

Introduction

In this thesis the democratic tradition within the post-1973 unions has been evaluated by addressing four distinct but related themes. Firstly, we examined the extent of the power of full-time union officials given the ambiguity of their role as employees of trade unions on the one hand, and leaders on the other. Secondly, we examined how the tradition of worker control was built and whether or not it succeeded in achieving its goal of constraining the power of full-time officials. Thirdly, we explored the impact of membership growth and changes in the national and global political economy on the tradition of worker control and the role that union officials play within unions. Finally, we discussed the notion of organisational modernisation and the reconfiguration of power relations between union membership and full-time officials. A central objective of this thesis is to establish whether or not it is possible to resolve the dilemma of organisational imperatives, that is, the contradiction between democracy on the one hand, and administrative efficiency and organisational modernisation on the other, in an organisation such as a trade union. With reference to the post-1973 unions in South Africa this means evaluating whether or not it is feasible to reconcile the tradition of worker control with processes of organisational modernisation which have accelerated in the last decade.

In the last chapter it was argued that there are different approaches to organisational modernisation, or modernisation projects, which correspond to three types of union officials which we have identified in this study. However, we asserted that only one of these projects provides opportunities for resolving the dilemma of organisational imperatives, namely, the moderate modernisation project. It was suggested that a necessary condition for the resolution is

the maintenance and sharpening of the dilemma of leadership, a tension between the two organisational imperatives. In this chapter we explore how this balance can be achieved. However, before we embark on that discussion we recapitulate our discussion of the worker control tradition as that tradition offers suggestions of how this balance can be achieved.

The Tradition of Worker Control Revisited

Our findings enable us to problematise the tradition of worker control and democratic unionism and thereby identify several contradictions within it. Thus, as we noted in Chapter 2, while there were those factors which predisposed the unions towards a democratic and participatory culture which sought to empower rank-and-file members and curtail the power of full-time officials there were also anti-democratic tendencies within the unions. Thus, contrary to accounts which tend to present a romanticised notion of union democracy and worker control, the reality of this tradition is that its establishment and maintenance was a contested issue. The contestation was complex and ever-changing in that at certain times it was by rank-and-file workers against full-time officials, while at others it was between shop stewards and officials, elected worker office-bearers and officials, shop stewards and workers, black officials and white officials, male workers and female workers and male officials and female officials. Thus, side-by-side with worker control were anti-democratic and elitist tendencies which worked to subvert it. In the past these tendencies became pronounced in different unions at different times and the history of the post-1973 unions is replete with episodes of lapses in democratic practice. While most of these seldom succeeded in overturning union democracy, some precipitated crises such as splits. We have already made reference to the split in MAWU in the 1980s and, more recently, the SAMWU case and the VW conflict.

What this indicates is that pressures to modernise union operations in an elitist way have always existed side-by-side with the worker control tradition. This contestation is an inherent part of the life of any organisation and it is accentuated by competing notions among the membership and

the leadership of how the organisation should modernise its mode of operation. Viewed in this way then, the worker control tradition of the post-1973 unions has always been contested, imperfect and somewhat messy compared to the idealised version which was part of a legitimating process by the nascent movement. Several factors, such as those discussed in Chapter 2 and those summarised in Table 19 in the introduction to *Part III*, ensured the predominance of democratic, as opposed to oligarchic, tendencies within the unions and to justify the use of the term 'democratic' with reference to the worker control tradition. The new unions broke with the tradition of bureaucratic unionism which was prevalent among established white (and white-led) unions of the time by seeking to give ownership of the unions to their own members. Not only did this engender the expectation that a union ought to operate democratically, but it also created real opportunities for workers to determine the affairs of the organisation. These ranged from the right to elect shop stewards to the right to give mandates to elected representatives and to veto the actions of those representatives if they were deemed to have departed from the norm of worker control. This notion of democracy, which combined participatory and representative approaches, was a radical one even when compared to how democracy operates in state institutions at local, provincial and national levels.

All three of the unions we have examined as case studies were part of this democratic tradition. But the depth of this tradition varied according to the six factors we mentioned above. Thus, using these factors and the number of prominent union-made and grassroots intellectuals and worker leaders as measures, it is possible to rank the unions, with NUMSA being the most democratic and SAMWU the least democratic. However, this ranking does not imply an absence of anti-democratic tendencies in NUMSA or their predominance in SAMWU. Indeed, union members' experience of self-government in the union varied according a variety of variables such as union, region, workplace and the type of union official who worked with them.

In the economic and political climate of the 1970s and 1980s the democratic culture was both a strategy to attract new members, to build unity and solidarity among workers and to ensure that these organisations had legitimacy in the eyes of their members. This forced the new unions to

work hard to build a culture of transparency and accountability in decision-making. This was more so during times of crisis when there had been serious infractions of the democratic culture, because the leadership had to work harder to restore the confidence of the workers in the union. Thus a worker leader or full-time official who had betrayed workers or acted in an overbearing and undemocratic manner had to be dealt with swiftly to ensure that workers remained loyal to the union.¹

Not only did the unions give ownership of the organisations to their membership, but they also put in place a series of checks and balances to make sure that full-time officials did not dominate in union affairs. In those cases where officials exercised power out of proportion to what was formally conceded to them in official policy documents, workers could invoke the checks and balances to call the officials to order. This was not conceived of as an absence of anti-democratic practices by leaders and officials. Rather, for many unionised workers it meant that anything officials and other leaders did, “the workers have got *a right* to question that”.² Indeed, the history of the post-1973 unions was characterised by contestation of this nature. The old South African Railways and Harbours Workers’ Union (SARHWU), which has since dissolved into the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), is an example of a union which was dogged by office occupations by its combative membership since the 1980s whenever there was a hint that officials had violated worker control. According to a SATAWU official, in 1999 alone there were three such incidents and one in February 2000 involving physical occupation of the union’s head office in Johannesburg by its members. The occupations are almost always triggered by unhappiness with leadership and their decisions and often entail keeping the national leaders and officials hostage until they have undertaken to deal with the workers’ grievances.³

Even though there were anti-democratic tendencies inside the unions, the notion of worker control had moral authority among workers and officials alike. Those who engaged in activities which could be construed to be antithetical to the spirit of worker control always made sure of concealing their real intentions and of presenting themselves as the real champions of union democracy. For example, although the question of worker control was at the centre of the 1984

MAWU split, none of the adversaries in the conflict could admit to having flouted worker control as this would have affected their standing and credibility in the entire union movement.

The characterisation of the post-1973 unions as democratic was more than simply stating the prevailing decision-making approach within these unions. It was, in addition, a reference to the moral and political choice these unions had made with regard to the way they were governed regardless of whether or not this choice was borne out by the reality of union practice.

However, despite the prevalence of these democratic aspirations, the new unions were under pressure to modernise and all of them did modernise in several ways. Examples include the following:

- ❑ The use of stop-order facilities to collect membership subscriptions.
- ❑ The centralisation of finances.
- ❑ The decision to employ or to make the use of university-trained intellectuals.
- ❑ Some professionalisation and specialisation (e.g. departments and specialist staff).
- ❑ The creation of a hierarchy of structures from the shopfloor to the national level.
- ❑ The use of modern telecommunications technology.
- ❑ Registration with the then Department of Manpower.
- ❑ The decision to fight for centralised bargaining and to join industrial councils.

Thus, the real innovation of the post-1973 unions was not the tradition of worker control but their ability to balance such a tradition with processes of modernisation such as the above. Of course the pressures to modernise were not as intense as they have been over the last decade, but the lesson we learn from this is that it is possible to balance the need to be democratic with the desire to modernise so as to achieve efficiency. There has to be a conscious and concerted effort in unions to ensure that none of these imperatives overshadows the other.

The erosion of the tradition of worker control and democratic unionism to which we have alluded

refers to the weakening of worker control *in relation to* the desire to modernise and achieve administrative efficiency. According to a former union official, this decline of the political and moral power of worker control is related to the waning of a “strong left configuration” which used to influence the way activists operated within organisations. He blames this on an “ideological infection” of civil society by “all sorts of negative tendencies and ideas”, which result in a redefinition of worker control in a narrow, economistic direction.⁴

The Erosion of Worker Control and the Prioritisation of Efficiency

Before we discuss the approach we suggest for resolving the dilemma of leadership, we need to emphasise that a return to the ‘golden age’ of worker control (real or romanticised) is no longer feasible because of several changes inside the unions and in the economic and political environment in which they operate. The post-1973 unions succeeded in developing a democratic tradition which became known to many of its members and leaders as worker control. Worker control was a participatory model of organisational governance buttressed by an altruistic organisational culture which sought to empower black workers in a context where they were denied industrial citizenship (especially trade union rights) and political citizenship (political rights such as the vote). The tradition sought to resolve the ambiguity inherent in the role of full-time officials by conceiving of union officials as activists rather than employees or leaders in the conventional senses of these words.

Thus, the worker control tradition succeeded in acting as a constraint on the power of full-time officials, but only for as long as the following conditions prevailed:

- ☐ Union membership was relatively small.
- ☐ Black workers were denied industrial citizenship.
- ☐ Black workers, and black people in general, were denied political citizenship.

- ❑ The South African economy remained relatively isolated from global developments and pressures.

Under this tradition, full-time officials were regarded as activists and indeed, many of them understood their role in those terms, too. Thus, they were prepared to make sacrifices to ensure the success of the worker's struggle and the national liberation struggle as a whole. They helped empower workers and, according to one unionist, the role of the official was similar to that of a trainer in the sport of boxing.⁵ They had to train workers and then leave them to run the unions and take the lead in fighting the bosses at the workplace. Of course, as we have argued before, there were many deviations and departures from these practices but the union environment was generally one which discouraged bureaucratic tendencies and practices.

However, from the late 1970s onwards some of the above conditions which favoured worker control began to change. The first of these was the 1979 statutory recognition of trade union rights for black workers which meant that these workers could form or join unions of their choice. However, such recognition on its own did not result in a rapprochement between union officials and management as some sociological texts predicted.⁶ The second change was membership growth, some of which is attributable to the fact that forming or joining a union for black workers was recognised in law. However, even though such growth put strains on the practice of worker control, it did not, on its own, lead to the erosion of the tradition. Besides, in a context of a struggle against apartheid, it was still important for all organisations who regarded themselves as part of that struggle to project themselves as the custodians of the democratic ideal.

The most profound changes in the post-1973 union movement, including the erosion of worker control and the emergence of an organisational culture which is antithetical to the collectivist one of the past, began to occur after 1990. These changes coincided with, and were occasioned by, the removal of the last two conditions we identified above, which resulted in black people attaining political citizenship and South Africa being readmitted into the global economy. We

have already discussed the changes which took place inside the unions. Suffice it to state here that all these changes, inside and outside the unions, also resulted in the erosion of the social movement character of the unions and intensified the tension between the imperatives of achieving democracy, on the one hand, and administrative efficiency, on the other. For many in these unions the latter increasingly became the overriding imperative, hence the shift of emphasis away from the democratic character towards a preoccupation with efficiency.

This prioritisation of efficiency coincided with the acceleration of processes of organisational modernisation and the growing centrality of the full-time official in the life of the union. The dilemma of leadership resulted from this prioritisation of efficiency and the changing role of the official in a context where the tradition of worker control was still official policy in the unions. Below we examine whether or not it is possible to resolve this dilemma and indeed, whether such resolution is necessary or desirable. Our assessment draws on lessons to be learnt from the golden era of worker control when it was possible to balance the competing organisational imperatives of trade unions.

The Leadership Dilemma: Threat or Creative Tension?

Organisational modernisation implies an acknowledgement of the centrality of administrative efficiency in the management of the affairs of an organisation such as a trade union. This, in turn, implies that organisations should devote personnel and resources to achieve this objective. For some within the worker control tradition this does not necessarily mean leaving organisational tasks in the hands of full-time officials. Rather it means that whenever feasible worker leaders and committees and other structures comprised of worker representatives should undertake such functions. However, this view no longer enjoys majority support within the unions as many argue that worker leaders with full-time jobs in their workplaces are not in a position to do this. In addition, they may not have the capacity to undertake complex tasks or

engage in technical issues such as economic policy, workplace restructuring and the intricacies of labour legislation.

Table 43: An Ideal-typical Representation of Modernisation Projects and Their Relationship to the Dilemma of Leadership and Types of Union Officials

<i>Organisational modernisation project</i>	<i>Nature of dilemma of leadership</i>	<i>Resolution of dilemma?</i>	<i>Type of official who promotes it</i>
Minimalist modernisation	Limited. High on democracy. Low on efficiency. Democracy and efficiency seen as contradictory.	No resolution. Supports democracy.	The ideological unionist
Maximalist modernisation	Limited. High on efficiency. No democracy. Democracy and efficiency seen as contradictory	No resolution. Ignores democracy.	The entrepreneur
Moderate modernisation	Intensified. Balance between democracy and efficiency. Democracy and efficiency seen as complementary.	Dilemma resolved by a creative tension between democracy and efficiency.	The career unionist

A crucial question which arises from the foregoing discussion is whether this dilemma of leadership threatens to destabilise unions or whether it is simply a creative tension which should be encouraged. Perhaps the way to begin addressing this question is to note that, under the conditions already discussed in this thesis, worker control as practised by the post-1973 unions in the past is no longer practicable. At the same time, the bureaucratic model which arises as a result of the maximalist modernisation project is equally unfeasible for reasons we have advanced earlier in this discussion. It is a recipe for crisis in the union movement and instability in the industrial relations system which is a harbinger of oligarchy as propounded by Robert

Michels. As we argued in our expert evidence in the case of *Sikhwezeli Jada and 582 others vs. SAMWU*,

It is likely to leave the workers dissatisfied and without any accountable leadership. This will exacerbate the dilemma facing trade union leadership, make orderly collective bargaining even more difficult and make it more difficult to normalise the workplace.

However, we believe that it is possible to achieve a balance between democracy and administrative efficiency through the moderate modernisation project. This observation has been made elsewhere.

Membership training and leadership development, strategic planning, administrative efficiency and professionalism, sound financial planning and appropriate staffing policies, are all key capacity issues which are integral to any strategy for organisational renewal. However, a strategy of organisational renewal has to ensure continuity in the trade union movement by strengthening those aspects of trade union organisation which still have relevance now and in the future. In particular, unions must ensure that principles of democratic decision making and worker control, leadership accountability, proper servicing of union members and strong structures are maintained.⁷

Indeed, the moderate modernisation project which seeks to establish a balance between the imperatives of democracy and efficiency is not only possible, but desirable. This, in turn implies that rather than seeking to eliminate the dilemma of leadership, unions should learn to intensify and manage it in a creative way by ensuring that a representation gap does not arise. It also means finding the middle way between worker control as espoused by the dismissed VW workers and the oligarchic model proposed by legal counsel of the SAMWU workers. The creative tension results from having a rank-and-file which asserts worker control on the one hand, and a skilled corps of full-time officials who are efficient in managing the union but remain accountable and responsive to the needs of their members. If there are no members who assert worker control or no skilled officials who can run union affairs, the dilemma of leadership ceases to exist. Table 43 above presents a schematic summary of the core elements of this argument.

The notion of a dilemma of leadership has several theoretical implications for the way we understand trade union organisations. It helps us overcome the either/or and zero-sum approach to attempts to resolve the democracy/efficiency conundrum by seeking to reconcile these contradictions. Unions need democracy or worker control in the same way that they need efficiency and organisational modernisation and both organisational imperatives are equally important and should be nurtured in creative ways, some of which we suggest below. Too often, scholars and activists avoid confronting this question altogether or they only offer clichéd answers about “finding a balance” without elaborating the nature and form of such a balance. The concept of a dilemma of leadership as discussed in this thesis helps us break through this conceptual and theoretical barrier imposed by the democracy/efficiency dichotomy.

The notion of a leadership dilemma enables us to make use of conventional conceptual tools such as oligarchy and democracy but also helps us to learn from the contextual experience of unions in developing society as suggested in Chapter 1. Thus while acknowledging the presence of oligarchic tendencies in organisations, we are able to transcend the view that these tendencies are part of an immutable or natural ‘iron law’. Identifying the dilemma of leadership means recognising a crucial aspect of an organisation such as a trade union, namely, that its aspirations to democracy will always be contested. Oligarchy is the outcome of a successful contestation by certain forces in an organisation. Similarly, and as the work of Voss and Sherman demonstrates,⁸ democracy is the outcome of a successful contestation by other forces within a trade union.

This brings us to the crux of our argument, namely, that the dilemma of leadership enables us to recognise a process of change within organisations which we have termed organisational modernisation. In an organisation different modernisation projects compete for hegemony but it is only when the moderate project succeeds that we get a dilemma of leadership because this project seeks to reconcile the contradictory goals of democracy and efficiency. Eliminating the dilemma implies an attempt to return to primitive democracy, which is not feasible today, or a move towards oligarchy, which is not desirable. Thus we suggest that the way to resolve the

contradiction of organisational imperatives (democracy versus efficiency) is to intensify the dilemma of leadership, that is to intensify the tension between control of the union by a democratically-elected leadership on the one hand, and its administration by a skilled corps of full-time officials on the other.

Several implications for union organisational strategies flow from the above. The maintenance and intensification of the dilemma of leadership means that unions should ensure a continuity with their past traditions, struggles and achievements. Not only does this alleviate problems associated with generational change, it also preserves the legacy of struggle, sacrifice and a democratic organisational culture built over nearly three decades of the movement's existence. Ensuring this continuity could take several forms, all of which are about the preservation of the collective memory of those traditions, struggles and achievements. This can be done by recording or documenting the history of the movement and preserving internal union records which document various aspects of the unions' history. This would entail actions such as the preservation of union archives, the writing of union histories, the writing of accounts detailing key struggles of the movement and the promotion of autobiographical writing by union members and leaders. The long-term objective of this would be to use individual accounts to build a collective memory of the movement's history, forms of organisation and struggles.

This collective memory and reservoir of organisational knowledge is crucial for the preservation of a repertoire of collective action which in turn is essential for contestation and the maintenance of the dilemma of leadership. As Sidney Tarrow has argued, different social groups have "a particular history and memory" of forms of collective action. He notes that "Workers know how to strike because generations of workers struck before them".⁹ Similarly, future generations of union members need to know how their parents and grandparents ran their trade unions and how the tradition of worker control enabled workers to assume leadership roles in these unions.

A related area which needs attention to maintain and sharpen the dilemma of leadership is union education and training. The end of the era of mass mobilization associated with the struggle for

union rights and political citizenship has deprived unions of a vital form of membership politicisation and informal education. Today unions have to take responsibility for the education and training of their members, particularly with regard to how the union operates and how to run it. Thus, union efforts to ensure technical competency among their full-time officials need to be balanced by programmes to empower union members and shop stewards to run these unions and to oversee the work of officials.

The above raises an issue which is important for building the leadership capacity of union members and worker leaders. In recent years many COSATU affiliates have been outsourcing the education and training of worker leadership to technikons, universities and labour supporting organisations. While this may be necessary on a variety of technical issues such as labour law and health and safety, it may not be the best way to deal with education and training on organisational leadership issues. If education and training are going to help intensify the dilemma of leadership, such education and training has to be consciously and explicitly aimed at raising the consciousness of union members and worker leaders about power relations in organisations and how to contest them.

This discussion now turns to an assessment of struggles and contestation for different projects of modernisation within the unions and evaluates three scenarios which suggest possible outcomes of these struggles.

New Struggles Within Unions: Three Scenarios

The life of an emerging trade union is always characterised by struggles and contestation for hegemony by the different projects of modernisation outlined above. This contestation is less pronounced when a union movement is small and still fighting to achieve recognition by the state and employers. However, with membership growth and recognition by employers and the state, the contestation intensifies as activists in each camp seek to entrench their preferred project of

modernisation. Below we present three scenarios and the implications of the triumph of each of the different modernisation projects for the organisational culture and governance of the unions.

Scenario A: minimalist modernisation triumphs

If the ideological unionists were to regain the upper hand and begin to steer the movement in an ideological direction, this reorientation would strengthen worker control and empower worker representatives and leaders to take the lead in union affairs. The power of full-time officials would be severely circumscribed by various checks and balances to ensure their accountability to union structures. In other words, democracy and efficiency would be seen as contradictory organisational imperatives.

However, the benefits of having a democratic or worker controlled union would be negated by the union's inability to respond to urgent workplace, national and global pressures. Democratic processes can be extremely time-consuming and inefficient in the face of pressures imposed by a rapidly changing workplace, and a national and global economic and political environment. In the final analysis, this inability to respond speedily would manifest itself as administrative inefficiency and organisational stagnation.

However, this scenario is unlikely to materialise because phenomenal union membership growth and geographic spread have rendered direct democracy nearly impossible to practise. In addition, the rapidly changing environment under a liberal democratic dispensation and a neo-liberal capitalist system has created a need for flexible and responsive representative structures which operate on the basis of loose mandates. Also important to take into account is the fact that the collapse of state socialism has resulted in the decline of ideology and a preference for pragmatic solutions, thus making it difficult for proponents of this view to find support within the unions.

Scenario B: maximalist modernisation triumphs

The other possibility is that the entrepreneurial union official could gain the upper hand and seek to entrench the power of full-time officials and dismantle the worker control tradition on the grounds that it is inefficient and unprofessional. A top-down system would be put in place to reorient unions towards business unionism, oligarchy and 'sweetheart' relations with employers and the state. Again, in this modernisation project democracy and efficiency are seen as contradictory.

In view of the fact that the discourse of worker control is still strong within the post-1973 unions, this reorientation would result in intense conflict and contestation which would threaten the entire movement with instability and fragmentation. Thus, once again this scenario is unlikely to materialise in the near future. In addition, the advent of a liberal political democracy in South Africa has introduced pressures for movements and organisations to operate democratically, something which would make this modernisation project unworkable.

Scenario C: moderate modernisation triumphs

By contrast, if the career unionists gained the upper hand and sought to establish a balance between the imperatives of internal union democracy administrative efficiency their chances of success would be much greater. This balance would be achieved by giving more power to full-time officials while still ensuring that in the final analysis, these officials account to worker-controlled structures. In other words, the two imperatives - democracy and efficiency - would be seen as complementary; the union would modernise and at the same time retain a degree of worker control to ensure leadership accountability.

This would steer the union in a pragmatic direction and intensify the dilemma of leadership as full-time officials would continue seeking to gain more decision-making powers while workers would be asserting worker control. However, none of the sides would seek a zero-sum solution to

the tension. Thus the dilemma would be a creative tension which would ensure a balance between union democracy and administrative efficiency.

It would appear that contestation within the post-1973 unions has produced outcomes which are very similar to this scenario. The moderate modernisation project, which is taking root in the union movement, is a delicate compromise which reconciles the imperatives of worker control to those of administrative efficiency by ensuring that the two imperatives are complementary rather than contradictory.

Notwithstanding the discussion of the scenarios above and our suggestion that only one of them is likely to materialise, in the real world of union organisation all three currents are present. In a union movement which is undergoing rapid changes such as those facing the post-1973 unions today, maintaining the creative tension implied by the dilemma of leadership is the only way to revitalise the movement and save it from organisational stagnation which would result from the minimalist modernisation project on the one hand, and oligarchy and fragmentation which would result from the maximalist modernisation project on the other.

Conclusion

A central conclusion of this thesis is that the dilemma of leadership offers opportunities for maintaining a robust balance between the organisational imperatives first identified by the Webbs more than a hundred years ago. This balance is the only way to avoid organisational stagnation and paralysis on the one hand, and oligarchy on the other. The worker control tradition of the post-1973 unions in South Africa offers important lessons in this regard. Thus a necessary condition for the resolution of the contradiction is the maintenance and intensification of the dilemma of leadership, a tension between the two organisational imperatives. In this chapter we explored how this balance can be achieved and argued that in addition to an acknowledgement of both as complementary rather than contradictory organisational needs,

unions need to maintain the dilemma. Two approaches which could help ensure this are the preservation of the collective history and memory of union traditions and struggles and the empowerment of unionised workers and their elected leaders through education and training.

Notes:

1. A similar observation is made by Webster, E. 1985. *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour process and trade unionism in the foundries*. Johannesburg: Ravan. He notes that "Those officials who continually refuse to change their actions in the face of criticism by the shop stewards are removed from their positions." (p. 251).
2. Author interview with the Treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee, Uitenhage, 1 May 2000. This worker, who is a former shop steward, had been dismissed with the rest of the 1 300 VW workers. He did not reveal his identity. For convenience, in this discussion we refer to him as "the treasurer of the VW Crisis Committee".
3. Informal discussion with Zico Tamela, International Officer of SATAWU, Johannesburg, 23 February 2000.
4. Author interview with Mojalefa Musi, national educator of SATAWU, Johannesburg, 30 April 1999. (Musi left SATAWU later that year and in 2000 he joined DITSELA.)
5. Author interview with Petrus Tom, NUMSA local organiser, Vereeniging, 21 February 2000.
6. The view that state and employer recognition of trade unions necessarily results in the emergence of bureaucratic or oligarchic tendencies is implicitly or explicitly supported by several texts such as those of Lane, T. 1974. *The Union Makes Us Strong*, London: Arrow; Lester, R.A. 1958. *As Unions Mature*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; Michels, R. 1959. *Political Parties: A sociological study of the emergence of leadership, the psychology of power, and oligarchic tendencies of organizations*, New York: Dover Publications; and Mills, C. Wright. 1948. *The New Men of Power: America's labor leaders*, New York: Harcourt, Brace.
7. Buhlungu, S. 2000. "Trade Union Organisation and Capacity in the 1990s: Continuities, changes and challenges for PPWAWU", in Adler, G. And Webster, E. (eds.), *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985 - 1997*. London: Macmillan, p. 97.
8. Voss, K. and Sherman, R. 2000. "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union revitalization in the American labor movement", *American Sociological Journal*, 106 (2).
9. Tarrow, S. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social movements and contentious politics*, second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 21.

APPENDIX 1

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Introduction

In the Preface I traced the origins of this study and how I moved from personal experience and observation towards a social science approach. In this appendix I discuss the data gathering processes adopted and methodological issues that informed this research. The discussion also reflects on how I moved beyond personal experience and avoided the pitfalls social researchers warn us about.¹

Methodological Orientation and Research Design

The process of moving from an experiential approach towards a social science approach to knowledge production raises questions about the ways of knowing about social reality and the approaches adopted to gather social facts. This section does not present a detailed exposition of the nature of social reality and how best it can be studied. What it seeks to do is to sketch the broad outlines of the methodological orientation that underpins the research design adopted in this study. The methodological approach which shaped this research is founded on five assumptions.

Firstly, social science research is concerned with knowing what *is* rather than *what ought to be*, and the method of finding out about social reality has to be systematic. In other words, the social scientific research method is about finding out about, analysing and interpreting the social world with a view to producing new knowledge about that world. The methods and techniques used in

this research sought to achieve this objective.

Secondly, quantification of social facts is possible and is an extremely useful tool in social research but it is not applicable in all social settings, research problems and questions. The approach taken in designing this study took this into account and tried to combine the two approaches in a creative way. Thus the quantitative method was used as an exploratory tool to get an overview of the research field and to generate research issues and questions. These issues and questions were then used to conduct an in-depth, qualitative study which, in my view, was a more appropriate tool for the research question which the study sought to examine and answer.

Thirdly, although social life has regularity and discernible patterns, it is also fluid and contains a high degree of subjectivity whose complexity is not always easily captured through the quantitative approach. This, then, influenced me to adopt the qualitative method as the most suitable one for examining socially meaningful behaviour because it takes into account the subjective meanings which people attach to their actions in the course of their daily interactions.

Fourthly, the aggregates which the quantitative method helps us to identify are an essential aspect of knowing about the social world which helps us to generalise. However, these aggregates need to be supplemented by other methods which allow us to explain *why* these aggregates take the form they do in the first place. The approach taken in this study shows a preference for the qualitative method as the one that best helps us undertake such explanation.

Finally, social science research methods should enable us to identify social structures in the material world and to construct critical theoretical perspectives. While the quantitative method enables us to identify patterns in social life, the qualitative method enables us to develop “explanations and generalizations that are close to concrete data and contexts but are more than simple generalizations”.² These explanations tend to be “rich in detail, sensitive to context and capable of showing the complex processes or sequences of social life”.³

In a nutshell, then, the methodological orientation which informs this study is an eclectic one which tries to draw on insights from the different epistemological traditions of social science research. Thus, instead of adopting the sterile approach which seeks to counterpose positivism with the interpretive approach and critical social science, this study attempts to combine them in a way which helps to answer the research question. The design of the research reflects this eclectic approach. It occurred in two stages, each one of which had a specific objective. The first stage, which adopted the quantitative method, was exploratory in nature and its value was in presenting a descriptive picture of the broad research area. The purpose of exploratory research is to explore a new topic or issue and to “formulate more precise questions that future research can answer”.⁴ This stage of the research was undertaken in 1996 to 1997 with the aim of understanding the position and role of full-time union officials in COSATU affiliated unions. In view of the fact that little research had been done in the area, the research was in the form of a survey of all full-time officials in COSATU and its affiliates. The survey attempted to cover as wide a range of issues as possible. Not all these issues had a direct bearing on the research question, but they were all relevant for shaping the second stage of the research. The specific form and techniques used in this stage of the research are discussed below.

The second stage of the research was undertaken from 1998 to 2000. This stage of the research was built on the first and took the form of archival research and in-depth interviews with selected unionists. Whereas the first stage was exploratory and yielded material which allowed for basic description, the second stage was intended to yield information which enabled me to explain and to provide context for these explanations.

In a nutshell, data gathering was three-pronged, that is, three methods of collecting research material were employed. The rationale for this triangulation is that the use of different techniques allows the researcher to view the subject of research from different angles, thereby enhancing the chances of reliability of the measurement. The nature of the topic covered and the methodological orientation adopted make the value of this approach evident. Below the three approaches are discussed and the rationale for each is given.

Data Gathering

In this section we discuss the different data gathering methods and techniques.

Quantitative research

It has been noted in Chapters 1 and 6 that union employment in South Africa is under-researched with the consequence that very little is known about full-time officials in the unions. For example, information about the number, salaries, educational qualifications and average length of service of union officials has, up to now, been unavailable. In this respect, the research explored a new territory by trying to gather such data which can then be used as a basis for further analysis. A survey of full-time officials in COSATU and its affiliates was conducted. The survey was exploratory in nature, with a view to mapping out the features and boundaries of the field. It proved to be extremely useful for examining the research question investigated in this study. In particular, the quantitative data enabled me to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To gain a snapshot of the situation of full-time officials with regard to demographic information, length of service in the union movement, remuneration and other conditions of work, turnover, etc.
- ii) To establish how union officials perceive their work and to assess whether or not these perceptions have been changing over time.
- iii) To serve as a statistical baseline study from which to develop questions for further exploration by means of in-depth interviews with selected officials.

The survey was conceived of as a census of all full-time officials in COSATU and its affiliated unions. Although this was an ambitious project, it was nevertheless achievable because the number of officials did not exceed 2 000 and because the project enjoyed the support of the national leadership of COSATU and its affiliated unions. The then general secretary of

COSATU, Mbhazima Sam Shilowa, provided a letter of endorsement which was mailed with the questionnaire to each union official.

The idea of a survey of union officials emerged when the September Commission on the future of Unions started its investigations in 1996. I was part of a network of researchers who were consulted by the commission on its work. I was then commissioned to undertake the survey. The conceptualisation and design of the survey questionnaire was undertaken by myself in consultation with some members of the September Commission and researchers working for the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) and the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (DITSELA).⁵ I reached an agreement with the Commission whereby, once a report had been presented to the Commission, I had a right to use the data for research purposes.

The questionnaire was 13 pages long and had 53 questions organised into six sections, namely, personal information, the position and service of the official, details about the job, servicing workplaces (organisers only), resources and support, and attitudes. COSATU and its affiliates supplied lists of names and addresses of all their officials. From these lists I was able to establish that the total number of officials employed by the federation and its unions was 1 600. Two student assistants were then employed to mail the self-administered questionnaires to the officials and to follow up by phoning individuals and regional secretaries to ensure that officials had received and completed the questionnaires. The process, which took approximately six months (from October 1996 to March 1997) was uneven among the different unions. On the whole, however, the return rate was impressive. Table 44 shows the total number of officials in each union, the number of returned questionnaires by union, the gender of the officials and the total of returned questionnaires. The return rate that was achieved was 587, which is more than a third of the total number of officials.⁶

Table 44: Questionnaire Return Rates by Union

<i>Union</i>	<i>Total officials (1996/1997)</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>% of officials</i>
CAWU	59	20	34
COSATU	52	15	29
CWIU	77	48	62
CWU	34	8	24
FAWU	108	11	10
IPS	18	11	61
NEHAWU	115	0	0
NUM	187	91	49
NUMSA	208	88	42
POPCRU	38	32	84
PPWAWU	62	52	84
SAAPAWU	24	9	38
SACCAWU	182	74	41
SACTWU	120	5	4
SADTU	60	4	7
SAMWU	127	11	9
SARHWU	52	21	40
SASBO	78	55	71
TGWU	80	32	40
TOTAL	1 681	587	35

The survey population was identified as all those individuals who were in the full-time employ of COSATU and its unions irrespective of whether they were elected or appointed into the positions they occupied - in other words, all those who were on the unions' payroll. This means that the survey covered the full spectrum of union employment, from general secretaries at the top to administrators, receptionists and cleaners at the bottom.

The officials who responded were operating from offices located in 71 towns and cities across the country. The largest concentrations were in Johannesburg (296 or 50% of the total), Durban (40), Pretoria (34), Germiston (27), Cape Town (17), Witbank (13), Nelspruit (11), East London (11), Port Elizabeth (10), Vanderbijlpark (10) and Bloemfontein (10). Three factors explain the high figure for the Johannesburg area. Firstly, most union head offices are in Johannesburg and these offices tend to employ larger numbers of people than regional or branch offices. Secondly, this city is the biggest industrial centre and many unions find that they have to employ more officials to organise workers in and around the city. Thirdly, most questionnaires in the Johannesburg area were hand-delivered and collected, making it much easier to follow up.

The data gathered by means of the survey provided the material for the profile of full-time officials presented in Chapter 6 of this study.

Qualitative research

The second stage of the research involved the use of qualitative research methods. The objective was to obtain data which would enable me to explain social phenomena and to provide the context for these explanations. The research question, and the sub-questions that flow from it, were generated from the results of the first stage of the research, namely the survey of union officials.

Two techniques were employed to gather qualitative data, namely, in-depth interviews and archival research. These techniques and the methods of drawing samples are discussed briefly below.

Although the research is a study of all the post-1973 unions in COSATU, three specific unions were chosen as case studies to gain a closer insight of the broader issues covered in this study. In other words, the value of the cases chosen here is that they are illustrative of the trends and differences within the union movement that is the focus of this study. NUMSA was chosen because, having been established in 1974, it is one of the oldest of the post-1973 unions and one in which the tradition of worker control was strongest. SAMWU, on the other hand, was chosen because the tensions which have arisen between union officials and membership suggest that the tradition of worker control is being eroded. CEPPWAWU was chosen because it has been debating the modernisation of its structures and practices for some time. It also was the union that I was most familiar with, having worked for one of its predecessors for five years in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sample of about 10 full-time officials, both current and those who have left the unions in recent years. This method was employed in such a way that it included those officials who joined the unions in the 1970s and the 1980s as well as those who joined in the 1990s. The snowball sampling method was then used to expand the size of the sample. Altogether 56 interviews with 52 unionists, ex-unionists and labour supporting activists were conducted. Table 45 below gives a breakdown of the interviewees by current position, union and region. (A full list of the interviewees is included in Appendix 2.) In addition I drew from previous interviews and informal discussions with unionists (see Appendix 2).

Table 45: Interviewees by Current Position, Union and Region

<i>Interviewees by Current Position</i>	<i>Worker or Official</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Unions</i>	<i>Region</i>
Shop steward	3 workers	3	CEPPWAWU	Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal
Ex-shop steward	4 ex-workers	4	NUMSA, SATAWU, CEPPWAWU	Gauteng, Western Cape
Worker office-bearer	3 workers	3	NUMSA, SACCAWU	Gauteng, Eastern Cape
Organiser	5 officials	5	SAAPAWU, NUMSA, CEPPWAWU	KwaZulu-Natal, EasternCape, Western Cape, Gauteng
Regional Secretary	7 officials	7	SAMWU, NUMSA, CEPPWAWU	Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal
Other regional officials	2 officials	2	CEPPWAWU, SAMWU	Eastern Cape
General Secretary	2 officials	2	SADTU, NUM	Gauteng
President	2 workers	2	NUMSA, SAMWU	Eastern Cape, Gauteng
Other National officials	8 officials	8	NUM, SAMWU, SATAWU, CEPPWAWU, NUMSA	Gauteng and Western Cape
Ex-unionists	9 ex-officials 2 ex-workers	11	CEPPWAWU, TGWU, NUMSA, SACCAWU	Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal
Labour supporting activists	3 activists	3	Wits University, UCT, Workers' College (Durban)	Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal
Other	2 dismissed workers	2	Ex-NUMSA (now OCGAWU)	Eastern Cape
	<i>16 workers 33 officials 3 activists</i>	<i>52</i>		

As can be seen from the above table, the interviews were not confined to a single stratum of union leadership. Indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of the research process was to hear different perspectives from current and past activists and, to a large extent, this enabled the researcher to broaden the scope of the dialogue by drawing on wisdom from different levels of the union movement's organisational hierarchy. In other words, the research was designed specifically so as not to privilege activists from any particular level of this hierarchy. Hence the list of interviewees included workers, shop stewards, organisers and national officials. This approach stems from a belief that an organisation's culture, values and traditions are not a product of any single stratum in that organisation nor are they understood and interpreted in the same way by those at different levels of the hierarchy.

The interviews were organised around a common set of questions organised into seven themes, namely,

- i) Biographical information (including early life, family and education),
- ii) How unions operated when he/she joined unions,
- iii) Union officials as employees and as leaders,
- iv) Democracy and worker control,
- v) How unions have changed he/she first joined them,
- vi) Differentiation within the ranks of full-time officials,
- vii) The current state of the unions.

All but one of the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. In addition, notes were taken during the interview and these were particularly useful for following up specific issues which came up in the course of the interview process.

Putting the actor at the centre of the story

The format of the interviews was what Stacey has termed “the focussed interview”, which means that the interviews were unstructured but they were formal in the sense that “the interviewer has a list of questions or topics he wishes to cover, but the way in which he asks the questions is largely left to his discretion”.⁷ In addition, the interviews were structured in such a way that they were conversations about everyday issues in the trade union movement.⁸ A technique that proved particularly useful during the interview was to tailor each interview in a way which put the interviewee at the centre of the conversation. This required that I should have prior knowledge of key phases in the interviewee’s life history so that these could be used as ‘entry points’. A good example of this is the interview with Jeremy Baskin who had written a book on the history of COSATU. In this case the entry point was the book and what Baskin thought he could add to it in view of recent developments in the union movement. The use of specific entry points to suit each interview meant that the interviews did not always follow the sequence of the interview questions and themes, and this required that I had to be alert at all times to ensure that all the questions and themes were covered. However, as Goode and Hart observed, respondents are more likely to give information voluntarily if they believe that the interviewer ‘already knows’.⁹

The in-depth interview process yielded the most useful data for this research and much of this is attributable to the approach adopted in conducting the interviews. Instead of adopting the conventional question-and-answer method of interviewing, the interviews were structured in a way which put the interviewee, as the actor, at the centre of the story that was being told. This was achieved by beginning the interview with an introduction which emphasised that the interviewee had a story to tell. He or she was then asked to talk about himself or herself in a way which brought key moments of his or her life or his or her family history to the fore. Although some were at first shy to talk about themselves, once it became clear that the purpose was to trace the trajectory of their lives and their political activism, they warmed to the subject. For many this method provided an opportunity to reflect on the role that they had played within the broader

processes of struggle and social transformation.

The other benefit of this approach was that it made it possible for the individual to ‘detach’ himself or herself from the organisation and to engage in some form of personal and organisational introspection. This turned the interview situation into an intellectual conversation in a setting where the interviewee was encouraged to reflect on his/her personal experiences while I had an opportunity to “probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts from informants that are based on personal experience”.¹⁰ For this to be possible, of course, I had to adopt a different way of raising issues which subjected statements to close scrutiny and debated issues vigorously where the interviewee was being evasive or unclear. Prior knowledge of the history of the union movement and its activists proved extremely useful as some of that knowledge could be used during an interview to draw interviewees out in greater detail.

This approach was aided by two unrelated factors. Firstly, I and/or my written work on the trade unions were known to most of the interviewees. The fact that I had been in the unions before and had subsequently been a regular contributor to labour journals helped create a degree of trust which normally takes a while to build in a research setting. Thus, my *bona fides* and motives were never a problem for any of the interviewees. Secondly, developments within the union movement in recent years have resulted in a change of attitude by unionists towards researchers and journalists. Whereas in the late 1980s and the early 1990s unionists had been suspicious of researchers in a context where there was fear that they could be state- or management-infiltrated agents,¹¹ there has been a remarkably different attitude since the mid-1990s. Now individual unionists speak relatively freely to researchers whom they know and few will seek formal union endorsement before granting interviews. Indeed, in the interviews done for this study, there were some interviewees who seemed to welcome the opportunity because of the potential publicity it provided. In a context where granting interviews no longer carries the risk of victimisation by the state and employers and where publicity could mean better prospects for upward mobility, many unionists were much more relaxed about granting interviews. This also seems to be indicative of

the slow breakdown of the processes of individual accountability and organisational discipline that unions were able to enforce under conditions of mass mobilisation and state repression.

The study focuses on broad issues of democracy, power and leadership in trade unions, but it does this by emphasising the importance of individual stories and experiences. There is a dearth of biographical writing among working class people in South Africa, particularly in relation to union organisation and struggles. The interviews, therefore, provided a platform for unionists to talk about themselves in the same way that a person tells his or her life story in an autobiography. In many cases the interview also became a mirror where the interviewee could stand back and look at himself or herself critically. In this setting, I acted as a facilitator to stimulate and provoke the interviewee and to ensure that the central themes of the research did not get lost in the details of the individual story and personal experiences.

Thus, the merit of the approach taken in conducting this research, namely, putting the interviewee at the centre of the story, is that it enables the researcher to view issues from the perspective of the interviewee. As the individual story unfolds, the researcher is able to understand how the interviewee as an actor relates to the processes and traditions of the trade union movement. In the process, the researcher gets introduced to the different discourses that operated in the movement at different moments of its history and how these are shaped by the organisational position of those who participated in them.

Archival Research

There is wealth of information on trade union development in the period covered by the study. Some of it is housed in archives at University and other libraries while the rest, particularly that in the form of minutes, discussion documents, reports, and so on, is in the possession of the unions themselves. Some archives of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union - a predecessor of NUMSA - as well as other general archives of the old Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), NUMSA and COSATU are housed in the University of the Witwatersrand library.

In addition, many unions have managed to preserve most of their internal records, such as minutes, reports, statements, discussion papers, and so on. This study benefited immensely from all these documentary and archival sources. However, documentary evidence has its own pitfalls as documents that are available tend to shape the perspective of the researcher. Raphael Samuel has gone further to caution that documentary materials tend to mirror the power relations which prevailed at the time the documents were written.

It is remarkable how much history has been written from the vantage point of those who have had the charge of running - or attempting to run - other people's lives, and how little from the real life experience of people themselves.¹²

This suggests that the usefulness of official documents has its own limitations as these documents, in the case of the trade unions, tend to reflect the perspectives of a minute layer of full-time officials and worker activists who have a sufficiently strong command of writing in the English language. Although some of the documents from the 1970s and the early 1980s are in the African languages, particularly Zulu, most of these are direct translations from the English and thus do not convey anything different. The situation is exacerbated by the glaring absence of documentary records by working class people in South Africa, in the form of diaries, letters, biographies and other personal documents. The interrogation of official union documents from a different, unofficial, perspective is not sufficient compensation for this gap.

Nevertheless, the archives were extremely useful to this study as they not only provided documentary evidence but also were used for the purpose of cross-validating material obtained in interviews or vice-versa.

Dealing with the Pitfalls of Memory

Some aspects of this study are historical and thus some of the research was historical. In the absence of sufficient written records and other documentary material, oral testimonies in the form of in-depth unstructured interviews offered the best opportunities for understanding that history. It has been noted above that these interviews yielded very dense descriptions and rich accounts of various historical moments of the union movement. However, Raphael Samuel warns against the ‘fetishisation’ of oral history.

Memory has its own selectivity and silences just as the written record has its bureaucratic biases and irrecoverable gaps. It may be strong on general outline, but fickle when it comes to facts, reticent on some areas of experience while on others it is unexpectedly vociferous. It cannot tell us how reality was perceived at the time, even when it can be recalled in the uttermost detail; and it is only too easy for difficulties to be softened in the warm afterglow of nostalgia. The threads of consciousness are particularly difficult to unravel, because past and present attitudes are so liable to be tangled up.¹³

These problems were also present in the research conducted for this study and, in the main, they were due to the passage of time, and personal and political sensitivity. Lambert noted a similar problem in his research on the South African Congress of Trade Unions. This ‘retrospective bias’, as he termed it, occurred because “memory is being transformed constantly under the force of subsequent experience”.¹⁴

Memory is a highly selective process in which certain aspects of experience are registered while others are discarded. There are certain events, decisions and conflicts that the activist would rather forget, and has in fact forgotten, while other experiences seem to acquire an importance that magnifies the significance of events. This occurs because memory is an active restructuring process.¹⁵

However, the problem was less acute for this study because it straddles the historical and the contemporary. Indeed, this study attempts to deploy historical material in order to answer a contemporary sociological question about union governance. Thus while there was a need to achieve accuracy of evidence regarding the history of the unions, this did not necessarily

jeopardise the integrity of the study.

Nevertheless, various techniques were used to deal with these memory lapses, silences and the tendency to romanticise the past. In those cases where these silences and lapses were due to the passage of time interviewees were provided with clues which helped them remember events and the names of people and places. In cases where the silences were deliberate due to personal or political sensitivity, the best way to overcome it was persistent probing which often meant rephrasing the question and raising the same issue later under a different question. Another useful approach was to volunteer another example to get the interviewee to engage on the subject until he or she felt relaxed enough to provide his or her own answer. In cases where none of these techniques worked, the silences, evasions and memory lapses were then taken as statements in themselves. Whatever the technique that one uses to deal with the pitfalls of memory Samuel has a general solution when he advises us that, "The living record of the past should be treated as respectfully, but as critically, as the dead."¹⁶

Data Analysis

The study involved two stages of data analysis, namely, the analysis of quantitative data gathered through the survey of full-time officials, and the analysis of qualitative data from interviews, field notes and archival material and other documentary sources.

Quantitative data analysis

This stage of data analysis was undertaken during 1997, soon after all the questionnaires had been received. Although the questionnaires had been pre-coded, the coding process had to be fine-tuned to cater for some open-ended answers and, in some instances, questions which had been split into several sub-questions. In the process a code-book which broke the questions down into variables and codes was also refined. The data was then entered on computer for analysis

using SPSS for Windows 6.0 (later upgraded to SPSS for Windows 8.0).

As this phase was exploratory, the analysis of the research was limited to basic forms of data manipulation, namely generating frequency distributions and cross-tabulations. The results generated in this way are discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis. More importantly, the results of this stage of the analysis enabled me to build a profile of the role and position of full-time officials in the unions, which was then used to design the next stage of the research, namely, qualitative research.

Qualitative data analysis

Unlike quantitative analysis which is quick and computerised, qualitative data analysis is extremely time-consuming and contains many pitfalls. The first challenge that faces the qualitative researcher is what Kvale calls the '1,000-page question',¹⁷ that is, the daunting task of having to process and analyse pages upon pages of interview transcripts and other documentary material. The first step that was undertaken was to transcribe all the taped interviews, a task which was both time-consuming and delicate. It was time-consuming because the interviews were very long, with the shortest being one hour and the longest four hours, and because the transcription was verbatim. Verbatim transcription was extremely important and necessary because the analysis was not simply about pre-determined answers but was about meanings, silences, areas of emphasis, evasions and sensitivities. The process was also delicate because the transcription had to be as close to the recorded oral interview as possible and had to convey the meanings that the interviewees had intended. For this reason, verbatim transcripts were seen as being the most appropriate form of representing the interviews.

I conducted all the interviews myself and transcribed half of them. Then, a transcriber was hired to undertake the transcription of the tapes using a Sony transcribing machine. Very precise instructions were given and she was asked to discuss any problems with the researcher. However, the first experience with a transcriber proved to be a nightmare as she had neither the patience

not the technical skills to produce quality verbatim transcripts. Large sections of extremely important interview material were left out and the language was tampered with in a way which made the material completely unintelligible. The result was that I had to transcribe all eight interviews afresh. A second transcriber was hired and the quality of the transcription improved considerably because she had prior experience of transcribing and the instructions were much more precise. In addition, I had to go over each transcript and check the material to ensure consistency of quality in all the transcripts. In most cases this checking process involved a great deal of retyping and recovery of sections that had been left out, and added at least five more pages to the transcriber's transcript. In several cases the interviews were conducted in two languages, English and an African language. All such interviews were transcribed by myself because they involved translation and other intellectual decisions. All the above serves to indicate the importance of keeping control over the form and quality of the data collected as this facilitates the process of data analysis, to which we now turn.

The most complex task was the analysis of the qualitative data so as to understand its meanings and implications. Kvale argues that there are no 'standard methods' to do this and warns us that,

The demand for a method may involve an emphasis on techniques and reliability, and a de-emphasis on knowledge and validity. The search for techniques of analysis may be a quest for a 'technological fix' to the researcher's task of analysing and constructing meaning.¹⁸

A different approach to analysis was adopted which, following Kvale's suggestion, moved from the premise that the interviews were simply there to assist the researcher extend his knowledge of the subject matter being investigated.¹⁹ Data analysis means "a search for patterns in data - recurrent behaviors, objects or a body of knowledge".²⁰ The approach which was adopted to analyse the data is what has been called 'successive approximation', which refers to a step-by-step way of reading and making sense of the data.

A researcher begins with research questions and a framework of assumptions and

concepts. He or she then probes into the data, asking questions of the evidence to see how well the concepts fit the evidence and reveal features of the data. He or she also creates new concepts by abstracting from the evidence and adjusts concepts to fit the evidence better. The researcher then collects additional evidence to address unresolved issues that appeared in the first stage, and repeats the process. At each stage, the evidence and the theory shape each other. This is called *successive approximation* because the modified concepts and the model approximate the full evidence and are modified over and over to become successively more accurate.²¹

A critical dimension to this approach to qualitative data analysis is coding which results in concept formation. The coding takes place in three stages, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Coding, a process which “frees the researcher from the entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages higher level thinking about them”,²² is about organising and condensing the data into categories, themes and concepts. During open coding, which is the first pass through the data, concepts, themes and categories are generated. The second coding stage, axial coding, involves the review of the concepts and themes, the generation of more concepts and the identification of links between various themes and concepts. The final coding stage of selective coding involves a final pass through the data and a review of existing concepts so as to identify major themes of the research.

The coding process can be conducted at a highly elaborate and technical level. However, in this research the thematic codes involved two aspects, namely the thematic labels and their definition. Another task which proved extremely useful during data analysis was the development of analytical memos, which were elaborations of each coded theme or concepts. The analytical memo formed the basis of the theoretical framework adopted in this research (see discussion in Chapter 1).

In addition to the identification of concepts and themes in the data, the analysis also paid attention to analysing the narratives embodied in the interview data. Each interview often carried several narratives or stories about family background, schooling, political and union activism, organising strategies, leadership and struggles in which the interviewee played a leading part.

The number and depth of narratives embodied in a single interview depended a lot on the individual concerned. The reading of the interview transcripts had to be close enough to identify these narratives and, in some cases they had to be cross-validated by examining other documentary sources. The rest of this kind of analysis was then about structuring a composite narrative out of the multiple narratives that were unearthed from the interviews. This process of reconstruction involved both condensation and elaboration of aspects of the original individual narratives so as to arrive at the larger narrative. This process is an extremely delicate one as it requires a high level of accuracy in the transcription and translation and it works better with verbatim interviews than with summary transcripts.

In a nutshell then, qualitative data analysis encompassed two discrete but contiguous processes which generated a set of themes and concepts and produced a single narrative which was larger than the sum total of the individual narratives because it was based on condensation, reconstitution and critical appraisal of these.

Access

One of the most pleasant aspects of conducting this research was that gaining access to organisations and individuals was never a problem. Not once was I turned away or refused access. As suggested above, this has a lot to do with the changing political environment within which unions operate as well as the relaxation of organisational discipline that unions can enforce on their members and leaders. In addition, in the 1980s and early 1990s I worked as a union official in one of the trade unions covered in this research. Since leaving the union I have managed to maintain a good relationship with these unions in various ways, particularly through involvement in union education and training activities. Some of the research I have done in the past has been fed back into the unions through workshops and in published form.

However, the decisive factor seems to have been the high level of trust that I established between

myself and the unionists, the majority of whom I was meeting for the first time. Informants were prepared to give information on extremely sensitive political issues despite the fear that many have about getting marginalised for voicing controversial opinions. Only rarely did informants speak 'off the record' and even on those rare occasions, none of them asked for the tape recorder to be switched off.

It must be clarified at this point that access in relation to this study refers to access to the individual unionist rather the organisation. Indeed, the only case where organisational permission had to be sought was when I wanted COSATU's authorisation to use their archives at the University of the Witwatersrand Library. In all other cases the specific individuals were contacted directly and none of them sought their organisation's permission to be interviewed nor did they ask me for a letter from my University proving that I was doing the research for *bona fide* academic purposes. Informants were informed up-front about the purpose of the research, that is, to gather information for a higher degree and to assist me in writing articles on labour, and this never created any problems.

Ethical Issues

The major ethical issue that normally arises in a study such as this one relates to confidentiality of responses, particularly when respondents specify this preference. The issues examined in this study require that the researcher should remain sensitive to the wishes and views of respondents as they may give information which is politically sensitive within the unions. Ethical problems of this nature are best overcome by ensuring anonymity of responses which involve sensitive information, regardless of whether the respondent specifies it or not.

Ethical considerations did not arise as a problem except in one instance which deserves mention here. During a visit to Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape in May 2000 to conduct interviews among unionists there, particularly those involved in the Volkswagen dispute, a contact person

introduced me to a young agent of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) who was monitoring the activities of the dismissed VW workers and their new union the Oil, Chemical, General and Allied Workers' Union (OCGAWU). The agent, introduced jokingly as 'one of Thabo's [Mbeki] men', was obviously junior and inexperienced and did not seem to have a great deal of knowledge and understanding of the functioning of the trade union movement. So, upon being introduced to him as "someone who does interviews and writes articles", he asked me to provide him with copies of taped interviews once these had been done. When told that passing on copies of interview material to a stranger was unethical, he then asked for photocopies of notes. Again I turned this down and instead invited him to have a discussion of the VW situation. He gave several excuses for not being able to make time for this, and instead continued to pester me over the telephone for the 'notes' until I left the Eastern Cape.

Limitations

No research project can ever hope to exhaust its subject matter, and this study is no exception in that regard. Thus, this study does not claim to deal authoritatively with any issue beyond those suggested and specified in the topic, the aims and the research question. Nor does the study claim any statistical representivity beyond the cases that are cited in this thesis. Rather, this study should be evaluated and judged on the analytical significance of its findings and conclusions and the extent to which those are backed up by evidence.

Notes:

1. For a discussion of these and other dangers of personal experience in social research see Barbie, E. 1989. *The Practice of Social Research*, fifth edition. Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, pp. 8 - 16, and Neuman, W. L. 2000. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and quantitative methods*, fourth edition, Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. p. 5.
2. Neuman, W. L. 2000. *op. cit.*, p. 419.
3. *ibid.*, p. 419.
4. *ibid.*, p. 21.
5. The researchers who participated in these brainstorm sessions were: Karl von Holdt, Roselyn Nyman and Rob Rees, all then still with NALEDI; Bobby Marie and Chris Bonner of DITSELA; Shele Papane from COSATU's education department; Gino Govender from NUM's education department; and Ian Macun, deputy director of SWOP
6. Another 50 or so completed questionnaires arrived too late to be included in the computerised data base.
7. Stacey, M. (1969) *Methods of Social Research*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, p. 75.
8. For a discussion of the interview as conversation see, Burgess, R. G. 1981b. "The Unstructured Interview as a Conversation", in Burgess, R. G. (ed.) *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*. London: George Allen & Unwin. Another excellent text dedicated to this subject is, Kvale, S. 1996. *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
9. Goode, W.J. and Hart, P.K. 1952. *Methods in Social Research*. Tokyo: McGraw-Hill, p. 187.
10. Burgess, R. G. 1981b. *op. cit.*, p. 107.
11. For a discussion of the difficulties faced by researchers during the apartheid years, see Adler, G: 1990. "The Politics of Research During a Liberation Struggle: Interviewing black workers in South Africa", in Grele, J. G. (ed.) *International Annual of Oral History, 1990*. New York: Greenwood Press.
12. Raphael Samuel cited in Burgess, R. G. 1981a. "Personal Documents, Oral Sources and Life Histories", in Burgess, R. G. (ed.) *Field Research: A sourcebook and field manual*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 131.
13. Samuel, R. 1981. "Local History and Oral History" in Burgess, R. G. *Field Research: A sourcebook and field manual*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.144 - 145.

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14. Lambert, R. V. 1988. Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955 - 1965, PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. p. 530.
 15. *ibid.*, pp. 529 -30.
 16. Samuel, R. 1981. *op cit.*, p. 145.
 17. Kvale, S., *op. cit.*
 18. *ibid*, p. 180.
 19. *ibid.*, p. 182.
 20. Neuman, W. L., *op. cit.*, p. 426.
 21. *ibid.*, p 427.
 22. *ibid.*, p. 420.

APPENDIX 2

List of In-depth Interviews

<i>Name</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Position¹</i>	<i>Place of interview</i>	<i>Date of interview</i>
Ruth Mhlongo	NUMSA	Ex-shop steward, now member	Johannesburg	19/02/1999
Norman Reed	ex-NUMSA	Member	Johannesburg	22/02/1999
Joseph Mthembu	CEPPWAWU	Full-time shop steward and former vice-president of PPWAWU	Johannesburg	11/02/1999
Joe Mahlangu	ex-CWIU	Shop steward and branch office bearer	Johannesburg	12/03/1999
Nelson Ndinisa	ex-SATAWU	President	Johannesburg	20/04/1999
Mojalefa Mike Musi	SATAWU	National education officer	Johannesburg	30/04/1999
Langa Zitha	ex-NUMSA	Information officer	Johannesburg	04/05/1999
Maud Khumalo	CEPPWAWU	Shop steward	Germiston	26/05/1999
Jenny Grice	NUMSA	Publications officer	Johannesburg	29/05/1999
Bethuel Maserumule	ex-NUMSA	Regional secretary	Johannesburg	30/07/1999
Bethuel Maserumule	ex-NUMSA	Regional secretary	Johannesburg	04/08/1999
Osborn Galeni	NUMSA	National organiser	Johannesburg	10/08/1999
Moses Mayekiso	ex-NUMSA	General secretary	Johannesburg	11/08/1999
Sipho Kubheka	ex-PPWAWU	General secretary	Johannesburg	16/08/1999
Mthuthuzeli Tom	NUMSA	President	Johannesburg	23/08/1999
Silas Letsimo	SAMWU	Provincial secretary	Johannesburg	14/08/1999
Bobby Marie	ex-NUMSA	National organiser	Johannesburg	26/10/1999
Gwede Mantashe	NUM	General secretary	Johannesburg	07/02/2000
Gino Govender	NUM	Head of Strategic Unit	Johannesburg	15/02/2000
Charles Bezuidenhout	NUMSA	2 nd Vice-president	Johannesburg	17/02/2000

Petrus Tom	NUMSA	Organiser	Vereeniging	21/02/2000
Philemon Bokaba	NUMSA	Ex-vice president, now a member	Pretoria	24/02/2000
Jeremy Baskin	ex-PPWAWU	General secretary	Johannesburg	24/02/2000
Thulas Nxesi	SADTU	General secretary	Johannesburg	25/02/2000
Thulas Nxesi	SADTU	General secretary	Johannesburg	01/03/2000
Eddie Webster	University of the Witwatersrand	University professor and activist	Johannesburg	01/03/2000
Kally Forrest	ex-TGWU	Media officer	Johannesburg	01/03/2000
Linda Mngadi	CEPPWAWU	National education officer	Johannesburg	11/03/2000
Jane Barret	SATAWU	National organiser	Johannesburg	17/03/2000
Moses Ndlovu	SAAPAWU	Organiser	Pietermaritzburg	21/03/2000
Themba Mbokazi	CEPPWAWU	Shop steward and former regional office-bearer	Pietermaritzburg	21/03/2000
Mhlaba Mkhize	ex-PPWAWU	Regional secretary, now at Natal Technikon	Durban	22/03/2000
Kessie Moodley	Workers' College	Director	Durban	23/03/2000
Richard Hlophe	SAMWU	Provincial secretary	Durban	23/03/2000
Gibson Nduli and Ngcobo	- ex-SACCAWU - SACCAWU	- Regional secretary and - Regional chair	Durban	25/03/2000
Lucky Mhlongo	CEPPWAWU	Regional secretary	Durban	26/03/2000
Roger Ronnie	SAMWU	Acting legal officer and former general secretary	Cape Town	05/05/2000
John Mawbey	SAMWU	National education officer	Cape Town	08/05/2000
Keith Jacobs	CEPPWAWU	Regional secretary	Cape Town	08/05/2000
Elias Maboe	CEPPWAWU	Organiser	Cape Town	08/05/2000
Johann Maree	University of Cape Town	University professor and activist	Cape Town	09/05/2000

Ralph Meas	CEPPWAWU	Member, former shop steward and officer-bearer (now a manager)	Cape Town	09/05/2000
Fred Petersen	NUMSA	Regional secretary	Cape Town	09/05/2000
Elias Maboe	CEPPWAWU	Organiser	Cape Town	10/05/2000
Nceba Plaatjie	NUMSA	Shop steward and local chairperson	Uitenhage	12/05/2000
Thobile Maso	SAMWU	Provincial education officer	Port Elizabeth	15/05/2000
Silumko Nondwangu	NUMSA	Regional secretary	Port Elizabeth	15/05/2000
Wilfuss Ndandani	OCGAWU (ex- NUMSA)	Chairperson of VW Crisis Committee	Uitenhage	16/05/2000
VW Crisis Committee Treasurer	OCGAWU (ex- NUMSA)	Treasurer of VW Crisis Committee	Uitenhage	16/05/2000
Silumko Nondwangu	NUMSA	Regional secretary	Port Elizabeth	16/05/2000
Livingstone Matiwane	CEPPWAWU	Regional education officer	East London	17/05/2000
Vuyo Mosana	CEPPWAWU	Acting regional secretary	East London	17/05/2000
Babini Goni	NUMSA	Educator and organiser	East London	18/05/2000
Vuyisile I. Makhuphula	NUMSA	Organiser	East London	18/05/2000
Petrus Mashishi	SAMWU	President	Johannesburg	20/01/2000

Other Interviews Used²

<i>Name</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Place of interview</i>	<i>Date of interview</i>
Nelson Mthombeni and Mandy Moussouris	CWIU	Assistant general secretary and education officer	Johannesburg	26/02/1997
Jenny Grice and Mbuyiselo Ngwenda	NUMSA	Media officer and deputy general secretary	Johannesburg	03/03/1997
Bhengeza Mthombeni, Phineas Masombuka, Linda Mngadi and Jabu	PPAWU	General secretary, assistant general secretary, education officer and media officer	Johannesburg	04/03/1997
Zico Tamela	SATAWU	International officer	Johannesburg	23/02/2000

Notes:

1. The positions given in this table are those the interviewees occupied at the time of the interview. Many subsequently changed positions within the unions or left the union movement for other positions elsewhere. In the case of former unionists, we have provided only the positions they occupied prior to leaving the unions.
2. The first three group interviews were conducted by S. Buhlungu for a separate project done for the International Chemical, Energy and Miners's Federation (ICEM) in 1997. The last one was an informal discussion S. Buhlungu had with Zico Tamela. A more formal interview was planned but never took place because of Mr Tamela's busy work schedule.

APPENDIX 3

Summary of Expert Opinion - S. Jada and 582 Others.

Nr/SAM10036

Jan 19 let. Prof Webster

7th Floor, Braamfontein Centre, 23 Jorissen Street

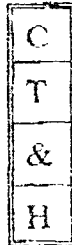
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**CHEADLE
THOMPSON
& HAYSOM**

ATTORNEYS, NOTARIES & CONVEYANCERS

Our ref: A Roskam / SAM10036

Prof Eddie Webster and Sakhela Buhlungu
Sociology of Work Unit
Wits University
JOHANNESBURG

PER TELEFAX: 716 3781

NO OF PAGES: 4

Dear Eddie and Sakhela

S JADA AND 582 OTHERS/SAMWU

I confirm that your consultation with Adv Tim Bruinders is scheduled for 09h00 on 20 January 1998. The consultation will take place at Adv Bruinders' chambers which are on the 14th floor of Schreiner Chambers, Pritchard Street, Johannesburg. Schreiner Chambers is opposite the High Court, Witwatersrand Local Division. A copy of the notice in terms of rule 24(9)(b) as amended by Eddie and which has been filed at court is attached for your information.

Yours sincerely

ANTON ROSKAM
CHEADLE THOMPSON & HAYSOM

PARTNERS: MH Cheadle (BA (Hons) BProc LLB); NM Manolm (BA LLB); HM Seady (BA LLB LLM); PJ Harris (BA LLB LLM); PS Benjamin (BA LLB LLM); AL Armstrong (BA Hons LLB); U Bhoola (BA LLB LLM); PFK Tucker (BA LLB); PS Stein (BA PDip ASS LLB LLM); BM Barry (BA LLB); TN Radtapolle (BA Law LLB); AKM Mayer (BA (Hons) LLB LLM); AJ Steenkamp (BA LLB LLM (Pret.) LLM (Notre Dame)); AS Roskam (BA LLB PDip Labour Law) ASSISTED BY: RC Orr (BA LLB); N Howard (BA LLB); HA Wadiwala (BProc LLB); YT Carrim (BSC LLB); GI Doble (BA LLB); SPF Matijane (BProc LLB); BP Ndha (BJuris LLB); MS Baloyi (BProc). GENERAL MANAGER: C Tilley (B Journ). CONSULTANT: K Pillay (BA LLB MCI).

**IN THE MAGISTRATE'S COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF SPRINGS
HELD AT SPRINGS**

CASE NO.: 4478/96

In the matter between:

SIKWEZELI JADA AND 582 OTHERS

Plaintiffs

and

SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPAL WORKERS UNION

Defendant

NOTICE IN TERMS OF RULE 24(9)(b)

TAKE NOTICE THAT a summary of Professor Webster's opinion and the reasons therefor are:

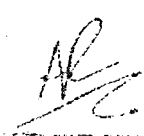
It is contrary to public policy and effective industrial relations to impose a legal duty upon trade unions and their officials to advise its members to return to work when its members have embarked upon illegal or "wildcat" strike action. The reasons for this are:

1. In the circumstances of industrial action trade union officials face a dilemma: on the one hand, they are expected to advise and lead the membership, on the other hand, they are constrained in this role by

the expectation that they act upon a mandate from their members themselves. Imposing such a legal duty would exacerbate the dilemma facing union leadership and make orderly collective bargaining extremely difficult.

2. Having regard to the heightened tension caused by illegal or "wildcat" strike action, the threat of dismissal for this action and the impact of the group on the individual members of the group, imposing such a legal duty carries the danger of causing a rift between the trade union's leaders and its rank and file members.
3. It also runs counter to the tradition of "shop floor democracy" where the leadership is directly accountable to its members. This tradition is a long established tradition within the democratic trade union movement in South Africa, especially those such as the defendant, which is affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).
4. It is likely to leave the workers dissatisfied and without any accountable leadership. This will exacerbate the dilemma facing trade union leadership, make orderly collective bargaining even more difficult and make it more difficult to normalise the workplace. It is likely to frustrate the effective resolution of the dispute and therefore delay a return to work.

DATED AT JOHANNESBURG ON THIS THE 13th JANUARY 1998.



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TO:
THE CLERK OF THE COURT
MAGISTRATE'S COURT
SPRINGS

AND TO:
ROSSOUW & ROSSOUW
Applicants' Attorneys
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Received copy hereof of this
day of January 1998.

For Applicants' attorneys

APPENDIX 4

Labour Supporting Organisations, 1971 - 1999

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Where based</i>	<i>Area of work</i>	<i>Decade formed</i>
Administrative Training Project (ATP)	Johannesburg	Training	1980s
Adult Learning Project (ALP)	Cape Town	Literacy	1980s
Afesis Advice and Resource Centre	East London	Training	1980s
Agenda	Durban	Gender Journal	1980s
Audio Visual Alternatives (AVA)	University of Natal, Durban	Production of audio-visual materials	1990s
Cape Town Trade Union Library	Cape Town	Library/resource centre	1980s
Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS)	Johannesburg	Advice and training	1970s
Centre for Community and Labour Studies	Durban	Research and training	1990s
Centre for Education and Aid on Labour (CEAL)	Port Elizabeth	Advice and education	1980s
Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE)	Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg	Research	1980s
Community Arts Project	Cape Town	Media resources, silkscreening, training	1980s
Community Based Development Programme (CBDP)	Johannesburg	Organisational management and leadership training	1990s
Community Resource and Information Centre (CRIC)	Johannesburg	Training and research	1980s

Co-operative for Research and Education (CORE)	Johannesburg	Research and education	1990s
Culture and Working Life Project	University of Natal, Durban	Cultural activities and education	1980s
English Literacy Project (ELP)	Johannesburg	Literacy	1980s
Farmworkers Research and Resource Project (FRRP)	Johannesburg	Research	1990s
Health Information Centre (HIC)	Johannesburg	Training, research, information	1980s
History Workshop	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg	Research, publications	1970s
Human Awareness Programme (HAP) (Also HAP Organisational Development Services)	Johannesburg	Education and training, publications	1980s
Industrial Aid Centre	Vereeniging	Worker education	1980s
Industrial Aid Society (IAS)	Johannesburg	Education and training	1970s
Industrial Health Research Group (IHRG)	University of Cape Town	Advice and training	1980s
Industrial Health and Safety Educational Project (IHSEP)	East London	Training and labour consultancy	1990s
Industrial Health Unit	University of Natal, Durban	Education, research, advice, resource centre,	1980s
Institute for Industrial Education (IIE)	Durban	Education and training	1970s
International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG)	University of Cape Town	Research, training, books, resource centre	1980s
Khanya College - a SACHED division	Johannesburg	Education and training	1980s
Labour and Community Resource Project (LACOM) - a SACHED division	Johannesburg	Publications, education and training	1980s

Labour and Economic Research Centre (LERC)	Johannesburg	Research and training	1980s
Labour History Group	Cape Town	Research and publications	1980s
Labour Monitoring Group (LMG)	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg	Research and monitoring	1980s
Labour Research Service	Cape Town, Johannesburg	Research and training	1980s
Learn and Teach Adult Basic Education	Johannesburg	Adult literacy	1980s
Learn and Teach Publications	Johannesburg	Journal, publishing	1980s
Legal Resources Centre	Durban, Cape Town, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Johannesburg	Legal aid, advice, publications	1970s
Media Resources Centre	University of Natal, Durban	Media training and advice	1980s
National Language Project (NLP)	Cape Town	Language education	1980s
Ravan Press	Johannesburg	Publishers	1970s
South African Committee for Higher Education Trust (SACHED Trust)	East London, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, Pietermaritzburg	Trade union library, advice, legal aid, training	1950s
Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP)	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg	Research and training	1980s
South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)	Durban, later Johannesburg	Labour journal	1970s

South African Labour Development Research Unit (SALDRU)	University of Cape Town	Research, resource centre and advice	1970s
South African Research Service (SARS) (see WIP below)	Johannesburg	Research and publications	1970s
Speak Women's Magazine	Johannesburg	Women's magazine	1980s
Technical Advice Group (TAG)	Johannesburg	Advice and research	1980s
Trade Union Research Project (TURP)	University of Durban-Westville	Research, training, publications	1990s
Urban Training Project (UTP)	Johannesburg	Education and training	1971
Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre	Roodepoort	Training, library, training facilities	1970s
Work in Progress (WIP) (see SARS above)	Johannesburg	Journal	1970s
Workers' Aid Centre (WAC)	Pretoria, Rustenburg	Advice, training	1980s
Workers' College, Western Cape	Bellville	Education and training	1990s
Workers' College, Durban	Durban	Education and training	1980s
Workers' Educational Project (WEP)	Johannesburg	Education, training, research	1990s
Workers' Library and Museum	Johannesburg	Library, museum, venue for workshops	1980s
Workplace Information Group (WIG)	Johannesburg	Advice and research	1980s
Young Christian Workers (YCW)	Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth and Goldfields	Leadership training	1940s

Notes:

- i) This list refers to organisations which were active in the period 1971 - 1999.
- ii) It excludes internal union education projects, departments or units.
- iii) Although some of these organisations provided support to other community organisations, the majority of them were dedicated to labour support.
- iv) Many of these organisations ceased to exist at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s due to the drying up of foreign funding which had sustained them.
- v) Almost all the organisations on the list were initiated by white activists, had white leadership and the majority of their staff, particularly those in senior positions, were white.
- vi) A few organisation may have been omitted by mistake, but the list includes all the major labour supporting organisations in this period.

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